

MINUTES
TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MARCH 25, 2024 – REGULAR MEETING

The Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County met in a regular meeting on Monday, March 25, 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, County Attorney Megan Silver, and Clerk to the Board Trisha Hogan.

Media: Jon Rich – *The Transylvania Times*

There were approximately 30 people in the audience.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Jason Chappell presiding declared a quorum was present and called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

WELCOME

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

The public comments are the opinions or points of view of the speakers. The Clerk to the Board did not attempt to modify the comments based on facts.

Harvest Leasure: Mr. Leasure stated that he was alarmed to see the state of disrepair in which Brevard High School was in and he feared for the safety of the students and others in the school buildings. He said the Commissioners have known about these issues for many years and have a long history of not taking action to address them. He shared that after meeting with Transylvania County Schools Facilities Director Kerry Putnam, it became clear to him that the Commissioners have stalled to the point that the schools are on the verge of being condemned. Mr. Leasure then shared several comments by Mr. Putnam stating that buildings cannot be patched any further and replacing them is the only option, fire codes are out of date and there are no sprinkler systems in the Rosman facilities, HVAC systems are in disrepair, buckets are catching water from the leaking roofs, and the gyms and cafeteria are structurally failing. He stated that the consultant's assessment indicating the school facilities are in fair condition is misleading and false. He also stated the consultant's report did not include structural failures or the replacement of buildings which should be addressed. He urged the Board of Commissioners to stop putting band-aids on issues and develop a master plan for the schools.

Alice Wellborn: Ms. Wellborn addressed the recent posts on the County's Facebook page relating to the school repairs and said the posts appear to be part of a reelection campaign for the three Commissioners running. She claimed the posts were unethical and inappropriate and accused County staff of electioneering on the Commissioners' behalf which she believed warranted a complaint to the Election Commission by the Democratic party candidates. Ms. Wellborn stated that there are deadlines to be concerned with in terms of the school bond and she was concerned about what she called the Commissioners' abysmal history with

meeting deadlines. She questioned why the County is waiting until October to have the projects approved by the Local Government Commission and accused the Board of delaying the bond projects until after the general election or killing the bond projects altogether. Ms. Wellborn also accused the Board of incompetence and having a lack of leadership in addressing the dangerous conditions in the County's Courthouse.

Jeff Brewer: Mr. Brewer is the Chair of the Transylvania County Republican Party. He sought to increase access to in-person voting for rural Transylvania County. He was concerned that the Board of Elections would face the highest volume of in-person voters in the County's history in the 2024 general election. He strongly felt that North Transylvania should have a one-stop early location to accommodate the four precincts located in that area that have more registered voters than the Brevard precincts. Mr. Brewer pointed out that the Transylvania County Democratic Party supports having a third one-stop early location as well so that as many Transylvanians may exercise their fundamental right to vote. He shared that on primary election day, he witnessed the parking and traffic issues as 400 people voted at the North Transylvania Fire Rescue Department which confirmed his stance on having a third location to get as many voters through as early as possible and reduce the election day crowds. Mr. Brewer stated the Board of Elections failed to consider the impact of the construction of the new traffic circle in Pisgah Forest which may keep North Transylvanians from coming into downtown Brevard to vote. He shared that the Republican Party has already recruited nine poll workers to staff a third location. He asked the Board of Commissioners to consider a third location to service the rural voters.

Phyllis Owen: Ms. Owen first thanked the Board of Commissioners for their service to the community. She expressed concern about the traffic and parking issues at the North Transylvania Fire Rescue Department which serves as the Boyd precinct poll location. She asked the Board to consider the safety of all the voters in this area and consider a third one-stop early voting location.

AGENDA MODIFICATIONS

There were no agenda modifications.

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

CONSENT AGENDA

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

The Board approved the following items:

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Board of Commissioners met in a closed session on Monday, February 26, 2024, in which the minutes were sealed. The Board of Commissioners met in a special joint session with the Board of Education on Monday, March 4, 2024, and in a regular meeting on Monday, March 11, 2024. The Board approved the minutes as submitted.

FEBRUARY 2024 DISCOVERY, RELEASE, AND 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 February, tax dollars released

totaled \$1,056.10 and refunds issued amounted to \$1,108.54. The Board approved the February 2024 Discovery, Release, and Monthly Settlement Report as submitted.

AMENDMENTS TO PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION BYLAWS

The bylaws of the Parks and Recreation Commission require that a quorum of five of the seven members is present to vote on issues that come before them. A quorum is the minimum number of members of a group that must be present to conduct business. The County's Policy and Procedures for Appointments to County Boards, Commissions, and Councils defines a quorum as one more than half the voting members unless specified otherwise. The "specified otherwise" was added to include any citizen advisory councils that may have other statutory quorum requirements when voting on legal matters, for example, a board of adjustment. There are no foreseen issues by which the Parks and Recreation Commission's quorum requirements should be more than the normal definition of a quorum being one more than half. The current quorum requirements prohibit the Parks and Recreation Commission from being able to conduct business and should be amended to reflect the County's policy. The Board amended the bylaws of the Parks and Recreation Commission to reflect the definition of a quorum as outlined in the County's Policy and Procedures for Appointments to County Boards, Commissions, and Councils.

BAD DEBT WRITE-OFF FOR SOLID WASTE

Transylvania County Schools Chief Financial Officer requested a waiver of late fees to reconcile their delinquent Solid Waste statement. The County Finance Director and Solid Waste Director agreed to bring this request to the Board of Commissioners to approve a one-time-only waiver of the late fees. In a review of their account back to 2020, County staff discovered \$285.80 in late fees that could be waived. Moving forward, Transylvania County Schools Finance will make prompt payments to avoid future late fees. The Board approved the one-time write-off of late fees of \$285.50 for Transylvania County Schools.

APPLICATION FOR THE INTERNET DOMAIN TRANSYLVANIACOUNTYNC.GOV

Information Technology Director Nathanael Carver requested to reserve the internet domain TransylvaniaCountyNC.Gov for Transylvania County. Migrating to a .gov domain will increase the County's domain security and presence and open the opportunity to apply for multiple cybersecurity grants and potential federal funding. There is a possibility that having a .gov domain may be mandated by the State in the future. The Board approved the application for reserving the internet domain TransylvaniaCountyNC.Gov for Transylvania County.

REQUEST APPROVAL TO APPLY FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE OPIOID, STIMULANT, AND SUBSTANCE USE PROGRAM ENHANCEMENT GRANT FROM THE BUREAU OF JUSTICE ASSISTANCE

The CARE Coalition requested approval to apply for the Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Use Program (COSSUP) site-based, enhancement grant, administered by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). The purpose of this grant is to continue building upon the successes and identified opportunities within the jail-based treatment and reentry program. This grant program funds up to \$200,000 per year for up to three years and would allow CARE and the Sheriff's Office to continue providing jail-based reentry and SUD treatment services and fill in some gaps in the continuum of care. These include peer support services, additional evidence-based treatment modalities, and overdose prevention strategies. The grant would also provide continued support for rigorous evaluation and contribution to emerging best practices in rural, local jail settings. The grant is forecasted, but not yet posted. It is anticipated that the opportunity will be posted in the spring of 2024 with a start date in the fall of 2024 which coincides with the end of the currently funded COSSUP grant cycle. CARE plans to request Dogwood Health Trust's Leverage Fund for grant-writing support. The Board approved the request from the CARE Coalition to apply for the Bureau of Justice Assistance's COSSUP Grant.

REQUEST TO APPLY FOR A GRANT FROM DOGWOOD HEALTH TRUST

Historically, the Department of Social Services (DSS) has had success with hiring interns into full-time permanent positions; however, these internships are unpaid and often students must work part-time jobs in addition to going to school and completing internship required hours. DSS would like to have the ability to recruit interns through the Bachelor of Social Work and Master of Social Work programs by offering paid internships. Through these paid internships from the grant funding, DSS intends to form relationships with the student interns with the goal of them joining the County's team when they graduate. The Board approved DSS's request to apply for the Dogwood Health Trust grant for the stated purpose.

PROCLAMATION - NATIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH WEEK

Making communities safe and healthy is Public Health's top priority. COVID-19 has made that even more important. During the most challenging public health crisis of our lifetimes, it is more important than ever to celebrate public health. The Board of Commissioners thanked Public Health for the hard work they are doing to keep our community safe. The Board approved Proclamation #02-2024 National Public Health Week.

**Proclamation #02-2024
National Public Health Week**

WHEREAS, the week of April 1-7, 2024, is National Public Health Week, and the theme is "Protecting, Connecting and Thriving: We Are All Public Health;" and

WHEREAS, the Transylvania County Public Health Department has provided immeasurable contributions to enhancing the quality of life for our residents, especially during the challenge of the coronavirus pandemic through testing, tracing, health education, and vaccination; and

WHEREAS, Transylvania Public Health programs have evolved over many years from a focus on sanitation and controlling the spread of infectious diseases to now also preventing the onset of chronic diseases; and

WHEREAS, Transylvania Public Health professionals help communities prevent, prepare for, withstand, and recover from the impact of a full range of health threats, including disease outbreaks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, measles, natural disasters, and disasters caused by human activity; and

WHEREAS, Transylvania Public Health promotes improved lifestyles by providing services and supporting policies to help young people stay well and develop into healthy adults; and

WHEREAS, Transylvania Public Health is a critical collaborative partner in the community to respond to emergencies; and

WHEREAS, the Transylvania Public Health's efforts in the community have contributed to improving the overall health of Transylvanians;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners does hereby proclaim the week of April 1-7, 2024, as PUBLIC HEALTH WEEK in honor of the men and women who work tirelessly to keep our community safe and healthy.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners encourages all citizens of Transylvania County to take steps to protect and promote the health and wellbeing of their families by making healthy personal lifestyle choices and seeking regular preventive health care.

