

**MINUTES**  
**TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**March 23, 2020 – REGULAR MEETING**

The Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County met in regular session on Monday, March 23, 2020 at 6:00 p.m. in Commissioners Chambers at the County Administration Building, located at 101 S. Broad Street, Brevard, NC.

Commissioners present were Will Cathey, Jason Chappell, David Guice, Chairman Mike Hawkins and Vice-Chairwoman Page Lemel. Also present were County Manager Jaime Laughter and Clerk to the Board Trisha Hogan. The County Attorney participated remotely.

Media: *The Transylvania Times* – Derek McKissock

There were nine people in attendance.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Mike Hawkins presiding declared a quorum was present and called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m.

**WELCOME**

Chairman Hawkins welcomed everyone to the meeting. He noted the format of the meeting has been modified to practice social distancing to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. He introduced Commissioners and staff in attendance.

**AGENDA MODIFICATIONS**

Commissioners requested to add two items to the agenda: 1) Impact of COVID-19: Resources and Support for Businesses and Displaced Workers and 2) Consideration of Letter to State and Federal Representatives/Partners Requesting Closure of National and State Forests/Parks. Staff requested to remove the sealed closed session minutes for February 24, 2020 under Consent Agenda.

**Commissioner Lemel moved to approve the agenda as modified, seconded by Commissioner Guice and unanimously approved.**

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Carole Deddy: Ms. Deddy submitted comments via email prior to the meeting and requested they be read into the record. Ms. Deddy requested Commissioners seek closure of State and national forests and parks to protect the health and safety of others. She feared our county would become medically stressed to handle the resident population and that additional visitors would likely infect others with the coronavirus, further stressing medical services. Ms. Deddy asked Commissioners to initiate these safety measures as soon as possible.

**CONSENT AGENDA**

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

The following items were approved:

MINUTES

The Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on June 24, 2019. The Board of Commissioners held a workshop on March 2, 2020 to discuss fire tax funding options. The Board approved the minutes as submitted.

DISCOVERY, RELEASE & MONTHLY SETTLEMENT REPORT

Per NC General Statute § 105-312 (b), it is the duty of the Tax Administrator to ensure 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 NC General Statute § 105-381 (b), it is the duty of the Tax Administrator to 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 2020, total tax dollars released was \$658.19 and refunds amounted to \$933.60. The Board approved the Discovery, Release and Monthly Settlement Report for February 2020.

PROCLAMATION MONTH OF THE YOUNG CHILD & CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

Transylvania County Children's Advocacy Center Director Susan Huter requested the Board of Commissioners proclaim the month of April 2020 as Month of the Young Child and 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 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.

Ms. Huter provided pinwheels and yard signs for each Commissioner and extra ones for the public. The pinwheels and yard signs are designed to bring attention to the issue of child abuse. The pinwheels serve as a concrete symbol for all to remember that children should be whimsical and fun, not living in fear of pain. Nor should children be taking on adult responsibilities. Commissioner Lemel felt this proclamation was timely given the stress and struggles families and children are experiencing during this time. The Board approved Proclamation #07-2020 Month of the Young Child and Child Abuse Prevention Month.

**Proclamation # 07-2020****Month of the Young Child and Child Abuse Prevention Month**

**Whereas**, in 1971 The Week of the Young Child™ was established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the world's largest early childhood education association; and

**Whereas**, the youth-serving agencies of Transylvania County come together to celebrate The Month of the Young Child during the month of April 2020 to focus public attention on needs of young children and their families and to recognize the early childhood programs and services that meet those needs; and

**Whereas**, youth-serving agencies of Transylvania County are collaborating to establish a countywide plan to prevent child abuse in our community; and

**Whereas**, we work to improve opportunities for our children knowing they are vital to our state's future success, prosperity and quality of life as well as being our most vulnerable assets; and

**Whereas**, all children deserve to have the safe, stable, nurturing homes and communities they need to foster their healthy growth and development; and

**Whereas**, child abuse and neglect are a community responsibility affecting both the current and future quality of life of a community; and

**Whereas**, communities that provide parents with the social support, knowledge of parenting and child development and concrete resources they need to cope with stress and nurture their children ensure all children grow to their full potential; and

**Whereas**, effective child abuse prevention strategies succeed because of partnerships created among citizens, human service agencies, schools, faith communities, health care providers, civic organizations, law enforcement agencies, and the business community;

**Therefore**, the Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County does hereby proclaim April as The Month of the Young Child and Child Abuse Prevention Month and calls upon all citizens, community agencies, faith groups, medical facilities, elected leaders and businesses to increase their participation in our efforts to support families, thereby supporting early childhood programs and preventing child abuse and strengthening the communities in which we live.

This the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of March, 2020.

S: //Mike Hawkins, Chair  
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

APPOINTMENT OF REVIEW OFFICERS FOR CITY OF BREVARD

NC General Statute § 47-30.2 requires that the Board of County Commissioners designate, by name, one or more persons experienced in mapping or land records management to be appointed as a Review Officer to certify that maps or plats presented to the Register of Deeds are in compliance with all statutory requirements needed for recording. The City's Planning Department has experienced turnover and job title changes. The resolution makes the necessary changes to the list of Review Officers on file for the City of Brevard. The Board approved Resolution #08-2020 Appointment of Review Officers for City of Brevard and instructed the Clerk to record the resolution with the Register of Deeds Office as required per statute.

