

**MINUTES
TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SEPTEMBER 26, 2022 – REGULAR MEETING**

The Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County met in a regular meeting on Monday, September 26, 2022, 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 Larry Chapman, Chairman Jason Chappell, Vice-Chairman Jake Dalton, W. David Guice, and Teresa McCall. Also present were County Manager Jaime Laughter and Clerk to the Board Trisha Hogan. County Attorney Natalia Isenberg participated via Zoom meeting software.

Media: *The Transylvania Times* – Jon Rich

There were approximately 25 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 at introduced Commissioners and staff in attendance.

PUBLIC HEARING

COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM (SECTION 5311 ADMINISTRATIVE, COMBINED CAPITAL PROGRAM, AND SECTION 5310 OPERATING PROGRAM FOR FY 2024)

County Planner Darby Terrell presented the information for the public hearing:

FY 2024 5311 Administrative

Section 5311 subsidizes the administrative costs of running a transportation system, allowing communities to focus their resources on operations. Funds are apportioned to counties based on land area, population, population growth rates, vehicle miles, and the number of low-income individuals. For the FY 2024 application, Transylvania County Transportation is requesting support for the administrative expenditures of its transit program for \$164,470 which requires a local match of 15%, or \$24,671. This application allows the department to fund the administrative costs as well as certain employee salaries and benefits for this program.

FY 2024 Combined Capital Program

The Combined Capital Program provides funding to maintain the fleet of publicly supported transit vehicles and other capital needs. FY 2024, County Transportation intends to apply for \$145,000 for two handicapped-equipped LTV vans, pending confirmation of eligibility. This eligibility is based on whether the vans meet a certain requirement of mileage. This program requires a 10% match of \$14,500.

FY 2024 5310 Operating Program

Transylvania County plans to apply for the \$104,000 from the 5310 Operating Program which requires a local match of 50%, or \$52,000. The 5310 grant has helped restore out-of-county

transportation to the elderly and disabled as well as enable these individuals to travel from unincorporated areas within Transylvania County to incorporated areas of the County. The program assists nonprofit groups in meeting the transportation needs of older adults and people with disabilities when the transportation service provided is unavailable, insufficient, or inappropriate to meet these needs.

Transylvania County's Community Transportation Program application is to be submitted to the North Carolina Department of Transportation no later than October 7, 2022. A public hearing is required before making an application.

Chairman Chappell declared the public hearing open at 6:05 p.m.

There were no comments from the public. Chairman Chappell invited Commissioners to comment.

Chairman Chappell stated this is one of the programs in which the County gets the biggest bang for its buck to enhance transportation services for our citizens. He thanked the County Staff and the County Manager for their hard work in administering this grant.

Commissioner Chapman inquired about where the matching funds would come from. The Manager informed Commissioners that the matching funds are budgeted in the general fund.

Commissioner Guice stressed the importance of these funds to take care of the transportation needs of the community, especially for the elderly, disabled, and those who do not have the means. He also agreed that the County's financial contribution is minimal.

Chairman Chappell declared the public hearing closed at 6:07 p.m.

The Board will consider approval of the application under New Business.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no comments from the public.

AGENDA MODIFICATIONS

The Manager requested to add a closed session per N.C.G.S. 143-318.11 (a) (3) To consult with an attorney employed or retained by the public body in order to preserve the attorney-client privilege between the attorney and the public body, which privilege is hereby acknowledged, and (a) (6) To consider the qualifications, competence, performance, character, fitness, conditions of appointment, or conditions of initial employment of an individual public officer or employee or prospective public officer or employee.

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

CONSENT AGENDA

Commissioner Guice moved to approve the Consent Agenda as submitted, seconded by Commissioner McCall, and unanimously approved.

The following items were approved:

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Board of Commissioners met in closed session on January 24, 2022, and February 14, 2022 (2) and the minutes were sealed, in a regular session on February 28, 2022, and following met in closed session (2) in which the minutes were sealed. The Board approved the minutes as submitted.

DISCOVERY, RELEASE & MONTHLY SETTLEMENT REPORT

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 August, tax dollars released totaled \$21,656.09 and refunds issued amounted to \$1,492.15. The Board approved the Discovery, Release, and Monthly Settlement Report for August 2022.

NOTARY FEE SCHEDULE INCREASE

House Bill 776 was signed into law in July 2022 which increased the fees that notaries are allowed to charge in the state of North Carolina per principal signature on acknowledgments, jurats, verifications, and proofs. Following this legislation, the NC Department of Motor Vehicles issued a statement in August 2022 detailing the allowable notary fees to be charged by any DMV or License Plate Agency office. Because the Transylvania County License Plate Agency provides a service that is contracted by the NCDMV, the LPA's fee schedule is determined at the state level.