This the 25th day of March 2024.

S://Jason R. Chappell, Chairman
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

PROCLAMATION - NATIONAL PUBLIC SAFETY TELECOMMUNICATORS WEEK

April 14-20, 2024, is recognized as National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week to honor the thousands of men and women who respond to emergency calls, dispatch professionals and equipment and render life-saving assistance to the citizens of the United States. The Board of Commissioners is immensely proud of all the Transylvania County 911 Communications Center's Telecommunicators and the vital service they provide to the citizens of Transylvania County and their fellow emergency services comrades. The Board approved Proclamation #03-2024 National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week - April 14-2024.

**Proclamation #03-2024
National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week
April 14-20, 2024**

Whereas, emergencies can occur at any time that require police, fire, or emergency medical services; and

Whereas, when an emergency occurs, the prompt response of police and law enforcement officers, firefighters, and paramedics is critical to the protection of life and preservation of property; and

Whereas, the safety of our police and law enforcement officers, firefighters, and paramedics is dependent upon the quality and accuracy of information obtained from citizens who telephone the Transylvania County 911 communications center; and

Whereas, Public Safety Telecommunicators are the first and most critical contact our citizens have with emergency services; and

Whereas, Public Safety Telecommunicators are the single vital link for our police and law enforcement officers, firefighters, and paramedics by monitoring their activities by radio, providing them information, and ensuring their safety; and

Whereas, Transylvania County's Public Safety Telecommunicators have contributed substantially to the apprehension of criminals, suppression of fires, and treatment of patients; and

Whereas, each dispatcher has exhibited compassion, understanding, and professionalism during the performance of their job in the past year;

Now, Therefore, Be It Resolved that the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners declares the week of April 14 through 20, 2024, to be National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week in Transylvania County, in honor of the men and women whose diligence and professionalism keep our county and citizens safe.

Signed this 25th day of March 2024.

S://Jason R. Chappell, Chairman
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

PROCLAMATION - CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

The Family Place requested the Board of Commissioners proclaim the month of April 2024 as Child Abuse Prevention Month. The purpose of the proclamation is to focus public attention on the needs of young children and their families, to recognize the early childcare programs and services that meet those needs,

and to call upon support for early childhood programs and the prevention of child abuse in our community. The Board approved Proclamation #04-2024 Child Abuse Prevention Month.

**Proclamation #04-2024
Child Abuse Prevention Month**

WHEREAS, children are our state's most vulnerable members as well as our state's most valuable resources, helping to shape the future of North Carolina; and

WHEREAS, positive childhood experiences, like loving caregivers and safe, stable, and nurturing relationships can help mitigate trauma and the negative impact of adverse childhood experiences to promote the social, emotional, and developmental well-being of children; and

WHEREAS, childhood trauma can have long-term psychological, emotional, and physical effects throughout an individual's lifetime and impact future generations of their family; and

WHEREAS, childhood trauma, including abuse and neglect, is a serious problem affecting every community, and finding solutions requires input and action from everyone; and

WHEREAS, children who live in families with access to concrete economic and social supports are less likely to experience abuse and neglect; and

WHEREAS, nurturing positive childhoods and preventing child maltreatment is possible because of the partnerships created between families, prevention advocates, child welfare professionals, education, health, community, and faith-based organizations, businesses, law enforcement agencies, and local, state, and national governments; and

WHEREAS, we acknowledge that in order to solve the public health issue of abuse and neglect we must work together to change hearts and mindsets through storytelling and sharing, center the needs of families, break down bias and barriers, and inspire action from expected and unexpected partners; and

WHEREAS, we are committed to advancing equitable, responsive, and effective systems that ensure all children and families are healthy and thriving; and

WHEREAS, we recognize the need to prioritize kids and invest in more prevention initiatives like home visiting and family-strengthening policies, economic supports, and community-based child abuse prevention programs at the national, state, and local levels;

NOW, THEREFORE, the Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County does hereby proclaim April as **CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH** in Transylvania County and urges all citizens to recognize this month by building a narrative of hope for children and families through collaboration and the creation of an ecosystem of primary prevention that does not currently exist in this country.

This the 25th day of March 2024.

S://Jason R. Chappell, Chairman
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

PROCLAMATION PROCLAIMING MARCH AS NATIONAL ATHLETIC TRAINING MONTH IN TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY

March is considered National Athletic Training Month. For the last few years, Pardee has continued to support the County by providing two stellar Athletic Trainers to support athletic programs at schools in Rosman and Brevard. An event was held on March 22 to celebrate the dedication of these folks who are supporting schools across five counties. The other four counties in the region - Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, and Polk - passed similar resolutions. The Board approved Proclamation #05-2024 Proclaiming March as National Athletic Training Month in Transylvania County.

**PROCLAMATION #05-2024
PROCLAIMING MARCH AS NATIONAL ATHLETIC TRAINING MONTH**

WHEREAS, athletic trainers have a long history of providing quality healthcare for athletes and those engaged in regular physical activity based on specific tasks, knowledge, and skills required through their nationally regulated educational processes; and

WHEREAS, athletic trainers are highly skilled healthcare professionals who specialize in immediate, acute, and emergency care; examination, assessment, and diagnosis; injury prevention; risk management; therapeutic intervention; and rehabilitation of injury and illness; and

WHEREAS, the National Athletic Trainers' Association represents and supports more than 45,000 members of the athletic training profession employed in the following settings: professional sports, colleges and universities, high schools, clinics and hospitals, corporate and industrial settings, and military branches; and

WHEREAS, leading organizations concerned with athletic training and healthcare have united in a common commitment to raise public awareness of the importance of the profession of athletic training and the role of athletic trainers in the provision of quality healthcare services; and

WHEREAS, it is the desire of the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners to promote improved healthcare for athletes and all of those who engage in physical activity;

NOW, THEREFORE, the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners does hereby proclaim the month of March as National Athletic Training Month and calls upon residents to recognize athletic trainers for their honorable work in keeping the community healthy.

This the 25th day of March 2024.

S://Jason R. Chappell, Chairman
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

PRESENTATIONS/RECOGNITIONS

FY 2025 BLUE RIDGE COMMUNITY COLLEGE CAPITAL AND OPERATING BUDGET REQUEST

Dr. Laura Leatherwood, President of Blue Ridge Community College, presented the College's annual report and FY 2025 capital and operating budget request.

2023 Successes – New Programs

Dr. Leatherwood reported that 2023 was a monumental year for Blue Ridge Community College and the impact of their work in Transylvania County continues to grow. She shared some of those successes with the Board. She stated that the College works hard to stay abreast of the forefront of technology, industry shifts,

and workforce needs throughout the local industries. This enables them to offer programs that directly benefit employers and ensure that their students make exceptional employees. This work culminated in the launch of several programs: Artificial Intelligence, Entrepreneurship, Medical Office Administration, Elementary Education Residency Certificate, Civil Engineering Technology, and Environmental Engineering Technology.

2023 Successes – Nursing Program

Between all its campuses, Blue Ridge proudly serves more than 500 students each year in its Healthcare Education programs. Community colleges like Blue Ridge provide most nurses across the State of North Carolina. To meet that need, the College expanded its nursing program by 20 slots last year. The College can enroll 74 nursing students each year ensuring that at any given time they would have 148 nursing students in the pipeline ready to go to work in local medical practices and the three hospitals in the region. Last year the program achieved a 100% passing rate on the RN exam which speaks to the quality of the education that the students are getting at Blue Ridge.

2023 Successes – Apprenticeship Blue Ridge

Blue Ridge apprenticeships have been one of the most popular and fastest-growing areas. They are unique in that they allow a student to earn and learn – going to school while earning a paycheck – and provide a workforce for local companies. Since 2021, Apprenticeship Blue Ridge has grown exponentially from three programs to 15 programs in the areas of Advanced Manufacturing, Banking, Business, Education, Healthcare, and Skilled Trades. The College added 10 of those programs last year.

2023 Successes - More

In the fall of 2023, the College had the largest graduating class in its history. The College received five national awards for the quality of their online courses. Blue Ridge's Board Chairman Chip Gould received the Governor's Award for Volunteer Service. Blue Ridge earned the Outstanding Registered Pre-Apprenticeship Program Award from the State. The College also added a new partnership with Wingate University where students can transfer and pay only \$2,500 in tuition to Wingate.

Transylvania County Campus – Recent Updates

In 2019, thanks to the campus' growth, the College needed an additional classroom. The State passed a statewide bond, allowing the College to add a classroom to the Strauss Building. Last year, the College renovated a science lab thanks to County funding.

Transylvania Programs

The programs are a direct response to the critical workforce needs in the community. Through research and planning, the College launched and maintained the programs that sustained local industries and public infrastructure. Under the current programs, there are four different associate degree programs, as well as Basic Law Enforcement Training, Criminal Justice, EMTs/paramedics, Human Services (also referred to as Social Work Technology), Medical Coding and Billing, Nurse Aide, and Welding in the high schools. The College has programs it needs to add, such as Additional Customized Training, Biotechnology/Life Sciences, Engineering, Mechatronics, and Skilled Trades (Construction, Electrical, HVAC, Plumbing, and Masonry). Dr. Leatherwood also listed in her presentation a few of the State workforce's needs which are not much different from what they are locally.