**RESOLUTION #08-2020  
APPOINTMENT OF REVIEW OFFICERS FOR CITY OF BREVARD**

WHEREAS, Chapter 47-30.2 of the North Carolina General Statutes requires the Board of Commissioners of each county to designate by name one or more persons experienced in mapping or land records management to be appointed as a Review Officer to certify the maps or plats presented to the Register of Deeds as complying with all statutory requirements for recording; and

WHEREAS, the review of statutory requirements is of a technical nature; and

WHEREAS, one of the services that the City of Brevard staff provides to the community is a similar technical process for subdivision plat review in order to verify compliance with the City's development regulations; and

WHEREAS, the City of Brevard has demonstrated a commitment to streamlining the review procedures for proposed developments; and

WHEREAS, it appears most efficient for the City of Brevard to avoid adding another layer of development review by providing for the certification of statutory compliance for all maps or plats to be presented to the Register of Deeds for recording within the context of subdivision review procedures;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY:

Section 1. The addition of the following persons is recommended to be appointed by the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners to serve as a Review Officer for all lands within the municipal and extraterritorial jurisdiction of the City of Brevard in order to certify each map and plat presented to the Transylvania County Register of Deeds for recording satisfies the statutory requirements for recording.

| <u>NAME</u>        | <u>POSITION/TITLE</u>  |
|--------------------|--|
| Kaitland K. Finkle | Planner & Assistant Zoning Administrator, City of Brevard Planning Dept. |
| Leigh C. Huffman   | Planner & Assistant Zoning Administrator, City of Brevard Planning Dept. |

Section 2. The removal of the following person as Review Officer for the City of Brevard is recommended.

| <u>NAME</u>      | <u>POSITION/TITLE</u>  |
|------------------|--|
| Bryan Brightbill | Planner & Assistant Zoning Administrator, City of Brevard Planning Dept. |
| Daniel Cobb      | Director, City of Brevard Planning Dept.                                 |

Adopted and approved this the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of March, 2020.

S: //Mike Hawkins, Chair  
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

**PROCLAMATION – NATIONAL PUBLIC SAFETY TELECOMMUNICATORS WEEK**

April 12-18, 2020 is recognized as National Public Safety Telecommunications 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 very proud of all the Transylvania County 911 Communications Center's Tele-communicators and the vital service they provide to the citizens of Transylvania County and their fellow emergency services comrades. Chairman Hawkins read aloud the proclamation for the benefit of the Board and public. The Board approved Proclamation #09-2020 National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week.

**Proclamation #09-2020  
National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week  
April 12-18, 2020**

**Whereas**, emergencies can occur at any time that require law enforcement, fire, rescue squad or emergency medical services; and,

**Whereas**, when an emergency occurs the prompt response of law enforcement, firefighters, rescue squad members, and paramedics is critical to the protection of life and preservation of property; and,

**Whereas**, the safety of our law enforcement officers, rescue squad members, and firefighters is dependent upon the quality and accuracy of information obtained from citizens who telephone the Transylvania County emergency 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 law enforcement officers, rescue squad members, and firefighters by monitoring their activities by radio, providing them information and ensuring their safety; and,

**Whereas**, Public Safety Telecommunicators of the Transylvania County communications center 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;

**Therefore, Be It Resolved** that the Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County declares the week of April 12-18, 2020 to be National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week in Transylvania County in honor of the men and women whose diligence and professionalism keep our city and citizens safe.

Signed this 23<sup>rd</sup> day of March, 2020.

S: //Mike Hawkins, Chair  
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

## APPOINTMENTS

### COMMUNITY CHILD PROTECTION TEAM

Appointments to the Community Child Protection Team (CCPT) were delayed last June to allow staff time to fill vacancies and determine the appropriate placement of statutory positions. The Board of Commissioners has the responsibility of filling some, but not all the positions on the CCPT. Staff recommended the Board appoint the following members:

1. Erin Drew (Family Place) to replace Mae Clayton – Member at Large (1)
2. Mark Ellenberger (DV Investigator-Sheriff's Office) to replace Gale Mackey – Local Law Enforcement
3. Teesie Stanton – SAFE, Inc. of Transylvania County (3)
4. Sharon Cameron – CFPT Coordinator
5. Susan Huter – TC Children's Advocacy Center (2)

**Commissioner Cathey moved to appoint the members as recommended, seconded by Commissioner Guice.** Commissioner Lemel shared a request from the Department of Social Services (DSS) to enact term limits for the Board's appointees. The recommendation came about during their discussions on the functionality of the team. Many of the positions are statutory and not within the control of the Board. DSS recommended three-terms with two term limits for those positions that are within the Board's control to appoint. Commissioner Lemel recommended a staggered initial term for the following: Erin Drew – one year, Susan Huter – two-years, and Teesie Stanton – three years. Commissioner Cathey was concerned about being able to recruit volunteers if term limits are added. Commissioner Lemel pointed out this would be in line with nearly all the Board's other citizen advisory councils. **Commissioner Cathey moved to amend the motion to include the recommended term limits, seconded by Commissioner Guice and unanimously approved. The main motion was unanimously approved.**

Commissioner Guice asked why there were no term limits in place like the County's other citizen advisory councils. Commissioner Lemel explained the State gives a lot of leeway on how this committee operates at the community level. There is no specific mandate from the State on how these teams' function. For a while, there was a combined Community Child Protection Team and Child Fatality Prevention Team. The Health Department and Department of Social Services split the joint committee into two to improve their functions. In doing so, it caused a need to realign members. Because so many

of the committee members are dominated by statutory appointments, the community members were not being considered in terms of their effectiveness or participation. Some members had been serving on the committee for many years. To allow some more involvement and accountability, setting term limits seemed like a good option to align the membership and be more consistent with the County's policy on citizen advisory councils.