The Board may adopt the same fee schedule that applies to the License Plate Agency to the remainder of County departments that have notaries. The NCDMV's fee schedule will go into effect on October 1, 2022, and will increase the maximum charge for a notary act to \$7.00 for one signature, \$8.00 for two signatures, and \$9.00 for three or more signatures. The fee schedule is then set to incrementally increase on July 1 in the years 2024, 2026, and 2028. This change would result in a small revenue increase for departments that perform notary authentications including but not limited to the License Plate Agency, Register of Deeds, and Clerk to the Board.

The Board directed staff to amend the FY 23 Transylvania County Fee Schedule and the Budget Ordinance to allow notaries to charge \$7.00 for one signature, \$8.00 for two signatures, and \$9.00 for three or more signatures when the service is provided as a Transylvania County employee.

TRANSYLVANIA NATURAL RESOURCES COUNCIL BY-LAW CHANGES

The Transylvania Natural Resources Council (TNRC) is a citizen advisory council created by the Board of Commissioners. The TNRC met in a regular meeting on September 9, 2022, and voted to approve changes to its bylaws. The bylaws were last updated in 2015.

The proposed revisions include changing the appointing authority for the public land representatives, municipality representatives, and Brevard College to match the current practice. For example, if Gorges State Park has a change in staffing, they may appoint a replacement member of the TNRC without coming to the Board of Commissioners. The proposed bylaws would also allow all members appointed by an outside authority to send a proxy in their absence with full voting authority. All members appointed by the Board of Commissioners would still be responsible for meeting attendance requirements set out in the bylaws. Other changes being proposed include mandating members to attend orientation only at the start of their term, as opposed to annually, and allowing a member to abstain from voting when they have a conflict of interest in the matter being voted on. In addition to the changes proposed in the bylaws, the TNRC voted to also allow the Soil and Water Conservation District Director to send a proxy like other standing seats such as the Pisgah National Forest or the Town of Rosman. The bylaw changes will not go into effect until approved by the

Board of Commissioners. The Board approved the recommended changes to the Transylvania Natural Resources Council bylaws as requested.

PRESENTATIONS/RECOGNITIONS

COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE ANNUAL REPORT

Each year the Veterans Service Officer gives an annual report to the Board of Commissioners on the distribution of Veterans Affairs (VA) expenditures in Transylvania County as compared to others and shares updates on the VA program. The following is a summary of the report provided by Veterans Service Officer Frank Pearsall:

Mr. Pearsall shared the data from the VA's FY 20-21 US Census Western North Carolina Veterans Population. This data set composes information from 17 counties in Western North Carolina which make up Region 1 in the state organization. The 2020 Census resulted in an increase in the number of veterans by 491 to a total population of 3,617 veterans in Western North Carolina.

Mr. Pearsall discussed the PACT ACT which added recognized diseases contracted by service members during their time in combat. This act added 11 diseases, mostly respiratory illnesses, which were contracted by service members during their time in the Gulf Wars, and two more diseases contracted by service members during their time in Vietnam. This is a significant act because it shows that the government will now have to recognize that the cost of war will be felt for many years after the conflict is over.

Mr. Pearsall also commented about the recent advertisements on television and radio from law firms about suing the government over Camp Lejeune water contamination. Dangerous exposure to contaminated water generated health conditions in service members who went to Camp Lejeune in Eastern North Carolina between 1953 and 1987. He explained that these are civil lawsuits and are separate from a claim issued through the VA and that if an individual does sue through civil litigation and gets money, they will not be able to make a claim through the VA. He advised veterans to make a claim through the VA and then go through civil litigation, as there is no guarantee of any settlement or restitution through civil litigation.

Commissioner Chapman asked if Mr. Pearsall has been receiving requests for documentation for these civil suits. Mr. Pearsall responded that many of the questions revolve around dependents who lived on the base at Camp Lejeune and that he normally directs veterans to call the Base Housing office for information. He noted that not all areas of Camp Lejeune were exposed to contaminated water.

Mr. Pearsall noted that the VA money coming into Transylvania County continues to increase due to the rise in the number of claims being filed.

This concluded his presentation.

Commissioner Chapman asked whether transportation was still an issue for getting veterans to and from their appointments. Mr. Pearsall said that it was still very much an issue. He directs them to the Transylvania Transit service, however, getting veterans to and from the VA Hospital is difficult because it is so far from Transylvania County. He mentioned that the VA Hospital is trying to start a program to get volunteers to pick up veterans and bring them to the facility, but there is a lack of volunteers.