Coming Soon: Respiratory Therapy

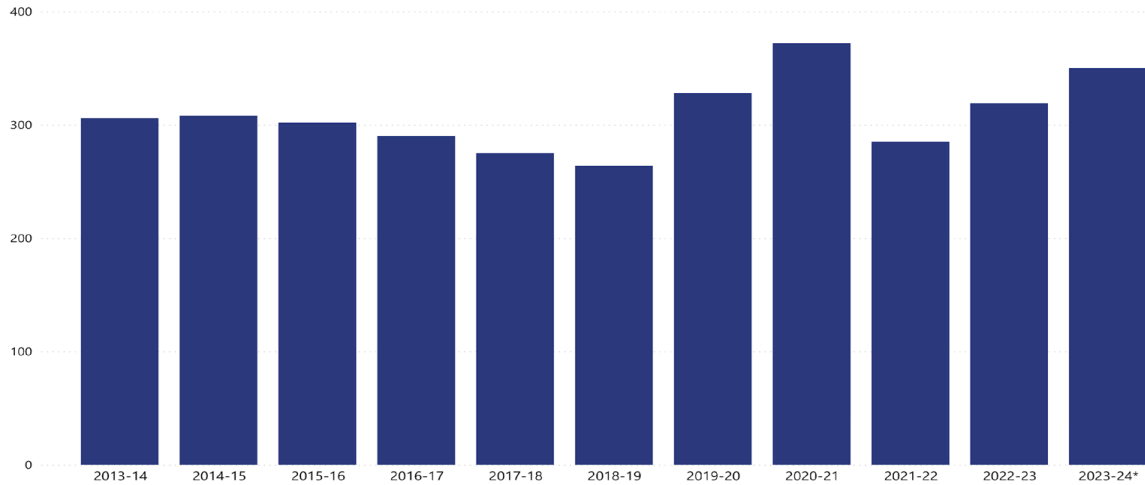
This fall, the College will offer an Associate Degree Respiratory Therapy program in partnership with Southwestern Community College, and it will be housed on the Transylvania County campus. This program is only one of three that are offered in the western part of the State. Healthcare workforce data indicates the demand for respiratory therapists is expected to climb by 14% by 2030. Both Henderson and Transylvania Counties will need these professionals to serve residents.

Coming Soon: Mechatronics Lab

In the fall of 2025, the College is planning to repurpose a lab into a mechatronics lab at the Transylvania County campus. The lab will allow training and disciplines, such as automation, mechanics, electrical, electronics, computing, programming, fluid power, pneumatics, hydraulics, and more. All these disciplines are used in manufacturing, agriculture, and several other occupational sectors.

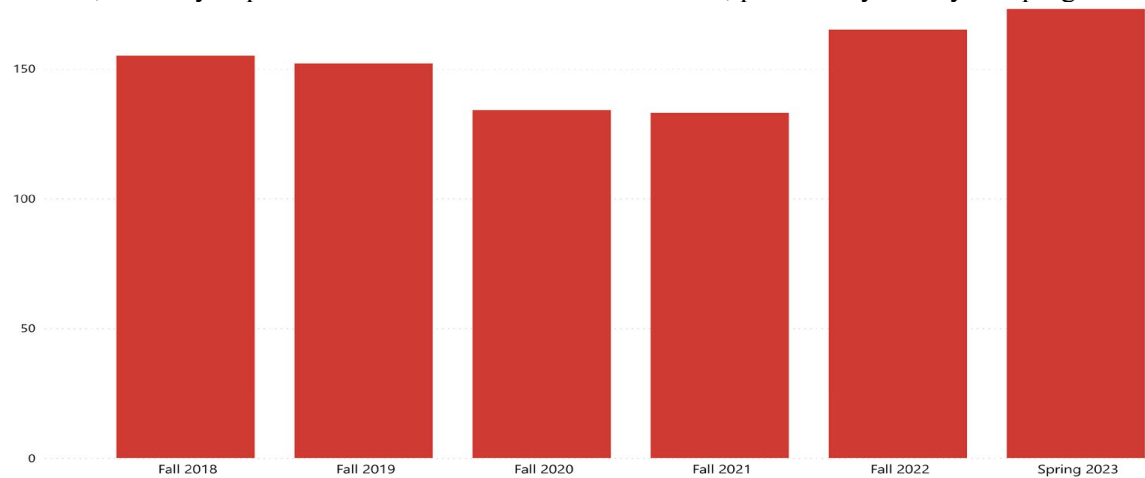
Enrollment Growth

The chart below shows the College’s enrollment growth. Enrollment growth dropped significantly in FY 2021-22 due to the pandemic, but enrollment began to increase in the following years.



High School Enrollment (Career and College Promise)

High School enrollment in the CCP program is up. The College has a great partnership with the public schools, and they hope to see enrollment continue to increase, particularly as they add programs.



Our Workforce Engine

Dr. Leatherwood stated that the three pillars the College must have to be successful and to continue growing the workforce are students, state-of-the-art facilities, and talented faculty and staff. Their facilities are aging but they have served the College well. The main building on the Transylvania County campus is a converted 1951 elementary school building. Within the three-part workforce engine, the limiting factor in Transylvania County is the physical campus.

Budget Needs: Capital and Operating

The College's total request for operations which includes campus security is \$698,414. Their capital request, which is the minimum amount needed to maintain the campus, is \$135,500. Dr. Leatherwood stated the Blue Ridge Community College Strategic Capital Planning Committee generated a figure of \$50.8 million for a new campus. She stated that while their buildings are not in imminent danger, the facility will soon require numerous improvements. The College's recommendation is to invest the capital funds in a long-term solution rather than in short-term fixes to an outdated building.

Committee Findings

Dr. Leatherwood stated that the College is appreciative of the due diligence that the Board has engaged in regarding all the options that should be considered for their campus. The College has spent considerable time considering several questions posed during the Strategic Capital Planning Committee meetings.

The first question was whether it was feasible to add a second story to the Strauss building. Dr. Leatherwood stated that the current building was never constructed to support an additional story. Otherwise, the entire lower complex would need to be modified and caught up to the current building code. It would be expensive and there would still be many issues associated with an aging retrofitted elementary school.

Another question asked was whether a new campus could be built in the same location. Dr. Leatherwood stated there is not an appropriate amount of buildable space to provide all the classrooms, labs, and work areas required for the current and upcoming programs as the student population continues to expand. Building on the current site would cause a significant disruption for all their activities, and thus for practical and safety reasons, the College would need to suspend its operations and services for several years to carry out the construction. The College explored alternative spaces but there is no space nearby that is equipped to maintain effective programming throughout the construction. Dr. Leatherwood stated that closing the campus would interrupt the positive momentum the College has built, impact funding, and have a negative long-term impact on enrollment as students in the community disengage. Additionally, the County would soon feel these losses in the local workforce, so building on the current site is not fiscally responsible nor operationally functional.

Another question posed during the Committee meetings was whether the College could relocate to the Rosman corridor of the County. Dr. Leatherwood stated that the College is seeing population increases focusing closer to Brevard and the eastern side of the County in the direction of the Fletcher and Mills River area. Relocating in that area would be the College's preference. She said students are much more likely to pursue education near their work and homes and that is a fundamental aspect of how community colleges were placed across the State.

The last question suggested waiting several years to construct a new facility. Dr. Leatherwood stated that escalating construction costs will cause the overall project cost to rise. Additionally, the existing facilities will continue to age and create a cost burden for the County as the College wrestles to keep them operational.

Dr. Leatherwood reported that the consensus of the BRCC Strategic Capital Planning Committee was that the existing site will not meet future flexibility needs and is cost-prohibitive to pursue. Considering the findings of the committee, Dr. Leatherwood asked the Commissioners to consider conducting a thorough third-party conditional and structural assessment of the existing Transylvania County campus like the assessment by Axias on Transylvania County Schools facilities. She stated that having this information will help the Board make a more informed decision.

Conclusion

Dr. Leatherwood expressed her appreciation of the Board's support for the College and stated that the College is looking to the future for continued growth in its facilities and students and being able to provide for the workforce.

Chairman Chappell called for questions and comments from the Commissioners.

Commissioner Chapman inquired about the request for a 27% increase in security costs. Dr. Leatherwood explained that the College contracts with the Transylvania County Sheriff's Office to provide security for its campus. The Sheriff's Office provides the College with an estimate each year of what it will cost to provide security. The percentage increase is relative to the actual cost of providing the security including salary increases.

Commissioner Casciato asked if the Strategic Capital Planning Committee considered any land along the Highway 280 corridor for a new campus. As a member of the committee, he recalled discussing locating in the western part of the County. The Manager stated that the committee conducted an analysis of tract sizes based on an architect's study recommendations. There were no tracts of sufficient size outside of the floodplain in that area of the County. She pointed out that the committee did not specify an exact location to consider for a new campus.

Commissioner Casciato asked how many high school students are attending courses in the College and which classes they are taking. He was concerned about students not learning skilled trades, like construction. Glenda McCarson, Associate Vice-President of the Transylvania County Campus, responded that in the last fall semester, there were 217 high school students taking 473 classes. In the current spring semester, 194 students are enrolled in 462 classes. She did not have the specific data on which classes they were taking, but stated she could provide it later. She stated the current campus does not allow the College to provide many of the skilled trades. The College currently offers automotive and welding courses. The automotive course is housed on their campus. The College sends an instructor to teach welding at Brevard and Rosman High Schools.