## OLD BUSINESS

### CORONAVIRUS/COVID-19 UPDATE FROM HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Public Health Director Elaine Russell presented an update to Commissioners on the health element of COVID-19. Following her presentation, the Manager gave an update on the activities being conducted throughout County government to implement and manage directives from the State.

#### *Coronavirus Disease: COVID-19 Briefing*

- This remains a rapidly evolving situation
- Recommendations and resources are changing rapidly
- Transition between travel-linked/lab-confirmed cases moving into a community-acquired dynamic

#### *About COVID-19*

- Mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms of:
  - Fever
  - Cough
  - Shortness of breath
- Spread person-to-person
  - Via air by coughing and sneezing
  - Close personal contact, including touching and shaking hands
  - Touching nose, mouth, or eyes before washing hands
  - May be possible to contract by touching surfaces with the virus on it, then touching nose, mouth, eyes, but not thought to be main way of spread
  - Stressed importance of social distancing and personal hygiene
- Greatest risk of severe illness for:
  - 65+ years of age
  - Living in a nursing home or long-term-care facility
  - Existing health issues:
    - Chronic lung disease, moderate to severe asthma
    - Heart disease with complications
    - Immunocompromised, including cancer treatment
    - Severe obesity or uncontrolled diabetes, renal failure, liver disease
- Monitor for possible higher risk for:
  - Pregnant women
- Severe illness:
  - Progression to pneumonia
    - Can require ventilator support
    - Concerned about surge capacity within hospitals across the nation
- Medication options:
  - All are in trial status or off-label use
  - An IV drug and two malaria drugs are being considered

#### *COVID-19 Lab-Confirmed Case Data (as of early today)*

- 367,457 cases globally in 168 of 195 countries\*
- 41,511 cases in the United States\*

- 297 cases in North Carolina in 45 counties\*\*
- 1 case in Transylvania County; community-acquired

#### *Testing Capacity*

- CDC and State Public Health labs maintain a very strict algorithm for testing
  - Health Department in possession of a few kits, but not a large capacity
- Commercial lab capacity through Lab Corp, Quest, and ARUP based on physician's order
  - Experiencing supply chain issues
- FDA-approved point-of-care testing by Cepheid GeneExpert Systems for deeper diagnoses on cases with more advanced symptoms
- Collaborations to provide community drive-through testing sites
  - Henderson County/Pardee Hospital encountered supply chain issues for lab kits and PPE
  - Not likely in Transylvania County based on supply chain issues and change in guidance for the community-acquired dynamic
- Testing access remains problematic nationwide

#### *NC is Preparing and Responding*

- Governor Cooper's Executive Order strategies minimize exposure and promotes social distancing
  - Limits gatherings to 50 people
  - Closure of public schools until at least May 15
  - Closure of restaurants/bars, except for carry-out, drive-through, or delivery until March 31
  - Additional entertainment facilities closed
  - Personal care and grooming businesses closed
  - No visitors to long-term care facilities and group homes
- Limiting exposure and honoring social distancing is one of the best strategies available to protect individuals and families

#### *Guidance for Healthcare Partners*

- NCDHHS transitioning into mitigation efforts as outbreak spreads into community-acquired cases
  - Community-acquired means the individual did not travel to a "hot zone" of transmission, nor have they had contact with someone who was a lab-confirmed case
  - Infected by being out in the community in the daily flow of their routine
- Impacts guidance and resource management so it is important to manage crisis as a team
  - Emergency Medical Services (EMS)
  - Hospitals, clinics, and urgent cares
  - Healthcare providers
  - Laboratories
  - Public Health Department

#### *Local Agency Response*

- Daily communication between lead agencies
- Active monitoring by Public Health Epi Team
- Resource analysis and planning to respond to current situation and future needs in the worst-case scenario
- Community partner collaboration
- Daily messaging of accurate data and factual situational information

#### *Prevention for Everyone*

- Wash all surfaces of the hands often and thoroughly using soap and running water for 20 seconds
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands

- Avoid close contact with people who are ill
- Cover mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces with EPA-approved cleaning solutions
- Practice social distancing; avoid non-essential travel; stay home as much as possible; limit group sizes; maintain six feet distance from other people
- Be conscientious of exposing older adults and those with compromised health to any illness
- It is not recommended that people wear masks if they are well; PPE resources need to be conserved for medical providers and those that are truly sick

#### *Prevention for High-Risk Populations*

- Those at higher risk for severe illness are older adults and those with serious underlying medical conditions
- NCDHHS recommends that people at high risk of severe illness from COVID-19 stay at home to the extent possible to decrease the chance of infection

The Manager presented information on the structural elements of this situation. She pointed out that none of the professionals working across the State has ever experienced anything quite like COVID-19 or the nationwide response to combat it.