Chairman Chappell asked Mr. Pearsall to share his hours of operation with the public. Mr. Pearsall stated that he is in the office all day Tuesday and Thursday for walk-in traffic, and he makes appointments with clients on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. He also commented that he tries to see and help anyone who comes in if it is workable, no matter the day.

TRANSYLVANIA ECONOMIC ALLIANCE ANNUAL AUDIT

Burton Hodges, Executive Director of the Transylvania Economic Alliance presented the organization's annual audit reports for 2020 and 2021 and gave a general overview and update of the activities going on in this fiscal year. The following is a summary of his report:

The Alliance continues to make timely payments back to Transylvania County for the Sylvan Valley Industrial Center. The Alliance was able to work with the City of Brevard to finalize the forgiveness for the remainder of the money owed for the land where the Sylvan Valley Industrial Complex resides.

Mr. Hodges made clear that the report shows that the Alliance is solvent, has liquidity, and has an overall sound financial performance. As of this new fiscal year, the Alliance board has designated a new money market account that has been earmarked for site and product development work. The Alliance has also raised \$10,000 in private funds through a capital campaign to help fulfill the organization's structure as a public-private organization. This amount is at the budget threshold which means the organization will receive more money than it budgeted for before the fiscal year is over.

Mr. Hodges described the Alliance from a programmatic perspective. He described how the guiding principle in economic development is that existing industry activity is where the vast majority of new job creation and taxable investment comes from. The Alliance continues to make very positive and aggressive strides in engaging existing industry, as they have a full-time dedicated staff member who conducts regular visits to industry partners. Mr. Hodges stated that project activity does not always follow the fiscal year boundaries, but the Alliance has an aggressive number of active projects right now. He stressed that there is interest in locating here, but the challenge is finding available product.

Mr. Hodges shared that the Alliance is going to market Transylvania County to the outside world through seven planned marketing events throughout the rest of the year and into next year. Alliance staff will travel with the state and with peers in the region to market the county to a variety of different third parties, such as brokers, site managers, or companies directly. Two of these events will be trade-specific, relating to bio-manufacturing and outdoor gear manufacturing.

Mr. Hodges shared that the Alliance's board is going through an internal strategic planning process with a board retreat. The goal is to produce a new three-year strategic plan during the retreat because the old plan is outdated.

Mr. Hodges informed that the Alliance has partnered with Transylvania County Schools to hold tours for Manufacturing Day the following month to show off some of the local manufacturing operations to the students and hopefully inspire interest in career paths for their future. The Alliance is working on its website, and they hope to have it completed by the end of the year. The Alliance plans to launch a new board committee to focus on promoting product development by the end of the year as well.

Mr. Hodges shared the activities planned by the Alliance going into 2023. There is work going towards organizing programming for existing industries and investors. The goal is to achieve the sale of the Sylvan Valley Industrial Center and to produce a usable and information-filled annual report. Mr. Hodges said that it is important to our stakeholders to regularly tell the story of the Alliance. The Alliance is continuing both public and private capital campaigning efforts and exploring the idea of a Transylvania County Life Sciences/Bio Training Center.

Mr. Hodges stated that the result of the Economic Alliance's work is \$131,000,000 in new taxable investment in Transylvania County and 365 new jobs created. Since the creation of the Alliance in 2014, there has been 69% employment growth in manufacturing and 83% employment growth in professional, technical, and scientific services. The top growing occupations in Transylvania County are management at 56%, business

and financial operations at 52%, computer and mathematics at 45%, life, physical and social sciences at 41%, and engineering and architecture at 39%. Mr. Hodges thanked the Board of Commissioners for their support and patience during the audit process and asked if there were any questions.

Commissioner Chapman asked if the Alliance had any trouble finding an auditor and if this was the reason for the delay in the audit. Mr. Hodges explained that this was partially the reason but that the main reason for the delay in the audit was organizational and that the Alliance was to blame for not supplying timely information to that third party. The Alliance is evaluating the relationship with that third party going forward to ensure that they provide a timely financial audit in the future.

Chairman Chappell thanked the Alliance's board for expanding and allowing ex-officio members to join. He also thanked Commissioner Dalton for agreeing to serve on the Alliance's board to represent the Board of Commissioners. He agreed that it was important for the Alliance to tell their story and share their successes. Chairman Chappell thanked Mr. Hodges and his staff for all the hard work that they do.

Commissioner Chapman commented that Pratt & Whitney was having a ribbon-cutting ceremony on the 16th and that he suggested Mr. Hodges arrange a visit here with the Commissioners. Mr. Hodges agreed and said he heard from a regional broker that more than several supplier-related projects are shopping around Western North Carolina right now.