Commissioner Chapman pointed out that North Carolina is an aging state, and it is estimated that in 2025 one in five North Carolina residents will be over 60 years old. For this reason, he applauded the College for starting the respiratory therapy program because it will be critical in supporting the community, especially for Transylvania County which has the highest percentage of population over the age of 65. Dr. Leatherwood stated that the data clearly show that when students attend a community college, they are 80% more likely to stay and work in the community and earn a family-sustaining wage.

Commissioner McCall asked if the College considers low enrollment when evaluating programs for community needs. Dr. Leatherwood replied that the College historically evaluated courses every three years but since the pandemic, they now evaluate enrollment every year based on jobs. She pointed out that enrollment with no jobs is doing a disservice to the students and jobs with no enrollment means the College needs to recruit. The College is constantly monitoring and evaluating all its programs and staffing levels.

Commissioner McCall asked for clarification on why it was not recommended to use the high school facilities that have CTE programs to offer trade skill classes in the evening for community college students. Ms. McCarson responded that the School System does not prefer having adults in a high school setting. The School System hosts many after-school activities, so they want to avoid the commingling of adults and students. She shared that the College is exploring adding a welding class in the evening at Brevard High School, but its accessibility would be limited based on after-school activities to avoid adults commingling with high school students.

Commissioner McCall asked if off-campus facilities, such as a business or a vacant building, have the setup to meet these needs. Ms. McCarson said the College would be willing to explore further. She pointed out that Dr. Leatherwood received a special appropriation for electrical and HVAC courses and charged her with finding a place to rent. She found that the rent in this area was higher than the market price. Ms. McCarson stated that this highlights the importance of making changes to the mechatronics lab to offer CCP and additional apprenticeships to support local businesses.

Commissioner McCall emphasized that the estimated cost of a new campus does not include land acquisition, architectural design, or infrastructure needs, so the cost of a new campus would be much higher than the estimated figure of \$50.8 million.

Chairman Chappell stated that the Board of Commissioners has been supportive of Blue Ridge Community College for many years and that they are a critical economic development partner. He pointed out that the College’s budget request will be part of the Manager’s full recommended budget for FY 2025 and thus there is no action required by the Board at this meeting. He thanked Dr. Leatherwood and the College for being a great partner.

Commissioner Chapman suggested a future agenda item for the Board to discuss options on Dr. Leatherwood’s request for an assessment of the current campus.

PRESENTATION ON EARLY VOTING SITES

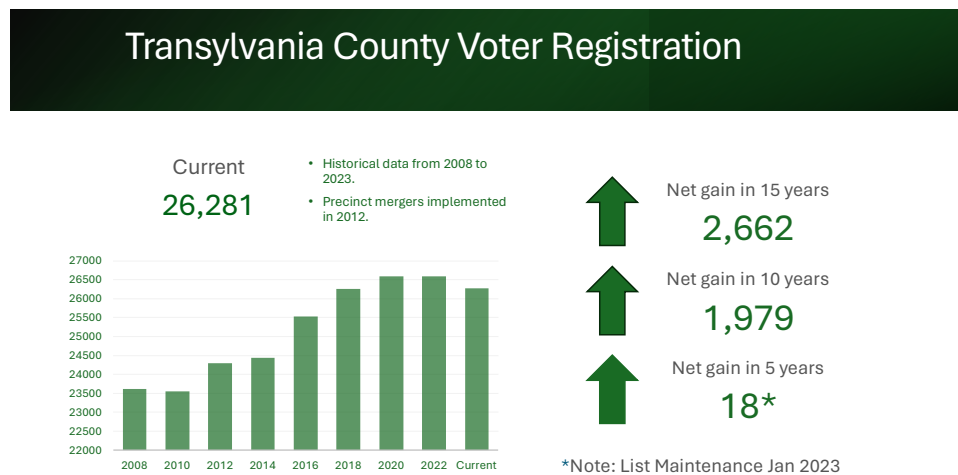
Board of Elections Chairwoman Sara Champion presented information on the Board of Elections’ consideration of early voting sites at the request of the Board of Commissioners.

Board Members

The Board of Elections is made of up five members. Both political parties appoint two members each and the Governor appoints one additional member. The Board of Elections takes an oath to serve the Constitution and the people of North Carolina and Transylvania County. Their decision on early voting must be unanimous. The State Legislature makes the laws to which the Board of Elections must adhere. The State Board of Elections provides the local boards with best practices and guidance on implementation.

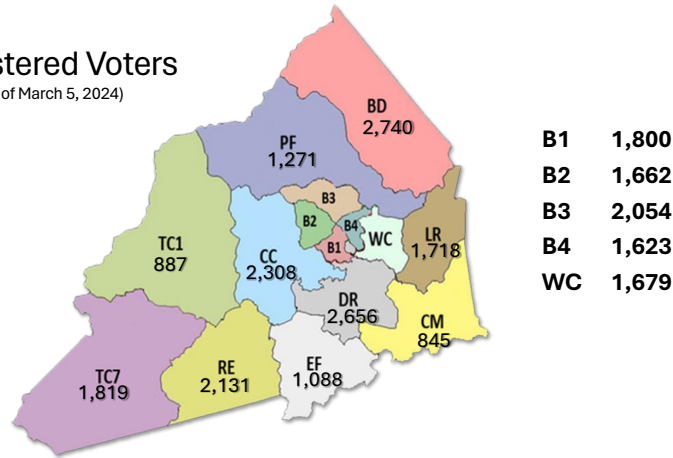
Early Voting Considerations

When considering early voting, the Board of Elections reviews the growth of registered voters. Ms. Champion reported that the growth has remained flat. In five years, the County has gained 18 net voters. The Election staff performed list maintenance and other processes to arrive at this number.

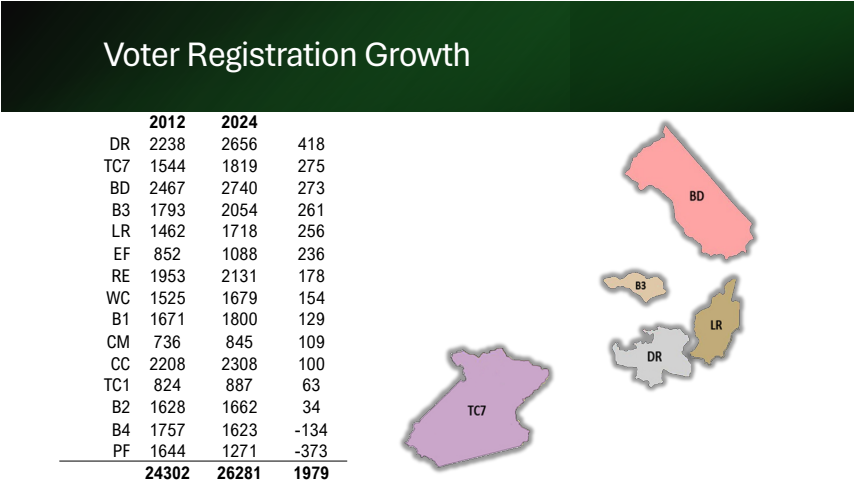


Boyd has the highest number of registered voters, followed by Dunn’s Rock and Cathey’s Creek.

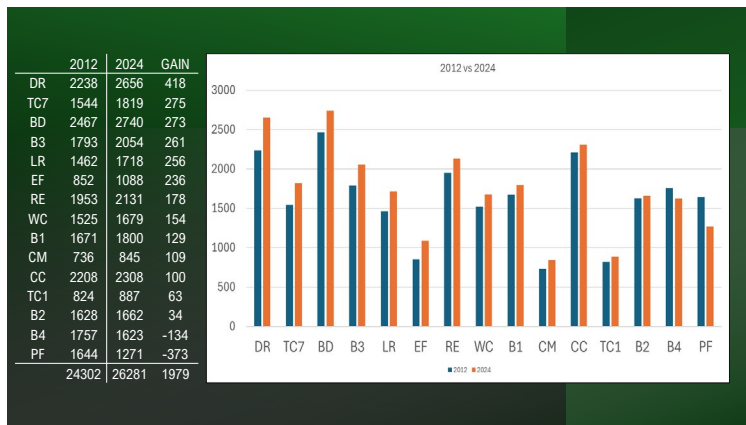
Registered Voters (as of March 5, 2024)



The figures below are raw growth numbers, not a growth percentage. It indicates Dunn’s Rock has experienced the largest growth, followed by TC7 and Boyd. The Board of Elections reviews this data to ensure their decisions meet the needs.



This chart shows the largest gain growth to the smallest gain since 2012. The largest gain occurred in Dunn’s Rock.