#### *North Carolina Structure*

- Dillon's Rule
  - Counties are extensions of the State
  - Counties are expected to align with guidance from State mandates
- Policies being developed at State level with unified command between State Emergency Management and NC Department of Health and Human Services
  - Healthcare professionals are helping to guide policy which affects policies throughout all County services, as well as community-wide amenities/services with the goal of minimizing contact to slow the spread of COVID-19 and to protect the ability of the healthcare system to handle the number of patients seeking care
- Local authority operates under State law parameters
- Requires all-hands on deck from our public employees; the community needs us now more than ever; local government provides critical services that require public employees to be ready to serve in the office

#### *Current State of Emergency*

- Establishes command structure
- Includes the Town and City in the effort
- Facilitates coordination of Emergency Services to meet a variety of logistical needs that the County is beginning to identify in conjunction with the State
- Working in tandem with Public Health; in a pandemic it is critical that Emergency Management and Public Health are working together
- Daily communication with State Public Health and State Emergency Management staff
- Core Team
  - Many challenging decisions forthcoming
  - Unified effort with over 200 years of collective years of experience
  - Team must communicate on a regular basis and cover different functions
    - Elaine Russell, Public Health Director
    - Jaime Laughter, County Manager
    - David Mahoney, Sheriff
    - David McNeill, Assistant County Manager
    - Kevin Shook, Emergency Management Director

- Cameron Sexton, Communications Manager

### *Strategic Activities*

- Altered EMS dispatch protocols
- Restricted access to Public Safety Facility, Library, Parks and Recreation
- Encouraging online and call-in services where possible; State relieving some restrictions on the requirements involving local government services, such as building code inspections (conduct virtually or with pictures; social services being provided over the phone)
- Library curbside service; DSS popup in Balsam Grove community
  - Effort to continue public service
- Evaluating positions to keep critical services (mandated) operating under State guidance
  - Guidance from the State named DSS, Public Health, Building Permitting, and day care as critical services
- Authorizing telework only when the work can be done and justified for the pay
- Evaluating staggered work schedules; State is keeping some of their software systems open longer to accommodate staggered work schedules
- Repurposing staff from noncritical areas to meet needs
  - 86% of County budget is to meet mandated services
  - Need for childcare for critical care workers (EMS, Healthcare, Law Enforcement, etc.); County providing childcare for K-12 students due to school closures
- Partnering with WCCA to deliver meals to Lunch Plus clients; using transit drivers to ensure elderly receives meals
- Coordinating nonprofits, faith leaders and community organizations on community response efforts; asking them to help the County identify needs and assist where they can to ensure access to local resources for local response
- Daily updates on social media and website (Transylvania County Unified Community Response) which include updates from County government and community-based information
- Working on collecting PPE supplies and will likely coordinate a local drive to collect additional resources; supply issues across the country
- Working on logistical support for Transylvania Regional Hospital with CEO Michele Pilon to understand their capacity and determine other resources
- Working with federal and State leaders as issues are identified
  - Last week issues raised with federal and State parks resulting in partial closures
  - Dupont State Recreational Forest will close tomorrow at 10am; Gorges State Park is closing facilities but leaving parking lots and trails open at this time; designated camp sites on federal property have been closed

### *State Coordination*

- Calls with NCDHHS, Speaker of the House Tim Moore, Governor Cooper, NCACC, State representatives regarding:
  - Funding support
  - Easing some mandates
  - Developing policy in real time
- State Legislative Working Groups convening on Health Care, Economic Support, Education and Continuity of State Operations
- Concern over how delay in sales tax disbursement will impact the availability of County revenues needed to meet the State mandates

The Manager's presentation provided an overview on how the County has changed some of its operations to meet the response. The issue is very complicated, but necessary to prepare for the impacts of COVID-19. The challenge is dealing with so many unknowns. The Manager stated if the community fails to plan well, it will be known. If the community plans well, the public impacts will be minimized. The Manager

reported that staff is not only working through issues related to how COVID-19 might affect the community, but also thinking through the issues related to employees out of the workforce. It may take several months to recover economically, and the ultimate impact is unknown. Staff and others are trying to put thought into the services citizens are going to need once the fear of community spread has subsided and the public has moved back to normal life. The DSS popup idea was generated through this work and gave DSS an opportunity to collaborate with a community partner in Balsam Grove to provide information about financial resources. She expects there to be additional opportunities in the future where the County can help play a critical role in collaboration to reach those in the community who have needs.

The Manager and Chairman called for questions and comments about staffs' response efforts.

Commissioner Cathey asked if the Manager was in receipt of a letter from the Department of Social Services dated today. The Manager confirmed she received the letter and it was shared with the entire Board via email this afternoon. She shared that DSS workers have requested to work staggered schedules and/or telework. Last week, the DSS Director was given the authority to stagger schedules which is in line with State guidance. The State opened its software programs for extended hours to accommodate longer workdays due to staggered schedules and to ensure DSS workers are practicing safe distance. A clarification today in the Governor's Executive Order directs local government, specifically Departments of Social Services to continue operations. The Manager pointed out she met with the Human Resources Director to talk about the staggered schedules and the potential need for weekend coverage. They will be working with the DSS Director to establish those schedules which should meet the health concerns noted in the letter. She pointed out that DSS workers are needed now more than ever.