Commissioner Dalton said that with the closing of the Continental Teves plant that left to relocate to Mexico, between 20 to 30 of those people who were driving out of the county are now employed in the county. That is important because it puts more money back into our local economy instead of putting it into Henderson, Buncombe, or Polk counties.

Commissioner Larry Chapman stated that Coats America was shutting down soon, which meant 52 jobs would be lost. Mr. Hodges responded that the Economic Alliance was going to work with Blue Ridge Community College to help any workers who were affected by those upcoming layoffs to transition into another career.

There was no further discussion.

APPOINTMENTS

JUVENILE CRIME PREVENTION COUNCIL

Sarah Hatch serves on the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council representing Vaya Health. Her role with Vaya Health recently changed. Jessica Fulton is the new Transylvania County Care Manager for Vaya Health, and she should replace Ms. Hatch on the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council.

Commissioner Dalton moved to appoint Jessica Fulton as the Vaya Health representative to the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council, seconded by Commissioner Guice and unanimously approved.

TRANSYLVANIA NATURAL RESOURCES COUNCIL

The terms of Stephanie Adams, Owen Carson, Stephen Matadobra, and Kent Wilcox expire on September 30. Kent Wilcox has served two terms and is not eligible for reappointment. The others are eligible and willing to serve another term. The quarterly advertisement yielded one application to fill Kent Wilcox's position at the end of his term.

Commissioner Guice moved to reappoint Stephanie Adams, Owen Carson, and Stephen Matadobra to another term, and to appoint Katherine Buzby to replace Kent Wilcox at the end of his term on the

Transylvania Natural Resources Council, seconded by Commissioner McCall and unanimously approved.

LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Tracie Trusler recently resigned from the Library Board of Trustees due to personal schedule conflicts. The Library Board of Trustees reviewed the applications and recommended the appointment of Hannah Camenzind to fill the vacancy.

Commissioner McCall moved to appoint Hannah Camenzind to fill the vacancy on the Library Board of Trustees, seconded by Commissioner Guice and unanimously approved.

OLD BUSINESS

ACCEPTANCE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE RESILIENCY GRANT

On June 21, 2021, the Board of Commissioners approved a resolution allowing the NC Department of Transportation to pursue statewide contingency funding to mitigate flooding in the areas of Hart Road, Everett Road, Cascade Lake Road, and Merrill Lane. The purpose of the funding is to elevate the road to mitigate flooding, allowing not only residents to have the ability to pass through, but also access for emergency vehicles. This funding was not approved.

In April 2022, the County received an opportunity to apply for funds through NC Emergency Management in the Transportation Infrastructure Resiliency Fund. NCDOT provided the project information to pursue the grant, including a project budget. In June 2022, the County received notice that it had been awarded \$2,365,016 for the flood mitigation project. The application intended that the County would steward the funds and contract with NCDOT to complete the project. The County signed the documents required under TIRF to accept the grant funds.

The County will also need to sign an Administration of Project Agreement with the NCDOT. That agreement will have to be approved by the NC State Board of Transportation and is anticipated to be on their September agenda after the County accepts the grant.

The NCDOT will be completing the project and invoicing the County who will then seek reimbursement from the NC Department of Public Safety. Since the funds will pass through the County, an amendment to the Multi-Year Grant Fund is necessary.

The Commissioners approved the acceptance of the grant in July and authorized the Manager to negotiate a contract with NCDOT. NCDOT requires that the contract include that the County commit to funding the design of the project even if the project were to encounter undesirable bid conditions that result in stopping the project and returning the grant. County staff have discussed the budget NCDOT prepared for the grant application and NCDOT staff feel it is still a solid budget with room to account for the bid environment. The only other risks to the project would be any unforeseen conditions that impact regulatory requirements or construction costs. To move forward, staff needed Commissioners to consider if they are willing to risk the expense of County funds should the project exceed the grant costs as required under the NCDOT contract.

Commissioner Chapman asked if this is normal or an exception for this kind of project. The Manager said that it is normal for a local government that intends to draw down a grant for which it is ineligible to apply and that NCDOT does require this stipulation in their contracts. The challenge is that NCDOT cannot apply for these funds. However, this project is the kind of project that these funds are ideal for,

especially in a community like ours where flooding puts our citizens at risk because it cuts them off from public safety access.

Commissioner Chapman asked if due diligence has been done to ensure there will be no disturbance to the adjacent property owners and cause more problems than there currently are. The Manager responded there would be no net impact because the work would happen in the existing right of way and the addition of more culverts would ensure water moves under the road and does not impact other properties.