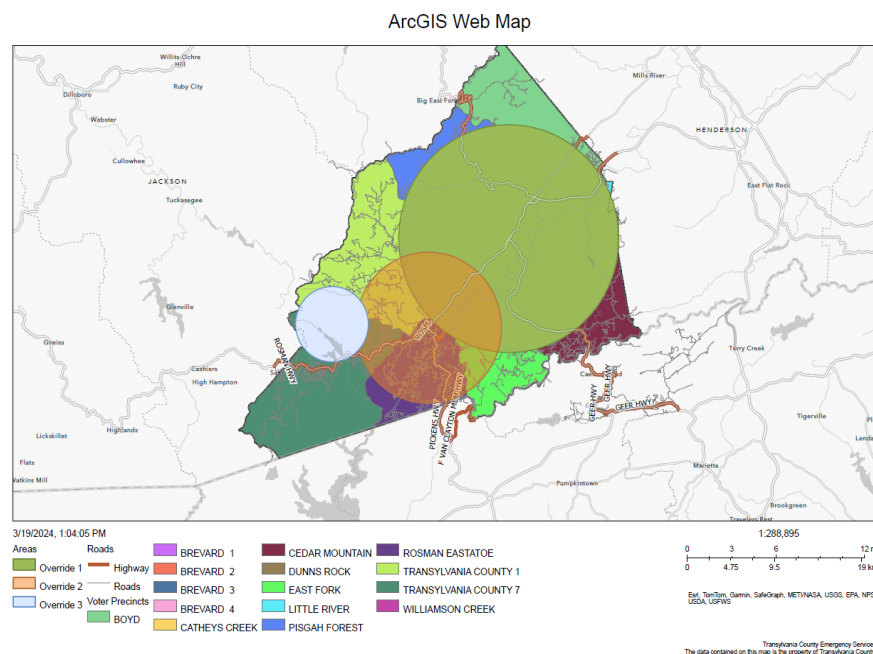
Early Voting Site Requirements

All early voting sites must be open every weekday during the early voting period from 8 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. All early voting sites must be open on the same days and hours. Over 17 days, early voting sites are normally open for 15 days because the Board of Elections does not staff on Sundays. The matching hours requirement routinely causes conflict.

Early Voting Site Considerations

For the early voting physical sites, the Board of Elections must consider facility size, parking, and exclusive use during the early voting period because the equipment remains in the facility and thus must remain secure. Not all locations are willing to give up use of their space for the full period.

The Board of Elections also considers geographic locations to be near transportation routes and centered in the population areas. The Brevard district covers a large sector of the voting population. The center of the large circle in the graph below is downtown Brevard.



Early Voting Staffing Considerations

The Board of Elections needs two teams of people to work early voting. The teams must work consistently across the early voting period to ensure the maintenance and upkeep of the records, equipment, and processes. The Board of Elections must also look for people who are physically capable of working. Most of the poll workers are older and the early voting period makes for long days for them.

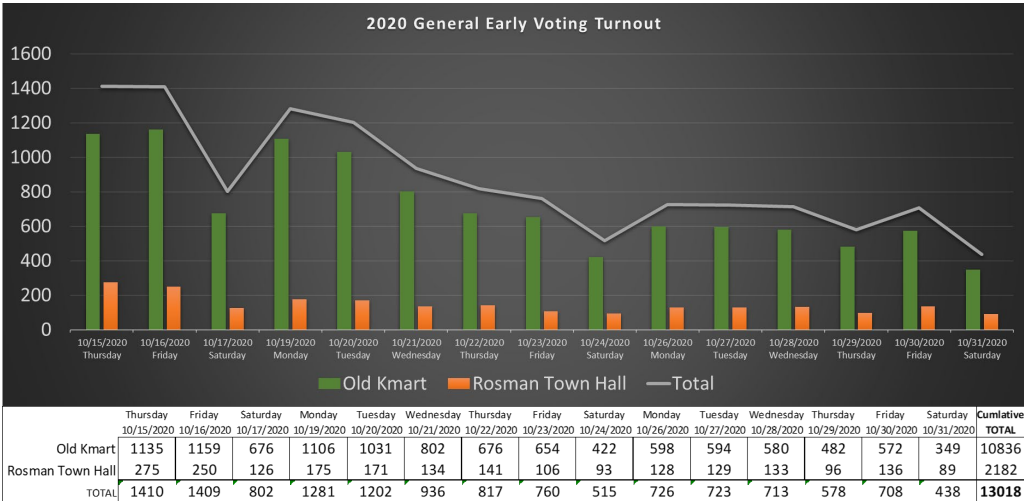
The chart below outlines the cost of early voting staffing. The staffing costs for adding a third early voting location would increase to \$58,200. The third site would also require the purchase of new equipment and hardware for \$25,000. The equipment cannot be repurposed after early voting and used on election day because there is not enough time to get the equipment ready.

Early Voting Staffing Considerations

Position	Workers	Rate/Hour	# of Hours	Total Requested
Site 1				
Early Voting Chief Judge	1	\$12.00	200	\$2,400.00
Early Voting Judge	2	\$11.00	200	\$4,400.00
Early Voting Workers	11	\$10.00	180	\$19,800.00
			TOTAL:	\$26,600.00
Site 2				
Early Voting Chief Judge	1	\$12.00	200	\$2,400.00
Early Voting Judge	2	\$11.00	200	\$4,400.00
Early Voting Workers	5	\$10.00	180	\$9,000.00
			TOTAL:	\$15,800.00

Voter Turnout

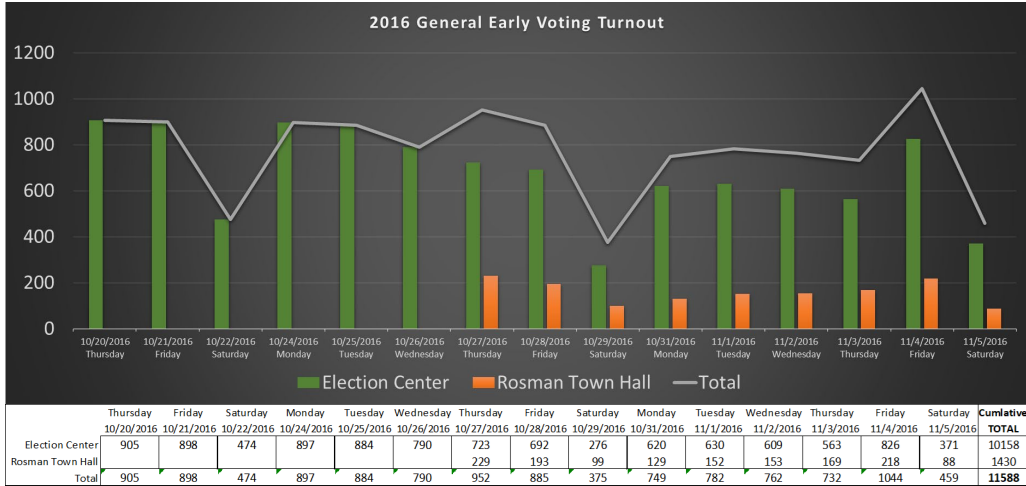
The charts below provide data on the voter turnout from the last two general elections at both early voting locations. Both locations were open for the same number of hours.



17 Day Period : 15 Days Open : 165 hours per site : 330 cumulative hours open

In 2016, the Board of Elections did not have the requirement for matching hours. They opened the Rosman location during the second week of early voting. It was more efficient, and it did not affect the voter turnout.

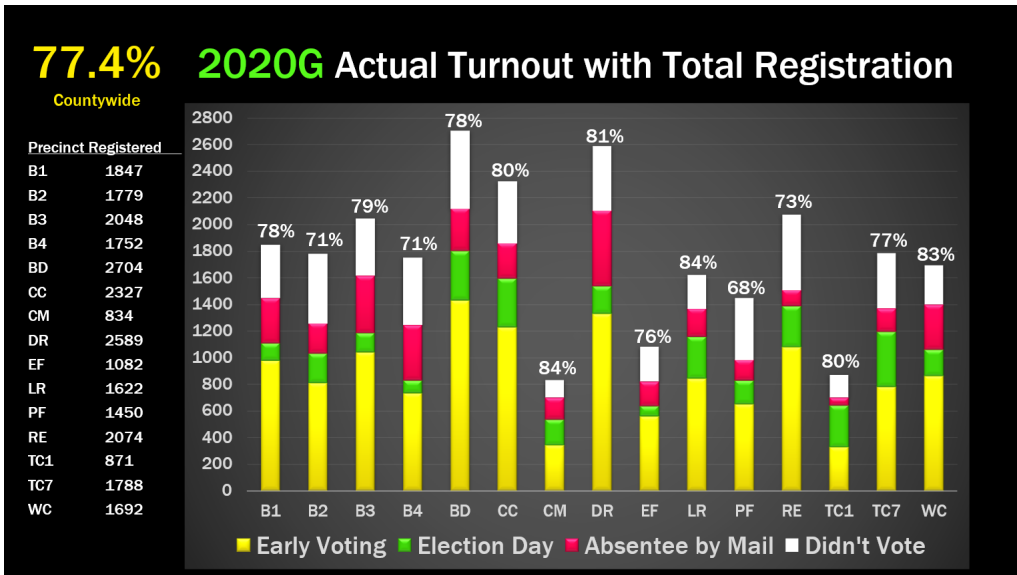
Ms. Champion also shared data from the 150-hour early voting period during the recent 2024 primary election. During the hours between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. at the Election Center, there were 165 voters during the total period, averaging 12 voters an hour. From 5:00 p.m. until closing, they had 174 voters across the entire period averaging 15 voters an hour during those last three hours. She stated there are peak times during early voting, as well as peak days, but they still have capacity.