Commissioner Lemel said her takeaway from the presentation is the primacy of local government and Public Health in navigating this situation. Dealing with a pandemic is very different from normal medical service provision. She asked for clarity to help citizens understand the differences. The Manager stated that Emergency Management and Public Health are both responsibilities of local government. Citizens do not often see the work that they do so there tends to be a lack of understanding about those specialties. Public Health is the key player in a pandemic. Public Health officials are trained experts and they are critical in helping to inform policy at the local and State level. NCDHHS is currently collocated with EOC and they anticipate that Public Health and Emergency Management are working together so the State is communicating with both local agencies simultaneously. Transylvania County is fortunate to have a team in place with collective experience to facilitate the planning process.

Commissioner Guice inquired about the working relationship between Public Health and Transylvania Regional Hospital. The Manager stated she is briefed regularly on discussions between Public Health and Emergency Management. Today the team met with Michele Pilon, CEO of Transylvania Regional Hospital (TRH) to discuss the hospital's surge capacity. It is important that Public Health and Emergency Management work together to determine where gaps exist and help support with critical infrastructure. The County and TRH agreed to communicate regularly so there is an understanding of the available resources since TRH will be responsible for providing critical care in the community. Although TRH is a private entity over which the County has no control, the lines of communication are open. Ms. Russell concurred with the Manager's comments and noted they have a very close working relationship. The Epi Team routinely communicates with the Infection Control Division at TRH and the main facility in Asheville. Those relationships and rapport have long been established, but now they are looking at more complex issues around surge capacity and how they would serve the critical emerging needs of the elderly population.

Commissioner Guice asked about TRH's capacity and whether there was room to expand the capacity if needed. He also asked how many citizens are being served by the hospital today for normal health issues. Ms. Russell shared information provided by Ms. Pilon on the TRH's surge plan:

- If TRH can secure physical beds and equipment, TRH will have capacity for 59 inpatients, an increase of 29 patients from current capacity; will include 47 med/surg beds, nine ICU beds, and three step-down beds
- Currently have two stationary ventilators and one travel ventilator; expecting two additional ventilators
- If needed, additional ER Triage could occur in two vacant spaces on campus, as well as in a tent if necessary
- If needed, will utilize current ER for infectious patients and overflow additional patients to the outpatient area allowing for 16 regular beds, three isolation beds (two are negative pressure), and two critical care beds
- Increased capacity available at all the Mission Health System hospitals if needed

Commissioner Guice requested a copy of the presentations that were given today by staff on this issue. If possible, he would like for the presentations to be included in the Board's agenda packet for study prior to the meeting, understanding that the presentation is often put together quickly before the meeting. Staff will provide the information to the entire Board following this meeting. The Manager noted the COVID-19 situation is very fluid and staff was making updates to the presentation with new data minutes before the meeting began.

Commissioner Cathey asked if there had been communication with the commandant of the NC National Guard for the purpose of securing supplies. The Sheriff replied no. The Manager pointed out that the County has access through Emergency Management to statewide resources. Staff has been attentive to what resources are available and are trying to secure PPE. The challenge the County is facing now is that everyone needs supplies.

Commissioner Guice asked for confirmation that the President had indicated the federal government would pay for the activation of the National Guard if necessary. The Manager reported the federal government indicated they would take on the responsibility for activating the National Guard. As of now, the NC National Guard has not been activated, but they are providing small-scale logistical support where needed.

Commissioner Guice asked if the County has adequate supplies and essential equipment on-hand or if there was a need for additional supplies. The Manager reported that the County is deficient in its number of supplies and equipment. The County is trying to conserve available resources knowing they will be critical in the days and weeks ahead. Staff has changed some of its protocols and has been working with the Sheriff to ensure law enforcement officers have proper PPE when they must serve on joint calls with EMS. The State has recommended that DSS workers use PPE, but the State dictated they can also operate using social distancing. The County is navigating the issue currently by social distancing. If the County were to adhere strictly to State guidelines, many more employees would need to be using PPE. Staff is actively pursuing PPE and equipment from the State and working to acquire the same from other resources. Staff is considering a community drive (to get donated supplies from contractors, dentist offices, etc.) which has been successful in other counties. The Health Department coordinated a mask-sewing effort based on CDC recommendations. Disposal PPE is ideal but having handmade masks on-hand can serve as critical backup PPE.

The Manager encouraged the public to view the COVID-19 updates on the website that are being posted almost daily. Much of the information presented to the Board during this meeting is found in those reports as well.

Chairman Hawkins pointed out that Ms. Russell's presentation emphasized social distancing with the goal of trying to limit the spread of the virus. She also commented on surge management to ensure there are enough medical facilities and supplies. The measures that have been implemented on the national and

State level are creating great disruption in people's lives and causing financial hardship. He asked the team if they support the measures that are being taken. Ms. Russell supported the measures in place around social distancing and scaling back business and system operations for the foreseeable future under the Governor's Executive Order. She believes these measures are necessary to preserve and protect current capacity and the medical systems to stagger the flow of elders who may be significantly impacted by COVID-19.

Chairman Hawkins pointed out that County Commissioners are scheduled to meet again in three weeks. There could be a reason to hold a special meeting prior to then. He asked staff if there were any compelling reasons to take further action regarding the County's State of Emergency Declaration due to information coming from the national and State government. Ms. Russell stated it is critical that the County monitors the emerging number of community-acquired cases over the next week to determine if further protective measures are needed. The Manager advised Commissioners that federal law has been passed with regards to COVID-19 and employment and could require an emergency meeting in order to be compliant with those policies. There are several unanswered questions about the new law and how it impacts County and State government, specifically because of the ongoing critical services provided by government versus the language in the bill. The UNC School of Government has been assisting local governments with navigating through states of emergency, employment law, and the new law. One issue is that the new law does not fully define positions such as emergency responders.