Commissioner Guice commented that it was important to keep in mind that this has been an issue in that area for many years. The County has been fortunate that Eagles Nest allows access through their property during times of flooding, but this is a real issue as it relates to providing emergency services. For this reason, Commissioner Guice believes this project needs to go forward.

Commissioner McCall agreed with Commissioner Guice's comment and sometimes the risk is worth taking and this is one of those times. She pointed out that one of the big concerns about this project is about commitment to the completion of the project promptly. The Manager said she was confident after talking to NCDOT staff that they are going to move forward with the project and that it will be designed and installed as quickly as possible.

Chairman Chappell stressed the importance of addressing public safety and said this is an opportunity to provide some needed assurances to those citizens who are affected by this issue in our community.

Commissioner Chapman moved to authorize the County Manager to finalize the administration agreement with NCDOT and sign the agreement, seconded by Commissioner Dalton and unanimously approved.

Chairman Chappell asked the Manager to provide periodic updates on this project.

NEW BUSINESS

COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM (SECTION 5311 ADMINISTRATIVE, COMBINED CAPITAL PROGRAM, AND SECTION 5310 OPERATING PROGRAM FOR FY2024)

The Board of Commissioners held a public hearing at the beginning of the meeting as required before making an application for the Community Transportation Program funding.

Commissioner Guice moved to grant permission for the Transylvania County Transportation Department to apply for FY 24 Public Transportation Program funding, enter into an agreement with the NC Department of Transportation, provide the necessary assurances and the required local match, and adopt the 5311 Designee Certification Form via resolution, seconded by Commissioner Dalton and unanimously approved.

CONTRACT SUBSIDIZED CHILD CARE PROGRAM

Department of Social Services Director Amanda Vanderoef presented this item. She reported that DSS has been unable to recruit and hire for the childcare subsidy position, classified as an Income Maintenance Caseworker II, since January 2022. A supervisor and program administrator have been covering this position in the interim. Ms. Vanderoef contacted Southwestern Child Development for a proposal since they currently contract with 11 other local county DSSs to provide childcare subsidies. She presented the DSS Board with this proposal during their meeting on August 24 and the DSS Board voted unanimously to approve this contract.

Below is the breakdown of the cost for an IMC II, at the minimum salary level:

Salary	\$33,450
FICA	\$2,259
Retirement	\$4,048
Insurance	\$11,500
Total	\$51,527

Transylvania County's total allocation is \$80,000/year to administer this program and is 100% federally funded. When fully staffed, the allocation will last until December of the fiscal year, leaving six months where the cost of the worker to administer the program becomes 100% County funded. Transylvania County currently receives an allocation of \$1.4 million (90% federal/10% state) for direct services. These funds help support Transylvania County families with the cost of childcare. Transylvania County currently has a caseload of 119 which would only justify one position. The current caseload will continue receiving the same services with a seamless transition. There would be no interruption in services or funding.

Chairman Chappell asked if Southwestern Child Development can ensure they can provide the County with the appropriate staffing. Ms. Vanderoef said that the organization is confident that they will have someone to fill the position by November 1 or they will send someone to fill it in if no one else fills this position. This fill-in person has already worked with Ms. Vanderoef in the past, so she is aware and confident of their abilities. If there are any financial errors under their contract terms, they will be responsible for any paybacks. All these programs are heavily monitored.

Commissioner Guice asked whether the individual and the office would be located in Transylvania County and whether the person would reside in Transylvania County. Ms. Vanderoef said she was unsure if there was a requirement for them to live here, but the individual will be stationed in the Community Services building so clients will still come to the same place for the service.

Commissioner Guice supported the request but was concerned about the caseload being over 100. He felt that the caseload should be lowered to meet the needs of families. He was unsure how our caseload numbers compared to other counties. Ms. Vanderoef said the figures were dependent on the program area. One reason for the possible higher caseload numbers is that the client does not need to recertify each year, so it could be that a client has not had to meet with the provider for some time unless their circumstances changed. She pointed out that each program has different caseload requirements.

Commissioner Chapman asked about the cost charged by Southwestern Child Development and how their fees are paid. Ms. Vanderoef replied that the organization would invoice the County monthly at a pro-rated amount of \$80,000 divided by 12.

Commissioner McCall asked whether Ms. Vanderoef could speak to how the County had already looked internally within Transylvania County for candidates, and at other agencies, but why it had chosen to select Southwestern Child Development. Ms. Vanderoef shared that she had contacted SmartStart to see if they would submit a proposal. SmartStart did submit a proposal, but they indicated they would need quite a bit of training and it would not be the seamless transition that Southwestern Child Development could provide. They agreed that SmartStart can continue researching to see if they can become better equipped in the future.