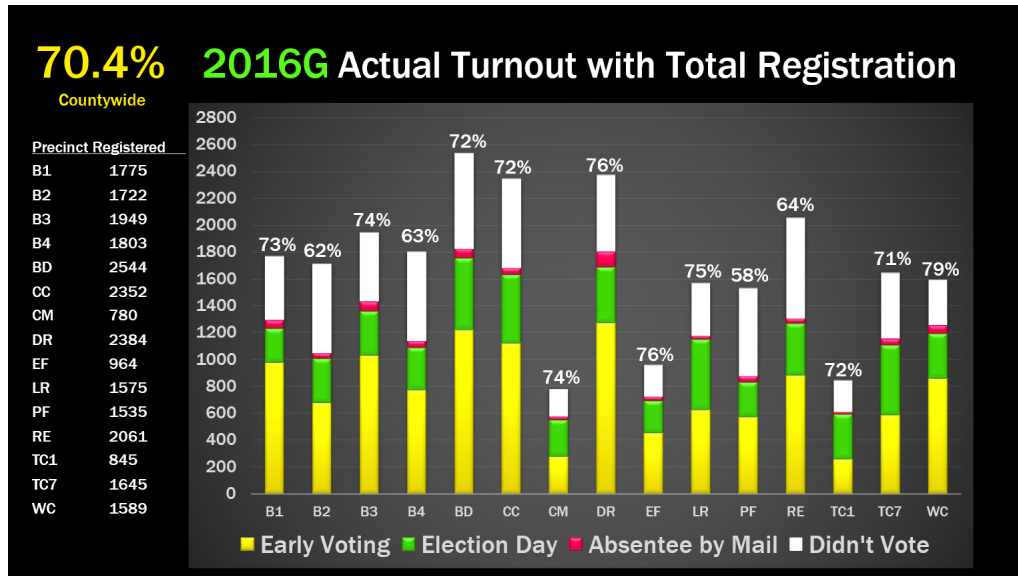


17 Day Period : EC 15 days open 109 hours RTH 9 days open 69 hours : 178 cumulative hours open

Based on the general early voting turnout, the average turnout at the old Kmart was 723 voters, and 145 voters at Rosman Town Hall. The peak daily turnout at the old Kmart was 1,410 and 275 voters at the Rosman Town Hall. Both locations were open the same number of hours.

The Board of Elections reviews the charts below which indicate the general election turnout and the average countywide turnout to ensure that no precinct is disadvantaged. The countywide voter turnout in 2020 was 77.4% of eligible voters. It was 70.4% in 2016. Each one of the columns represents a precinct and to the left is the number of registered voters in those precincts. Each column is made up of different colors representing the number of people in the respective precincts during early voting, on election day, absentee by mail, and did not vote. The number at the top of each column is the total percentage of voters from that precinct who voted. Some of the precincts that are located near the early voting locations are voting under the percentages of the County. Others that are further away from the early voting locations are voting higher than some of the percentages of the County.





The Board of Elections also looked at the potential for growth in early voting. They estimated a 14% growth rate which mirrors the last couple of presidential elections. A 14% growth rate equals an increase of 1,800 voters.

The top five precincts by volume during the 2020 general election early voting period were Boyd, Dunn's Rock, Cathey's Creek, Rosman Eastatoe, and Brevard 3. The top five precincts by volume during the 2016 general election early voting period were Dunn's Rock, Boyd, Cathey's Creek, Brevard 3, and Brevard 1.

Early Voting Conclusion

While the number of people voting early is increasing, the Board of Elections felt that the proposed plan is appropriate. The estimated growth of 14% is 1,800 voters during a 330-hour period which equates to 5.5 voters/hour, or 106 more voters a day total between the two early voting sites. The Board of Elections felt confident the two sites could manage this increase. In addition, the Board of Elections could not justify the staffing challenges and additional costs for so few additional potential voters, nor could they advocate for additional funding. The Board of Elections felt if they needed to add a third early voting site, that the Board of Commissioners would fund the request.

At this point in the presentation, Ms. Champion asked the Commissioners if they had any questions.

Based on the low voter turnout at the early voting site in Rosman, Commissioner Casciato asked if they would be better served by establishing a site in the Boyd precinct. Ms. Champion said the challenge is finding a suitable facility that is available for exclusive use during the entire early voting period. She pointed out that the old BI-LO is vacant, but their parking lot will be used as the laydown area for the construction of the roundabout in Pisgah Forest. She also pointed out that the precincts near Rosman are large precincts and the early voting site in Rosman serves the people in the upper end of the County, including those in the TC7, Cathey's Creek, and Rosman precincts.

Commissioner Casciato preferred the Board of Elections to set up three early voting sites. He was concerned about the parking and traffic issues at the Boyd precinct location, and he hoped the Board of Elections could find a solution. Ms. Champion responded that the Board of Elections could not demonstrate the need for a third location based on the data, so they did not advocate for funding.

Commissioner Chapman shared his concerns about the safety issues at the Boyd polling place but said he understood the challenges of finding a suitable location. Ms. Champion stated they have had a Sheriff's deputy park there with their flashing lights on to alert drivers coming over the hill. The Board of Elections has discussed additional signage, like "congested area ahead" to urge drivers to slow down.

Commissioner Chapman asked if the Board of Elections had analyzed the number of voting machines needed for a third location and whether some of them could be moved from the other two sites to reduce cost. Ms. Champion stated that they have, and it is doable, but the number of machines they need is dependent on the projected number of voters. She shared that more than 300 people showed up at the Election Center to vote on election day rather than at their respective precincts.

Commissioner Chapman asked the Board of Elections to consider inquiring further about the possibility of using the separate building at the Little River Fire Department. He strongly felt that a third early voting is needed and pointed out that Jackson County, a county with a similar population, has five sites. He understood that staffing is challenging but pointed out that the Republican Party Chairman has already recruited workers. Ms. Champion pointed out that the Board of Elections has had challenges with staffing for Election Day, which is only one day. She also shared that 1,400 Boyd precinct voters voted early while only 400 voted at the Boyd polling place on election day in 2020. Commissioner Casciato pointed out this election occurred during the pandemic.

Commissioner McCall was concerned about the upcoming construction of the roundabout in Pisgah Forest and the impact it could have on travel in and out of Brevard. While she understood their challenges with finding a location, she urged the Board of Elections to consider the impacts of the construction on early voting. She said having a third early voting site would lessen the burden on the two current sites and encouraged the Board of Elections to continue exploring sites.

Ms. Champion asked how the Board of Elections could justify keeping the Rosman site open if they established a site in the eastern part of the County. Commissioner McCall responded there is no justification for closing the Rosman site because it serves a viable part of the County. She said that there needs to be a realization that not everyone resides within the city limits of Brevard.

Commissioner Casciato pointed out that early voting is growing so there should be a site in the eastern part of the County. Ms. Champion stated that staffing another site is challenging. She said the Board of Elections also has issues staffing on election day which is only one day while the early voting period is 15+ days. The State Legislature requires in-precinct party balance on election day for the judges and chief judges, but the County's largest voting block is unaffiliated. So, the Board of Elections has had to employ unaffiliated voters to fill these positions which is against the recommendations and laws but those were the only bodies they could produce. Ms. Champion stated that even if they had enough poll workers, the challenge of finding a suitable site remains a challenge.

Next, Ms. Champion presented information on precinct organization separate from the early voting.

Election Day Precinct Review & Growth of Registered Voters

The Board of Elections reviews the number of registered voters and the growth from the previous elections.

Since 2012, the Board of Elections has been tracking data in the voting districts, including the preexisting precincts that now make up TC1 and TC7 (TC1= Balsam Grove and Gloucester and TC7=Lake Toxaway, Quebec, and Sapphire-Whitewater). In 2012, Balsam Grove had 455 voters, and since that time gained 12. Gloucester had 359 voters in 2012 and gained 35 but it still does not have enough voters to be a

functioning precinct. TC1 has a total voter registration of 887. After the 2012 consolidation, TC7 currently has 1,800 voters after the consolidation.

Next, Ms. Champion showed a map of the polling locations with road overlays. When considering polling sites, the Board of Elections looks for locations that are centrally located within the precinct boundaries.

G.S. § 163-128 - Election Precincts and Voting Places Established or Altered

Precinct boundaries must coincide with census blocks and the polling places must be ADA-accessible. The old polling places for Gloucester and Sapphire-Whitewater are no longer ADA-accessible. The Board of Elections considers driving distances as well, and Ms. Champion showed maps detailing the farthest point in the precinct to the polling location.

Other Considerations

- Bests practice < 3,000 voters per precinct
- Election officials must live in-precinct with party balance
- Cost to establish another precinct
- Ongoing cost to operate

Costs for Establishing a New Precinct

- \$14,495 in initial costs
- \$5,205 in recurring costs

Ms. Champion reiterated that the Board of Elections considers the total turnout from previous elections and currently, they do not see any disenfranchised voters with the current offerings.

Commissioner Casciato asked the Manager if there were monies within the budget to cover the cost of a third early voting site. The Manager stated there are currently no funds budgeted for a third early voting site. She said the Board of Commissioners can increase property taxes to bring in additional revenue.

Commissioner McCall reiterated her concern about the impact of the roundabout construction in Pisgah Forest and hoped that the Board of Elections would seriously consider how it would affect people traveling in and out of the County. Ms. Champion pointed out that the construction intersects the major highways coming into the County so had to believe that the NCDOT would ensure traffic flow even if it is not ideal.

Commissioner Chapman asked about the latest date the Board of Elections could decide on a third location to have the equipment in place in time. Elections Director Jeff Storey responded that the Board of Elections must submit its early voting plan to the State Board of Elections by the end of July and that they would need to have equipment in place by September.