Commissioner Guice was very concerned about the impact to the local business community. He was also concerned about social distancing recommendations that closed many businesses, while other businesses like grocery stores remain open. He did not advocate for grocery stores to be closed, but he said if the virus continues to spread it will result in possible loss of life. He felt it was equally important to send the correct message and not send mixed signals to the business community. In a recent conference call with Speaker of the House Tim Moore, he emphasized several measures local governments can enact to reduce the burden on citizens and business owners. He advocated for the Board to be more active and responsive to local business leaders and provide resources where they can receive assistance and help others if they are able.

Commissioner Lemel reported that last week several small business owners expressed some of the same concerns. The Transylvania Economic Alliance assembled a group to include the Heart of Brevard, Chamber of Commerce, etc. to determine how to support businesses during these times. Additionally, Brevard City Councilwomen Maureen Copelof and Geraldine Dinkins started looking at ways to publicize needs and requests. The camp industry is also united in their effort to survive the year so they can continue in the future. The joy of being in a small community is the investment we have in each other.

Commissioner Chappell added that the Land of Sky is hosting weekly electronic meetings with workforce partners and compiling a clearinghouse of resources that are available to assist businesses. Tomorrow Commissioner Chappell will be presenting via webinar on unemployment information for Henderson County's Partnership. He said he would be happy to do the same for Transylvania County. There are many different groups pulling employers together to determine available resources based on the needs.

Commissioner Cathey asked Sheriff Mahoney to examine the procedures for calling up the State Militia. He felt it was necessary to have those in place. Sheriff Mahoney reported this office has several contingencies in place to do what needs to be done within and around the County.

Commissioner Guice thanked Commissioner Chappell for the Land of Sky update. He felt that Commissioners needed to be armed with as much information as possible so they can respond to inquiries from the public and business leaders. He was very concerned for the business community and their employees. He stated that times like these will challenge the fiber of the community so how the local government responds is critical.

Chairman Hawkins thanked staff for the work they are doing and the work they are going to continue to do.

## NEW BUSINESS

### REQUEST TO INCREASE COUNTY MANAGER'S EMERGENCY APPROPRIATION AUTHORITY

Transylvania County's Budget Ordinance grants the County Manager certain powers to modify the County Budget without the approval of the Board of Commissioners. Those powers are as follows:

1. The Manager may transfer up to \$10,000 between departments of the County within the general fund
2. The Manager may increase the revenues and expenditures within the general fund up to \$5,000
3. The Manager may approve emergency appropriations of up to \$10,000

With the complexity of the COVID-19 infectious disease outbreak and potential for significant cost escalation and overruns across all facets of County government, it was requested that the Board allow the Manager to make modifications to the Budget Ordinance without limit for a period of 90 days. At the end of that period, a full report of all anticipated revenues and authorized appropriations will be presented to the Board of Commissioners for review.

The recommendation was to waive the dollar amount the Manager is authorized to appropriate for a period of 90 days and instruct the Manager to provide immediate reports of spending in writing to the Board.

Chairman Hawkins asked Commissioners if they were comfortable setting the amount as unlimited or whether they preferred to cap the amount. Commissioner Cathey preferred to cap the spending amount. Commissioner Guice stated while these are unprecedented times, he was also concerned about authorizing an unlimited amount of spending capacity. He expressed that he trusted the Manager, but he felt the budget is a responsibility of the Board. If conditions worsen, the Board may be forced to reallocate dollars to a designated fund to address the potential actions that must be taken. Commissioner Chappell stated he asked for this item to be on the agenda for consideration, not the Manager, because he wants to ensure that if a need arises the Manager is able to respond accordingly and quickly. He understands that the Board can call a special meeting to address immediate issues, but he noted that even with special meetings, there is a delay because of the 48-hour notice requirement. He was okay with capping the amount, but asked Commissioners to set the cap at a level in which the Manager can use funds quickly to address an immediate need. Commissioner Lemel suggested a cap of \$50,000. Chairman Hawkins emphasized Commissioner Chappell's point that this request did not come from staff. Commissioner Lemel pointed out the provision would sunset after 90 days.

**Commissioner Lemel moved to raise the dollar amount the Manager is authorized to appropriate for a period of 90 days to a maximum of \$50,000 and to instruct the Manager to provide immediate reports of spending in writing to the Board, seconded by Commissioner Cathey. To clarify, Commissioner Lemel stated her intent is to authorize \$50,000 per transaction. The motion was unanimously approved.**

### IMPACT OF COVID-19: RESOURCES AND SUPPORT FOR BUSINESSES AND DISPLACED WORKERS

Chairman Hawkins invited Transylvania Economic Alliance Executive Director Josh Hallingse to speak during this meeting to provide an overview on the impacts to businesses and the resources available to help them.