Commissioner Chapman inquired about the terms of the contract. Ms. Vanderoef said the contract term is year-to-year. So, the County would not be tied to Southwestern Child Development if SmartStart became ready to take on the contract in the future.

Commissioner Guice moved to approve the contract with Southwestern Child Development to provide subsidized childcare to Transylvania County and the associated budget amendment for financial purposes, seconded by Commissioner McCall and unanimously approved.

NEW ADVENTURE COUNTY CHILD INFANT CARE

The Manager presented this item. Transylvania County owns and operates New Adventure Learning Center, a childcare and early learning facility that is not a typical service of counties in North Carolina. Currently, New Adventure serves children ages 1-5. Infant care was removed in 2012 with plans to eliminate the one-year-old room later, but those plans were not executed. This department is currently budgeted to break even on direct operational costs and charges market rates for care. The budget does not include any cost center allocation of overhead or for use of the county-owned building.

Infant care in Transylvania County was identified in the 2015 State of the Young Child Report prepared by County staff as a part of the GetSet Transylvania early childcare report. Additionally, the report identified that there are not enough full-time care options, and that affordability was a growing concern. Since that time, there has been a decrease in infant care spots in licensed facilities. According to SmartStart of Transylvania, there are currently 11 full-time infant care slots and eight half-day.

There are typically around 300 children in any given year age range in Transylvania County. According to the NC Department of Health and Human Services, the market rate for infant care in a five-star center in Transylvania County in 2021 was \$1,048. Centers in Transylvania County have cited challenges to keeping infant care rooms open and/or adding infant care services. These challenges include regulatory requirements, workforce availability including full-time and substitutes, and that infant care is difficult to provide on the revenue achieved by the market rate. In the past, centers were able to even out budgets with classrooms of older children that had higher ratios, but the business model has begun to fail with the cost to provide care and the revenue becoming smaller margins even in classrooms with older children.

The need for childcare is growing with impacts on the available workforce. The lack of an available and dependable workforce is a contributing factor because working parents are either unable to afford or find care on which they can rely. The lack of infrastructure is also a threat to long-term economic development because there are fewer early learning opportunities for children in the community. Studies have made clear correlations that quality early childhood education has a lifelong positive impact on educational and career achievement.

Transylvania County has seen a slight increase in part-time, unregulated options that offer half-day programming, but full-time care has remained unchanged since the 2015 report. Rates have continued to rise with the increased cost of personnel and other operational expenses and annual costs of childcare continue to outpace the annual cost of tuition in the UNC University System, as cited in the 2015 report. Infant care has seen a decrease since 2015 and parent surveys reflect that this is a growing challenge for working parents. GetSet Transylvania has identified that an increasing number of infants are being cared for by individual providers operating underneath the number of children to require regulatory oversight and licensing, but even those opportunities are limited in capacity.

For this reason, County staff have evaluated the personnel costs that would be necessary to reopen an infant room at New Adventure. This would require two additional positions including a lead teacher and an assistant to serve eight infants. The total staffing costs, including salaries and fringe benefits, come to an annual expense of \$114,000. Annual income from market rates for those slots would total \$100,608. A rate of \$1,188 would be required to break even on the personnel costs without factoring in the annual replacement and/or repair of items in the room. Restoration of the infant room would require the Commissioners to be prepared to subsidize the cost of the infant room given the close margins. When infant care was removed from Child Development, the space was reconfigured, and equipment was removed. Staff have begun evaluating the

capital improvement costs necessary to reopen the room, but do not yet have a budget figure for consideration.

Should Commissioners want to continue exploring infant care provision, staff would refine the capital expense expectation and come back to Commissioners at a future meeting with that information. County operation of childcare is unique in Transylvania County, but New Adventure is also one of the few centers available and represents a sizeable portion of the full-time licensed care available in the County, making it a critical piece of infrastructure. Additionally, Transylvania County is hearing as an employer about the challenges of childcare for the County workforce that are in line with the general concerns. County staff are currently working to understand the scope of the challenges County employees face and the opportunities there may be to assist in solving those problems so that County employees are available to provide essential services to the public.

Chairman Chapell pointed out that this is an issue that Commissioner McCall had brought up so he thought it would be helpful for the Board to begin a formal discussion and direct the Manager on any next steps to take.