Chairman Chappell expressed concerns about the traffic patterns with the upcoming roundabout construction and the impact it could have on elections and travel in and out of the county in general. He also understood the challenge of comparing presidential election data especially when the last one fell during the pandemic. Chairman Chappell pointed out that the Board of Commissioners does not have the authority to demand the Board of Elections open a certain number of early voting sites.

Commissioner Chapman challenged both party chairs to determine if they could staff a third early voting site.

There was no further discussion.

OLD BUSINESS

CANCEL ZITEL GREAT GRANT CONTRACT

The State of North Carolina awarded Zitel a federal GREAT grant in FY 2023 to serve eight counties, including Transylvania County. Deputy Secretary of the NC Department of Information Technology, Nate Denny, recently notified Transylvania County that Zitel is not going to proceed with projects in those eight counties. The contract was a three-party agreement between Zitel, NCDIT, and Transylvania County. The State and Zitel have agreed to cancel the contract and requested confirmation that Transylvania County will do the same. NCDIT is already working with the County's Information Technology Department on opportunities to retain as much of the funding in the County as possible. They will work with NCDIT to review the service maps and determine if there are logical ways to reassign the funds to local providers. The Manager stated that NCDIT understands the significant impact the loss of this contract will have on the eight counties, and they intend to do their best to make the counties whole.

Commissioner McCall moved to cancel the Zitel GREAT Grant Contract Agreement and authorize staff to work with NCDIT on opportunities to reassign any grant funds possible, seconded by Commissioner Dalton and unanimously approved.

NEW BUSINESS

SHERIFF'S REQUEST TO APPROPRIATE FUNDS FOR TRANSPORT VEHICLE FROM EXCESS SHERIFF'S OFFICE TUITION ASSISTANCE RESERVE

In 2016, the Board of Commissioners agreed to approve a Sheriff's Office Tuition Assistance Policy and to dedicate jail commissary revenue after associated expenses to fund the program. The calculation to establish the fund balance number for the reserve is done at the end of each audit. At times, the balance has grown beyond the demand for tuition assistance and the Sheriff has requested to use excess funds for capital needs. The balance for FY 2023 year-end is still to be determined but will at least be \$115,851.

The Sheriff's Office is responsible for transporting inmates for several reasons to other facilities or to attend court. The transport van most recently in use was a 2005 van that broke down and had to be towed back to the county. The cost to fix the van was estimated at \$10,000 which was more than it was worth. At the same time, transport vans that met the needed specifications were challenging to find so the transport officers have been using another Sheriff's vehicle to make transports in the interim.

The Sheriff's Office has located a van that is available now with a purchasing contract price of \$83,500. The Sheriff requested the Board of Commissioners allow him to use excess funds in the reserve to fund the purchase. The reserve had \$92,556 at the end of FY 2022 so the projected FY 2023 balance (confirmed through April 2023) is sufficient to cover the purchase while still retaining a balance for tuition reimbursement requests.

Commissioner McCall asked if there would be additional costs for upfitting the van to use it for inmate transport. The Manager responded that she has not received any further information but if the upfit costs are not able to be absorbed into the current year's budget, a request for additional funds will be brought back before the Board for approval.

Chairman Chappell commented that the Board of Commissioners agreed on the flexibility of the fund despite its name as a tuition assistance fund to ensure there are monies available to meet the needs of the Sheriff's Office.

Commissioner McCall moved to approve the Sheriff's request and amend the budget to utilize the Sheriff's Office Tuition Assistance Reserve Funds to purchase a transport van, seconded by Commissioner Casciato and unanimously approved.

SCHOOL PROJECTS BUDGET AMENDMENT & PROJECT LIST UPDATES

The Manager reported that the education capital fund includes the project budgets for specific projects requested by the Board of Education and approved by the Board of Commissioners. Both parties must authorize any amendments to officially approve modifying the project budgets and the funding allocations. The approval process has been in place since the Board of Commissioners began appropriating capital funds by project.

In the fall of 2023, Transylvania County School staff provided invoices and requested reimbursement for approved projects. As part of that reimbursement, the School Finance Director requested to reallocate the savings on completed projects to other approved project budgets. This was during the transition of staff and the budget amendment approval was not brought forward immediately and thus is being requested at this meeting. This set of debits and credits total \$314,579.66.

Recently, the School Finance Director submitted another set of invoices for reimbursement and requested to remove a total of \$1,015,788.90 of approved project funds primarily from the TC Henderson Elementary School (TCHES) air handlers and chillers project and the Rosman High School (RHS) air handlers to the Brevard Elementary School air handlers and Brevard Middle School (BMS) air handlers and boilers. These requests would zero out the TCHES and RHS projects to reflect them as canceled. In the staff, chair, and vice chair meeting of the two boards, the Finance Director confirmed that the Board of Education has not approved the requested project budget changes. While the Commissioners could approve the reallocation of funds per this latest request, County staff are concerned that the Board of Education should approve requests, particularly if it means canceling projects. Therefore, the staff is not requesting approval at this meeting, only the \$314,759.66 that was moved between the closed projects. Additionally, County staff have reviewed the submittals and identified an invoice that was reimbursed twice that will need to be withheld from the next payment to correct the error.

The Manager recommended the Board of Commissioners ask for clarification of project documentation regarding the second request, as follows:

- The documentation for reimbursement reflects construction contracts for Brevard Elementary and Brevard Middle School that were signed on May 1, 2023, for a total of \$3.37 million that have not yet been shared.
- The FY 24 budget capital list does not list the \$3.37 million in projects at these sites. Documentation about the project budgets that allocated funds to these projects and revenue sources should be included. The funds in the education capital fund for these sites do not match these project figures.

The County's auditor has indicated the need to make sure that proper documentation is being shared on capital projects since the funding originates with the County with the schools as a subrecipient. Documentation will ensure proper contracting, purchasing, and fiscal controls under state statutes, including N.C.G.S. § 115C-441 (c1), N.C.G.S. § 143-129 and N.C.G.S. § 143-131 and public record laws.

Additionally, there was an article in the local newspaper regarding NC Pre-K operating annually in a deficit which is news to County staff. Budget submittals to the County indicate that Pre-K is budgeted within Fund 8: Restricted Grants and that Fund 8 shows as being balanced. The County does not provide the funding for Fund 8. State law requires that funds be balanced by the end of the fiscal year. The Manager pointed out that the FY 2024 Transylvania County Schools budget did not show funding for NC Pre-K coming from

Fund 2, which is the current expense (operational funds) budget funded by the County. The Manager stated that the budget documents are balanced but school staff reported otherwise, which raises the question about where the funding is coming from to make up the deficit by the end of the year.

The Manager recommended the Board of Commissioners request in writing additional information and documentation from the Board of Education, including the following:

- All scopes of work, contracts, assessments, or other capital documents for projects that have been active within the last year. These will be forwarded to Axias in the event it changes any assessment information. The issue is that County staff were only able to share with Axias the information on hand. The County did not know about the BMS and BES projects, so it will be important to make sure they are considered by Axias so they can make any necessary changes to the project list.
- Copies of the Brevard Middle School and Brevard Elementary School HVAC project files including contracts, bid documentation, documentation showing approval of the project funding, documentation showing approval of the contracts, and any presentation materials about those projects.
- Copies of approval documentation for any funds used for or planned for HVAC improvements by funding source. There has been discussion at previous Board meetings when school personnel were present about ESSER funds and whether they are being used for HVAC improvements. County staff have some documentation on that, but it would be helpful to have information on the HVAC improvements by funding source so that the Board can match those up, particularly for a budget amendment request of this size.
- Explanation of the request to cancel the Rosman and TCHES projects and reallocate the funds to BMS and BES. This is a substantial change in programming for the fiscal year capital.
- Documentation of what funds have been appropriated to eliminate a deficit as reported in the newspaper in the preschool program since the School System started offering preschool for NC Pre-K and private pay. Some of the funds could be related to ESSER funds but County staff is unsure at this time.

The Manager stated that the Commissioners and staff need this information to ascertain the proposed budget amendment and satisfy the auditor that the County has followed up and understands the School System's capital projects.

The Manager recommended the Board of Commissioners approve amending the education capital project budgets in the education capital fund by transferring savings from completed projects to other approved project budgets as requested by Transylvania County Schools. She also recommended approval of a letter requesting the information she outlined.

The Manager noted that under the capital amendment list, some air handlers were appropriated in FY 2021 and FY 2023 for Brevard Elementary School and air handling and boiler systems for Brevard Middle School in FY 2022 and FY 2023, but those budget amounts do not match the contract that the Board of Education signed in May 2023, so having documentation will help staff verify the information and then present a better recommendation to the Board of Commissioners on the requested budget amendments.

Commissioner Chapman asked if had been practice for the Board of Education not to approve a budget amendment of this magnitude before asking the Board of Commissioners for approval. The Manager stated this was the first time that she was aware that the Board of Education had not approved a budget amendment before it came to the Board of Commissioners for approval. She said that amendments to the budget normally follow the same approval process as the budget so that both Boards are aware of where project funds are being moved to and from.

Commissioner McCall pointed out that the Board of Commissioners approved the funding for the air handlers in FY 2021 and FY 2023 and the School System is just now seeking reimbursement. The Manager confirmed her statement and noted that the County has received invoices for the reimbursement process, but the air handlers are also part of the second budget amendment request.

