

MINUTES
TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
June 26, 2013 – SPECIAL MEETING

The Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County met in special session on Wednesday, June 26, 2013 at 5:30 p.m. in the large courtroom of the Transylvania County Courthouse. The purpose of the meeting was to vote on the FY 2013-2014 Budget.

Commissioners present were Vice-Chairman Larry Chapman, Jason Chappell, Chairman Mike Hawkins, Daryle Hogsed and Page Lemel. Also present were County Manager Artie Wilson and Clerk to the Board Trisha Hogan.

Media: *The Transylvania Times* – Jeremiah Reed

There were approximately 25 people in the audience.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Mike Hawkins presiding called the meeting to order at 5:33 p.m.

WELCOME

Chairman Hawkins welcomed everyone to the meeting. He introduced the members of the Board of Commissioners and staff.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no comments from the public.

NEW BUSINESS

FY 2013-2014 BUDGET ORDINANCE

The Manager presented the FY 2013-2014 Budget Ordinance for approval by the Board. The Budget Ordinance indicates a total General Fund budget of \$44,499,235. The Budget Ordinance has been prepared according to the wishes of the Board of Commissioners. A public hearing was held on Monday, June 24, 2013.

Commissioner Lemel moved to approve the FY 2013-2014 Transylvania County Budget Ordinance. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Chappell.

Commissioner Hogsed first thanked staff for the work they do for the County. He stated that this budget takes \$2.5 million out of the hands of County residents and away from businesses. He does not believe Transylvania County has recovered from the recent economic recession. Requests by citizens for governmental and charitable assistance are at an all time high and many others are struggling from job loss and other unfortunate events that have affected their families. Commissioner Hogsed believes this tax increase is going to impact those people greatly, as well as small business owners, small families, and those living on fixed incomes. He also does not believe Commissioners can encourage economic growth in Transylvania County with a tax increase at this time. While the tax increase does accomplish things that need to be addressed, he feels they can be accomplished without a tax increase.

Commissioner Hogsed commented that Commissioners have been accused of allowing the County to become stagnant and of having no vision. However, in the six years since the last tax increase, he reminded everyone that the County has constructed a \$20 million Public Safety Facility, a small business incubator at Blue Ridge Community College, a new animal shelter, and a new Career and Technical Education Building at Rosman High School, renovated a new area for the Tax Offices and Register of Deeds and renovated the Courthouse to provide additional space for court-related functions, built a new sports complex in Rosman and a new park at Connestee Falls, and maintained school funding at one of the highest levels in the State. This has all been done over the last six years with no mission or vision statement, no strategic plan, and most importantly with no tax increase. Commissioner Hogsed believes Commissioners can still move the County forward without a tax increase. Furthermore, he believes the actions of this Board over the past six years by keeping taxes low for citizens and businesses have actually saved jobs.

Commissioner Hogsed also addressed some concerns he has with the school system. He said it has been stated that the school system's buildings have fallen into a state of disrepair because of the lack of funding from the County Commission. He took exception to those statements, pointing out that Transylvania County has been one of the highest counties in the State in terms of funding for education and in most years there has been an increase to education spending in this County.

Again, Commissioner Hogsed stated strongly that he believes Commissioners can move the County forward without a tax increase.

Commissioner Chappell said he has anguished over this budget, but he will not allow the school system to be gutted while he is on this Board. He believes education is one of the key economic engines in Transylvania County and having an excellent school system attracts people here. Commissioner Chappell also believes it is important for the County to invest in economic development. He agreed that a tax increase is going to affect everyone in the County but he will stand firm in his belief that the County must take care of its responsibilities, especially adequately funding the school system. He said there are things going on in the schools right now that are going to pay dividends for Transylvania County. Commissioner Chappell expressed support for a tax increase so the County does not fall further behind. While he shared the same concerns as Commissioner Hogsed, he believes the County needs to make these investments to take advantage of the opportunities that lie ahead.

Commissioner Chapman expressed concern about the increase in school system's budget and asked if the the Board of Education's budget request was so important why there was no recommendation from staff to enact a tax increase to pay for the Board of Education's entire request. Commissioner Chapman also expressed concern about how a tax increase will affect local businesses and businesses wanting to locate here. He agreed with Commissioner Hogsed that the County has done an excellent job over the last several years of accomplishing many things without a tax increase. He commended staff and previous Boards for this. Commissioner Chapman said he is against raising taxes in this state of the economy. While he understands there are needs, those needs must be prioritized because times are hard. He stated his concern about the majority of the budget being recurring expenses which the Board will have to deal with again next year.

Commissioner Chapman addressed the members of the Board of Education and school system in attendance and urged them to put more money in the classroom.

Commissioner Chapman stated that he will not support the budget for the reasons he stated; however, once the budget is voted upon, he said he will support the decisions of this Board.

Commissioner Lemel said this is a hard decision by Commissioners and she understands how it will affect all citizens; however, the conversation about this budget seems to be viewed as “them against us”. She said this should not be the case. Commissioners will be affected by this property tax increase too and County employees will be foregoing part of their merit raise to property taxes. Commissioner Lemel feels very strongly that the community is ready to move forward and the only way is to begin investing in the County in order to spur economic development and provide jobs for citizens. Raising taxes a modest amount is a step that will contribute to the Commissioners’ ability to invest in the County and bring in positive economic development that allows citizens to be part of a successful community. Commissioner Lemel said the County has been in the bottom 10th in the State in terms of the property tax rate and the County has done all it can do at this level, so now is the time to leap forward and do it together.

Chairman Hawkins views the budget as a step towards shoring up holes that exist, primarily in the operational structure of general government. While this budget does add more staff, he said it has to be done. In fact, he believes the County will still be understaffed in many areas after the budget is approved. Chairman Hawkins said the budget also acknowledges the importance of economic development initiatives by specifically designating significant resources.

Chairman Hawkins said the notion that the County cannot do these things because of the economic situation in the County isn’t as good as an upside down way of thinking. He said if there are people struggling in the County; it is the duty of the leadership to take action. He does not believe the County has been making the kind of investment and expenditures that would facilitate a positive economic environment. Surrounding counties are doing so and because of that, the County is going to have to work harder for a longer period of time just to catch up.

Chairman Hawkins stated that if there are not sufficient resources provided, the chances of failing are great. He believes this budget is a good starting point; therefore he expressed his support for the budget. He thanked staff, the members of the public, and Commissioners for doing what they think is right for Transylvania County.

The motion passed by a vote of 3 to 2, with Commissioners Chapman and Hogsed voting against.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no comments from the public.

COMMISSIONERS’ COMMENTS

There were no additional comments by Commissioners.

ADJOURNMENT

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

ATTEST:

Mike Hawkins, Chair
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

Trisha M. Hogan
Clerk to the Board