Commissioner Guice made clear that the Board of Commissioners cares a great deal about the children in our community. He said he believes the Board needs to communicate effectively to the public and the media on this issue because the waitlist is staggering for a county like ours. The question is not whether the Board sees this issue as a measurable need in the community, rather it is a question of how to meet those needs. He pointed out that even if the County were to reopen this program, it would only help eight families initially. Childcare is a huge problem in this community and this Board has great interest in hearing from others on the issue and potential solutions.

Commissioner Chapman expressed some consternation about the fact that our County is one of the only counties that provides this service, and he was concerned about the County competing with the private practice with government subsidies. He asked whether the local government should be in the childcare business or whether the County could work with the private sector to provide this service by giving the building to a company that would be willing to cover the operational costs of running the facility. Otherwise, he felt that the County needed to find a way to make it more equitable because it only serves a few families in the community. If the County cannot serve everyone, then he would prefer the County to get out of the childcare business.

Commissioner Dalton asked whether the wait lists for other privately owned and operated child-care facilities throughout the county are like the New Adventure Learning Center. The Manager responded yes; they are similar. Infant care has been a struggle for these businesses to provide because the numbers do not work out, so they are becoming less and less profitable as time goes on.

Commissioner McCall said that she keeps thinking of what happens to those infants who cannot get that service and to those parents who work under the threat of losing their jobs. She said the New Adventure Learning Center has a great reputation in this County. While she does not believe that the government is the solution to all our problems, New Adventure exists for a reason and has existed successfully for many years. She is not advocating for New Adventure to go away and would prefer to strengthen this service for the County. Commissioner McCall stated that Children should not be viewed as a burden to solve so parents can work. Working parents worrying about their children are not productive employees. She wondered if there were avenues for working parents so that they do not fear losing their jobs to be effective parents. She wanted to explore this further. Commissioner McCall pointed out that adding eight spots does not solve the problem of waiting lists for other facilities, but it indicates there remains a great need in this community for childcare. She hoped the Board having this discussion would create greater awareness and yield possible solutions.

Commissioner Guice said the reason we are not seeing childcare centers opening in the private sector is due to government requirements relating to operating a facility that they cannot meet. In addition, it is a challenge to hire workers today and meet the standards and requirements set forward by the government. The two most vulnerable populations to the Board of Commissioners are our children and our elderly, and it is worth having the discussion countywide to find a solution to move forward. He stressed that dollars invested in our children are dollars invested in the future of our community.

Commissioner Chapman asked the Manager to research what it would cost to expand the New Adventure Learning Center by 50% if it is that important to the County to make such an investment in the community.

Commissioner Dalton pointed out that childcare is highly regulated by inspectors who are highly liable and litigious. He said he is usually an advocate for the private sector but due to the lack of space and workers, he felt the County needed to investigate further to see what the viable options are. He said many families do not have the luxury of having other family members help take care of their children while they work.

Commissioner McCall said if employees are happy, employers will have a lot more dedication from them. This means supporting families. The New Adventure Learning Center is a model for the private sector, not something for the County to subsidize.

Chairman Chappell thanked the Board for their discussion on this issue. He asserted that it was clear from the discussion that no one has had any negative comments about the New Adventure Learning Center in terms of the quality of care that they provide. The discussion was about being able to serve more people in our community. This was the beginning of an ongoing discussion and a potential inclusion in next year's budget. In the meantime, Chairman Chappell asked the Commissioners to inform the Manager about specific items they wanted her to research with all the options and questions being kept in the context of being respectful to the taxpayers.

NCACC FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE GOALS

The Manager stated that in every biennium, the NC Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) solicits input and proposals from counties concerning federal issues that impact North Carolina counties. The NCACC has implemented a process to ensure deliberation on the federal goals by providing an opportunity for input and discussion from counties on proposed federal goals. Counties can submit federal goal proposals until 5:00 p.m. on Friday, October 7.

State and federal goals are developed along two similar, but separate, tracks, and set the Association's priorities for legislative action at the NC General Assembly and in the US Congress. Goals on federal issues may call for changes to federal statutes, changes to federal programs or agency priorities, or involve federal budget and appropriations requests, or a congressionally mandated study. The NCACC's federal goals may also complement the NCACC's state goals, and guiding principles, or support the NCACC presidential initiative.

The Manager provided the list of goals to the Board of Commissioners which was submitted as a carryforward in the previous biennium. Those goals were:

- Fair market rent methodology
- Fully funding or increasing PILT (Payment In Lieu of Taxes) funds
- Fully funding School Resource Officers in all schools or reimbursing those counties that already fund these positions
- General opposition to government shutdowns legislation because it costs local governments

- Increase funding for prevention programs through federal spending programs – drug/opioid addiction, mental health, and Medicaid – allowing communities to spend dollars on prevention programs rather than reactionary programs
- Support the Stepping Up Initiative for jail diversion because it is a substantial savings for counties

She also presented a couple of new goals that were added to the previous submission to the NCACC in addition to the carryforward goals. These goals were:

- Define broadband as a utility
- Fully fund mandates; stop passing down costs to local governments

Chairman Chappell emphasized how important PILT would be for our county as we are one of the few counties hit the hardest by this issue, in addition to a couple of other counties in Western North Carolina.