Commissioner McCall inquired about the funding source for the contract the Board of Education signed in May 2023 for \$2.3 million. The Manager said the County does not have definitive information on this contract, so her recommendation includes an explanation of the projects under this contract as well as the funding source.

The Manager pointed out that the County does not receive copies of contracts for each of the School System's projects, but general statutes require County Commissioner approval of their multi-year contracts. The reason for this law is that school systems cannot raise revenue, so they seek commitment from the local governing body to provide future year funding.

Commissioner McCall was stunned that the School System used 42% of the \$11 million they received in ESSER funds for salaries which they were advised against doing so. She pointed out that only 20% of ESSER funds were spent on HVAC improvements which was an allowed usage. She agreed with the Manager's recommendation to request documentation and further explanation, particularly if the County's auditor is requesting the information.

Chairman Chappell emphasized that the County's auditors require the documentation outlined in the Manager's recommendation. The auditors are performing their statutory responsibilities and following generally approved accounting principles and guidance, so getting the information from the School System is essential. Chairman Chappell was concerned about the magnitude of the dollars the School System is requesting to reassign, especially when he hears year after year that the schools have leaky roofs and mold. The Board of Commissioners has allocated the funds as early as FY 2021 to fix these issues. He understood that the Board of Education's priorities may change or that projects may fall behind, but he was concerned about shifting over \$1 million from projects that were previously listed as a need. He felt that the reason the auditors are seeking additional information too is that the School System has caused confusion by shifting and canceling projects that were previously approved.

The Manager said the Chairman's statements are an accurate depiction. She pointed out that the second budget amendment request has received a lot of attention because of the magnitude of the dollars involved. In addition, one of the requests for reimbursement involved a contract that the County was unaware of, and the projects were not listed on the capital sheets, so this raises questions about their project list and funding sources.

Commissioner McCall pointed out that the Board of Education has only requested funding for a roof replacement and the Board of Commissioners immediately approved the \$400,000 request. She shared that a member of the Board of Education told her they did not want to waste money on buildings they intended to tear down. Commissioner McCall said the Board of Education's failure to act has caused the condition of the buildings to fall into disrepair.

Commissioner McCall shared her concerns about the Board of Education running a deficit in its Pre-K program and yet they want to expand it without having the space or staffing. She was also concerned about how the deficit was being absorbed into their budget. She requested information from staff regarding how much money for capital the Board of Commissioners has allocated to the School System that has yet to be spent on fixing the schools.

Commissioner Chapman inquired about the County managing the School System's major capital projects because they are not getting done. He said if the Board of Commissioners is going to be blamed for the work not getting done, then the County should have the authority to manage the projects.

Commissioner Casciato stated that leaking roofs and mold are unacceptable, and someone is being negligent in their duties to ensure the schools are safe and in good condition. He said school buildings will last if they are maintained properly. He said he was tired of the Board of Commissioners constantly receiving the blame for not fixing the schools when the County was doing its job by providing the necessary funding.

Commissioner Dalton shared that the State's Superintendent of Public Instruction is lobbying to add the Pre-K numbers to the ADM numbers. If they are successful, Transylvania County Schools could lose \$1.5 million in small school funding, in addition to already operating at a deficit.

Commissioner McCall pointed out, according to the Board of Education's budget discussion, that they also used small school funding on salaries.

Chairman Chappell expressed concerns with how the School System is making up the deficit in their Pre-K program based on the budget documents the Board of Education shares with the County. He emphasized the County's statutory responsibility is to fund K-12. In theory, NC Pre-K is supposed to be self-funded or funded by the State. There will be more discussion on this topic at the next meeting when Superintendent Dr. Lisa Fletcher presents the Board of Education's budget request.

Commissioner Dalton moved to approve amending the education capital project budgets in the education capital fund by transferring savings from completed projects to other approved project budgets as requested by Transylvania County Schools and to officially request the documentation for all the projects as presented by the Manager, seconded by Commissioner Chapman.

Commissioner McCall asked to go on record as stating that she would not vote to approve the School System's budget until the Commissioners receive all the information requested. For clarification, the Manager stated that this motion does not approve the second budget amendment request. The request for additional information will go to the Board of Education in a letter following this meeting. **The motion was unanimously approved.**

Chairman Chappell stated that moving forward, the Board of Commissioners will not consider any budget amendments from the School System unless they have first been approved by the Board of Education.

MANAGER'S REPORT

The Manager reported the following:

- The runoff/second primary election for the Lt. Governor's race and possibly one other office is scheduled for May 14
 - Early voting is to begin in mid-April at the Election Center
 - Runoff elections normally have a low voter turnout
 - Election staff will not be able to process any new voter registrations until after the second primary
- The new Landfill cell is on track to be bid out this summer with construction to begin in the fall. The current cell has two years of life remaining.
- The Board of Commissioners is seeking to appoint a person to serve on the Board of Delegates to the Land of Sky Regional Council to ensure representation of regional minority interests. The Land of Sky Regional Council is a multi-county, local government, planning, and development organization.

Interested individuals should prepare a summary stating why they are interested in serving and their qualifications and submit the information to the Clerk to the Board by March 31st.

- Kudos from Elections to Operations and IT for their support in helping to set up election day.
- Kudos to Sarah Tennyson in Public Health for being selected to present at the National Public Health Conference in 2024 in July in Detroit about the Region 1 Workforce Development Project being managed in our Health Department.
- The Health Department has free COVID-19 shots available through the end of March.
- The courthouse architect contract is under negotiation and should be coming back on the agenda soon.
- The Board of Education responded regarding the project list for Step 1 Investment. County staff will be working to schedule the next step with a charette to scope projects into packages and is already engaged with the financial planner to be ready for bond sale this fall.
- The Rosman-Brevard Water system interconnect project has received the erosion control permit and will be out for bid later this year.

Commissioner McCall asked for clarification that the list of projects the group will be reviewing for scoping purposes is the list of projects that was presented by Axias. The Manager confirmed but noted that the Board of Education has added projects to the list. She said the group would work within the charettes and then make a recommendation to the Board of Commissioners on the bond sale. She has been in consultation with the County's financial advisor on the next steps and shared that depending on the project scoping, there could be more than one bond sale.

Chairman Chappell asked the Manager to review the process for selling the bonds and explain why October is the target date. The Manager explained that selling bonds is similar to the process of taking out a loan in that it requires documentation to ensure the project will be completed and can be paid for. The process takes 90 days to get information in hand and it must be satisfactory to get to the bond sale process. The current timeline is for the group to establish the project packages by July 1. There would then be a 90-day window for the County to complete all the required processes for the bond sale. The County is on the Local Government Commission's calendar for its October meeting. The Manager stated that the charettes will be more efficient if the County has all the information in hand regarding projects that the School System has previously not shared information about.

Chairman Chappell asked if it would be a fair statement to say that the County cannot sell the bonds today, next month, the following month, and so on. The Manager responded yes, that is an accurate statement. Chairman Chappell stressed that the Manager has presented this information repeatedly and it has been posted on the County's website.

The Manager added there are opportunities to help save money by combining projects, like roofs and HVAC, so it is important that the group has the proper amount of time to meet and review projects and that there is no further delay.

Commissioner McCall asked the Manager to keep the Commissioners apprised of any delays.

Chairman Chappell shared with the Board that he has asked the Manager to provide an update on capital projects at least once per month.

Commissioner Chapman referred to the gentleman who spoke during public comment stating that the schools were about to fall in and asked for clarification that an engineer reviewed the structure of the buildings and ensured their safety and that the buildings were evaluated for mold. The Manager stated that a structural engineer assessed the beams in the cafeteria and the old gym and took core samples of the beams to assess

their stress level. The engineer reported the buildings are safe. She said there will be necessary maintenance which is reflected in the Axias report. In addition, while there were some recommendations to replace or repair moldy ceiling tiles, there were no areas identified as being concerning or toxic.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no comments from the public.

COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

Commissioner Chapman was frustrated by some citizens making accusations during public comment and then leaving before hearing the Manager and the Commissioners present the facts. He suggested the Board consider time after public comment for the Board to respond. Commissioner Chapman reported that he attended the Rural Center Conference in Raleigh last week. It was a great conference, and he encouraged the Commissioners to consider attending in the future.

Commissioner McCall also expressed her frustration with citizens making comments that are unfounded and untrue. She said the facts are available for the public to access on the County's website and during these public meetings. Commissioner McCall reiterated her concern about the Board of Education using one-time funding streams on recurring items, like salaries. She pointed out that the County advised against this, but they did it anyway. She did not support giving the School System a blank check with no accountability or transparency on how they spend the funds. She encouraged citizens to attend the Board of Education meetings and let them know that their lack of transparency is becoming known.

Chairman Chappell said that just because statements are made repeatedly full that are full of falsehoods and accusations, does not make them true. He emphasized Commissioner McCall's point that the facts are available to the public. He shared that someone recently made a statement that the Commissioners are now becoming serious about the schools because it is an election year. He encouraged the public to go online and read the years of minutes posted there that serve as a record of the Board's actions to fix the schools. Chairman Chappell was equally frustrated about accusations that he and the Board do not care about the schools, especially when he has a son in Transylvania County Schools, his wife is a teacher in Transylvania County Schools, and his daughter is attending NC State University to become a teacher. He pointed out that the Board and County staff have repeatedly requested information from the Board of Education and School System with little to no response and that the same issues remain although the Board of Commissioners has provided the funding.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, **Commissioner Chapman moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:37 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