Mr. Hallingse spoke on behalf of a newly created task force that was formed last week in partnership with other business organizations, namely the Heart of Brevard, Brevard/Transylvania Chamber of Commerce,

Blue Ridge Community College's Small Business Center and Transylvania Economic Alliance. The task force formed mainly because they were getting questions from the business community that they did not have the answers to. The task force is trying to understand the available resources and distribute that information out to the business community. Mr. Hallingse highlighted some of the task force's activities:

- Launched a COVID-19 Business Resource Guide
  - All four organizations compiled the best available information to them regarding this crisis
  - Excellent place to start if anyone has questions or seeking a place that captures business-specific information
  - Guide can be found on the Chamber and Alliance websites and is updated daily
- Chamber converted their Transylvania True webpage, which is a "support all things local" initiative, to contain information on adjusted business schedules, special offerings, how to help local businesses, community resources, and more
  - Information is updated daily
- Task force members send regular emails to their audiences with shared information to highlight key updates
- Created and distributed a business survey in which business owners were asked to report impacts to their operations and the steps they are taking to mitigate the impacts
  - While most businesses are feeling the impact, the severity varies greatly based on the sector
  - The impact and perspectives are changing daily
- Blue Ridge Community College Small Business Center will hold two free webinars
  - Wednesday, March 25, 2pm-3pm; panel discussion including experts in homeland security, health science and supply chain to discuss how businesses can prepare
  - Thursday, March 26, 9:30am-10:30am; on best practices for communicating with customers and employees

The business survey wrapped up today. Mr. Hallingse relayed some of the broad points from the survey responses. The task force is still reviewing the responses from the open-ended questions and the feedback given in order to prepare their next steps.

### **COVID -19 Business Impact Survey (120+ survey responses through 3/23)**

#### **Type of Business**

- 13% Retail
- 13% Food & Beverage
- 9% Professional Services
- 8% Accommodations
- 7% Manufacturing
- 6% Arts/Entertainment
- 6% Attractions/Recreation/Tourism
- 6% Healthcare
- 5% Real Estate
- 4% Construction

#### **Size of Business**

- 60%: 1-5 employees
- 11%: 6-10 employees
- 10%: 11-20 employees

- 12%: 21-50 employees
- 2%: 51-100
- 5%: 100+

#### **How has Business Responded to COVID-19?**

- 25% Have not had to adjust hours or services at this time
- 17% Offering limited services (takeout vs dine-in)
- 16% Offering employees' opportunities for remote work
- 15% Temporarily closed
- 11% Continued operations but adjusted hours
- 6% Employee furlough, reduced hours
- 4% Special offers (gift cards, discounts)

#### **What resources would be beneficial (top 3 answers)?**

- Assistance for impacted employees
- Marketing & business development alternatives
- Business & financial planning services

#### **Rank the challenges you are experiencing or foresee experiencing?**

1. Stress management - 77%
2. Productivity issues - 68%
3. Fringe benefit management - 67%
4. Basic needs for employees - 67%
5. Information technology - 66%
6. Childcare - 65%

#### **What steps is your business taking to implement social distancing?**

- Increase use of sanitation and cleaning during business hours
- Limiting foot traffic in offices and retail stores
- Encouraging use of technology
- Implementing remote work options
- Reducing frequency of staff meetings
- Implement modified work schedule

#### **How is your company changing your approach to marketing and business development?**

- No change (currently)
- Social media campaigns
- Existing customer base

Mr. Hallingse reemphasized that the survey results do not include responses from the open-ended questions the survey asked related to how local governments should collaborate on developing next steps and how the task force can be more responsive to the needs of the business community, i.e. answering questions, connecting to resources. He noted the survey link remains live on the website. The Alliance and Chamber offices remain open and staffs are available to aid. He encouraged members of the business community to contact either organization if needed.

Chairman Hawkins reiterated that the Alliance will be analyzing the input from the surveys and tailoring programs and information to the business community. He noted that many businesses and citizens have inquired about ways to offer their assistance and he asked how they can become engaged in this effort. Mr. Hallingse encouraged those who want to help to contact the Alliance or Chamber. They are desperately seeking great ideas and want to make sure those ideas are shared across the community.

Existing companies are also sharing great stories and information on social media, and Mr. Hallingse encouraged them to continue doing so. The task force will be working on follow up efforts and will need engagement from people in the community.

Chairman Hawkins stated that while people's lives are of utmost important, the economy is a priority as well. People must be able to earn a living. When the County and the task force talk about helping businesses, it means helping employees and ensuring their jobs are protected. He was encouraged by the creation of the task force because it is critical that we support businesses and connect them to resources at all levels. Chairman Hawkins asked Commissioner Chappell to share information about resources for displaced workers.

Commissioner Chappell reported the most frequently asked question from most workers right now is how to file for unemployment. The Division of Employment Security (DES) posted a fact sheet today that contains important information for workers. Unemployment procedures were changed a few years ago requiring all claims to be filed online or by phone. The volume of workers filing unemployment claims has increased exponentially across the country which has created a lag time for being able to file. Workers can visit the DES website or call in to file a claim ([www.des.nc.gov](http://www.des.nc.gov) or (888) 737-0259). The local NC Works Career Center is open, but closed for public walk-ins. The Center is scheduling by appointment to practice social distancing.