Chairman Chappel moved to submit the above listed goals to the NCACC, seconded by Commissioner Dalton, and unanimously approved.

MANAGER'S REPORT

The Manager reported the following:

- The 1963 Brevard High School Football Team Civil Rights Sign Dedication is upcoming on October 8 at 2:00 p.m. outside of the Brevard High School gym to honor and celebrate the first integrated high school athletics team in North Carolina.
- Kudos to Elections Director Jeff Storey for earning his recertification as a Certified Elections/Registration Administrator (CERA), the highest professional achievement in the National Association of Election Officials.
- The US 64 water and sewer pipe installation is complete from Harmony Korner's entrance to Cathey's Creek Road and is now waiting for delivery of 16" pipe casing to bore under Cathey's Creek Road. This is scheduled for Wednesday, September 29. Grass seeding and matting are underway on the road shoulder.
- Reminded the public that early voting will start on October 20.
- Transylvania County Emergency Management will be watching Hurricane Ian for potential impact on the County this weekend.
- HalloweenFest with GetSet Transylvania and Sesame Street in Communities will be on October 29. The Sesame Street character Rosita will be the visiting character to appear in Transylvania County, so the public and the Commissioners are encouraged to mark their calendars to avoid missing this special event!
- A career expo will be held on October 11 from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Davis Event Center at the Ag Center. Anyone looking for a new job is encouraged to attend to see all that is out there and available in our community.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments.

COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

Commissioner Chapman said he has been asked by citizens about what the County can do to address the kudzu problem and suggested the possibility of the Transylvania Natural Resource Council addressing it. Commissioner Dalton said he knows a contact who owns goats that will take care of the problem.

Commissioner Chapman shared she will be attending a School of Government course on affordable housing in Marion on Friday. He reminded the public that November 11 is Veterans Day and that there will be a ceremony at the Transylvania County Courthouse gazebo. This event is being planned and organized by the Veterans History Museum.

Commissioner Guice acknowledged the expansive problem of the kudzu situation and wondered about the legality surrounding goats eating away at both public and private land.

Commissioner Call said the 100 Counties Prepared Task Force has caused her to pay closer attention to hurricanes, and it looks like Hurricane Isan is a strong storm. She encouraged everyone to be safe. She also informed the public that the roundabout is not finished yet.

Commissioner Dalton gave a shout-out to Tyrea Allen in Rosman. Commissioner Dalton said he is the most outstanding person he has ever known. Mr. Allen was recognized on WLOS this week and is a great example to young people in our community.

Commissioner Chapman said the American Legion has selected a student to serve as a senator by the National Boys State. The Brevard Newsbeat wrote a nice article about the student.

Chairman Chappell reminded the Commissioner to continue thinking about establishing a committee for the topic of capital needs at Blue Ridge Community College. This would include thinking about the make-up of the committee and revenue streams. This will be an item on next month's agenda.

Chairman Chappell moved to enter into a closed session per N.C.G.S. § 143-318.11 (a) (3) To consult with an attorney employed or retained by the public body in order to preserve the attorney-client privilege between the attorney and the public body, which privilege is hereby acknowledged, and (a) (6) To consider the qualifications, competence, performance, character, fitness, conditions of appointment, or conditions of initial employment of an individual public officer or employee or prospective public officer or employee, following a 10-minute recess, seconded by Commissioner Chapman and unanimously approved.

CLOSED SESSION

Per N.C.G.S. § 143-318.11 (a) (3) To consult with an attorney employed or retained by the public body in order to preserve the attorney-client privilege between the attorney and the public body, which privilege is hereby acknowledged, and (a) (6) To consider the qualifications, competence, performance, character, fitness, conditions of appointment, or conditions of initial employment of an individual public officer or employee or prospective public officer or employee, the closed session was entered into at 8:00 p.m. Present were Chairman Chappell, Commissioners Chapman, Dalton, Guice, and McCall, County Manager Jaime Laughter, County Attorney Natalia Isenberg (participating via Zoom meeting software), and Clerk to the Board Trisha Hogan.

The Board consulted with the County Attorney on a privileged matter and discussed a confidential personnel matter.

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

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 carried.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, **Chairman Chappell moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:29 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