Other highlights regarding filing for unemployment:

- Work search requirements are waived for unemployment recipients if their unemployment is a result of COVID-19
- Wait-a-week requirement has been waived if unemployment is related to COVID-19
- First unemployment check issued in approximately 10 days
  - Must receive response from employer to prove unemployment is due to layoff and not a firing
- Maximum amount of unemployment benefits is approximately \$350/week for a period of 13 weeks

Commissioner Chappell pointed out that North Carolina has one of the strongest unemployment trust funds in the nation, specifically to respond to a situation like this. The State's unemployment trust fund totals about \$3.9 billion.

In addition to helping displaced workers, there is also a call center where employers can seek information. Employers should call the local NC Works Career Center at (828) 883-2550 for information on how to contact the call center.

Commissioner Chappell learned today that Walmart and Ingles are hiring temporary workers as stockers, grocers, etc. with same-day start.

Commissioner Guice thanked Mr. Hallingse and the task force for their work. He was mindful that during stressful times people respond and react in different ways. He was concerned about the mental health of the community as well and encouraged the task force to consult local mental healthcare professionals for advice. Commissioner Guice also encouraged everyone to think creatively and engage successful business owners who have experienced ups and downs in the economy over the years to help foster communication to other business owners. Transylvania County has several small businesses in the community that will be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic situation in one way or another and they need every resource at our disposal.

CONSIDERATION OF LETTER TO STATE AND FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVES/PARTNERS REQUESTING CLOSURE OF NATIONAL AND STATE FORESTS/PARKS

A partial closure to Pisgah National Forest and Dupont State Recreational Forest has been implemented; however, a partial closure sends mixed signals to our citizens and visitors. There is a critical need to limit exposure through public gatherings and practice other CDC recommendations. There has been an increased number of visitors to National and State Forests/Parks. This increase creates additional need for resources that could be used elsewhere and negates efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19. The Manager reported that last week during an Emergency Management Team meeting, there was a rescue call for someone who fell from Looking Glass while they were recreating in the Forest.

The letter requests immediate closure of the Pisgah National Forest, Dupont State Recreational Forest and Gorges State Park during the current phase of the COVID-19 response. The letter also requests forest and park staff be authorized to prevent use of the forest and parks through authorized means which prevents local resources from being needed to police the closure.

**Commissioner Lemel moved to approve the letter to be sent to State and federal representatives and partners requesting closure of national and State forests and parks, seconded by Commissioner Chappell.** Commissioner Chappell stated he brought this issue forward for consideration. He reported a tremendous number of visitors in the community this past weekend. He was concerned that we are sending mixed message when we say there is a need to practice social distancing and limit public gatherings, yet the State and national forests and parks were teeming with visitors. He believes it is necessary for these areas to be closed temporarily. He expressed his concerns to Representative Johnson and Congressman Meadows about these issues today. Not only does keeping the forests and parks open negate the social distancing recommendations, but it also impacts the County's supply lines and constrains our resources. Commissioner Lemel reported that Dupont dealt with unbelievable crowds of people over the weekend. They were forced to close bathroom facilities and use portable toilets. Then officials discovered that toilet paper and hand sanitizer were being stolen from the portable toilets. Additionally, there were more than 30 states represented in the Hooker Falls parking lot recently. People are traveling here from hotspots, potentially bringing exposure to the community and taxing our resources. She appreciated the desire to be out enjoying the open space, but she felt there needed to be more reasonableness. Commissioner Lemel asked about the TDA's stance on this issue. She knows they are struggling in their role to promote the community yet remain mindful of the outbreak. Chairman Hawkins noted there are pros and cons to this request, but he supported it at this time. Commissioner Guice was hesitant of the proposal, but he understood the concerns expressed about the spread of the virus and the need for social distancing. For those reasons he stated he would be supportive, but he did not support violators being criminally charged. Commissioner Cathey felt this action was too early. **The motion passed 4 to 1, with Commissioner Cathey voting against.**

MANAGER'S REPORT

- COVID-19: activities being reported occurred in a single week
  - Transylvania True website housing updates for business community
  - TC United Community Response Reports – encourage public to review reports on County website; includes links to resources on food, mental health, etc., and updates from the State; update from March 22 announced County's 1<sup>st</sup> COVID19 case
  - Manager keeping distribution list of businesses, non-profits, faith communities, and other community groups that have reached out to County government because they want to serve the community
- Budget on hold; unsure if counties will receive an extension on approval of their budgets
- Kudos to Transylvania County Schools for providing meals to community children quickly and efficiently; buses delivering throughout the community; TC Schools using virtual days to ensure students' education can continue; County assisting by pushing out information to the public

### COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

Commissioner Cathey thanked all those in County government for the good job they have been doing related to the pandemic.

Commissioner Lemel stated she has never been prouder to be an elected official and to be associated with those working for our citizens. She stated the amount of communication being shared by the Manager and other leaders is impressive. She has much faith and confidence in County Administration.

Commissioner Chappell was amazed at the kindness of individuals and businesses during these trying times. Many have donated meals, supplies, money, etc., even at the cost of their own livelihoods. Today we received notification that Lake Toxaway Charities donated \$10,000 to TC Schools for their feeding program. He was proud to live in such a wonderful community. He also thanked staff for the great job they are doing to protect our citizens.

Commissioner Guice was appreciative of everyone who has stepped up during these challenging times.

### ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, **Commissioner Cathey moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:15 p.m., seconded by Commissioner Lemel and unanimously approved.**

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Mike Hawkins, Chair  
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

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Trisha M. Hogan, Clerk to the Board