

**MINUTES**  
**TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**MARCH 11, 2024 – REGULAR MEETING**

The Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County met in a regular meeting on Monday, March 11, 2024, at 4:00 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 Julie Hooten, 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 4:01 p.m.

**WELCOME**

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

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Peter Offen: Mr. Offen is the Assistant Chair of the Transylvania County Democratic Party. He addressed the Board in response to Transylvania County Republican Party Chair Jeff Brewer's request for a third early voting location. He stated that the Democratic Party strongly believes that the right to vote is fundamental to our democracy and that the voice of the people should not be suppressed. The Party also opposes barriers to people exercising their right to vote such as the inability to physically go to a voting poll or voter ID laws. Mr. Offen stated that the Democratic Party supports a third early voting location so that as many Transylvanians may exercise their fundamental rights as possible. He stated that the Party trusts the expertise and judgment of the Board of Elections to administer the elections in a fair, impartial, and safe manner and to ensure elections are accessible while considering the cost and personnel required for each voting location. Mr. Offen applauded the Board of Commissioners' support of the Board of Elections, and he looked forward to that continuing.

**AGENDA MODIFICATIONS**

There were no agenda modifications.

**Commissioner Chapman moved to approve the agenda as presented, seconded by Commissioner Dalton, and unanimously approved.**

**CONSENT AGENDA**

**Commissioner Casciato moved to approve the Consent Agenda, seconded by Commissioner McCall, and unanimously approved.**

The Board approved the following items:

#### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Board of Commissioners met in a regular meeting on Monday, February 26, 2024, and following met in a closed session in which the minutes were sealed. The closed session minutes will be coming forth to the Board for approval at a future meeting. The Board approved the minutes of the February 26, 2024, regular meeting as submitted.

#### BAD DEBT WRITE-OFF FOR THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT

The Department of Public Health's Bad Debt Policy identifies the process for handling aging accounts with no payment activity greater than 180 days. Pursuant to this policy, Public Health Director Elaine Russell recommended the Board approve the write-off of bad debts totaling \$165.50 for the period January 1, 2023, to June 30, 2023. The Board approved the bad debt write-off amount of \$165.50 as submitted.

### **PRESENTATIONS/RECOGNITIONS**

#### MARINE CORPS JROTC REPORT ON PARRIS ISLAND TRIP

The Transylvania County Schools Marine Corps Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps cadets recently visited the Marine Corps Recruit Depot at Parris Island, SC to get an introduction to boot camp and they requested to make a presentation to the Board of Commissioners on their experience. Retired Marine Col. and Senior MCJROTC Instructor Scott Blankenship and Retired Sergeant Lance Oufnac opened the presentation and introduced the cadets: Cadet Captain Browne, Cadet 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. McCall, and Cadet 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Whitmire.

Col. Blankenship stated that the MCJROTC program has been in place in Transylvania County since 2015-2016. His predecessor, Lt. Col. Chuck McGown, who was in attendance, is one of the founders of the program. He stated that they are all happy to present today on their experience at one of the Marine Corps' legendary installations at Parris Island.

Sgt. Major Oufnac stated that the MCJROTC program services all three high schools. He shared examples of how the cadets have served the community by helping out with several events and activities during the current school year. They have contributed over 1,200 volunteer hours this year alone. Sgt. Major Oufnac reported that the program started a new team this year called the Raiders Team which is an eight-person team to work on leadership principles under stressful conditions and to learn lifelong skills, such as rope and knot-tying, and competing at the state and national level. The Team has an upcoming competition with West Henderson High School in April. He invited the entire community to a pancake breakfast on May 11 at Brevard High School. It will be a donation-only event. There will be more information about this event.

Next, the cadets gave a presentation about their experience last October at Parris Island. The purpose of their trip was to build interest in the program, build unity across the program, see the transformation process of civilian to Marine, and experience what it was like to be a recruit. The cadets visited Parris Island for four days, but the normal time for recruits is three months. The cadets got to experience what it was like to sleep, wake up, eat, be on time, and drill. They also had the opportunity to visit the swim tank and gas chamber and participate in leadership courses. During the school year, the program is split into blocks, so this trip served as an opportunity for all the cadets to drill together, which offers lessons in teamwork. They participated in leadership courses that identified their strengths and weaknesses. By the end of their four days, the cadets had gotten more comfortable in their experience and wanted to stay longer.

Some of the important things the cadets learned from their experience were teamwork and discipline. The cadets discovered they needed to work together on everything they did there, whether it was making sure their racks (beds) were made, ensuring everyone was ready on time and on the line, or just being there for each other. They worked as a team, otherwise, if one person failed, the team failed. The cadets had to practice

discipline most of all because they were exposed to a more regimented schedule which they felt they needed more of in their lives as high schoolers.

During the close-order drills, the cadets perform as the Color Guard in uniform and march at events displaying the American flag and the Marine Corps flag. It takes teamwork and discipline to drill together effectively and correctly. The cadets participated in a leadership reaction course which was a course made for recruits on Parris Island to work together as a team to overcome a task or a problem.

The cadets visited an indoor rifle range where they learned about several weapons and participated in a simulator. During the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP), they learned about certain stunts and commands and if they did not perform them correctly, the cadets were made to do pushups. The cadets learned techniques at the swim tank. Afterward, they met with the drill instructors to share their experiences.

The cadets experienced the receiving process in the Marine Corps boot camp which included standing on the line on yellow-painted footprints and getting one 30-second scripted phone call while being yelled at by drill instructors. Later the cadets visited the Marine Corps/Marine Corps Recruit Depot Museum where they learned about the history of the Marine Corps which was a fun experience for them.

The cadets wrapped up their presentation by sharing several pictures of their experience and describing each one.

Chairman Chappell thanked the instructors and cadets for their presentation and called for questions or comments from the Commissioners.

Commissioner Casciato thanked Col. Blankenship and Sgt. Maj. Oufnak for leading the MCJROTC program. It is a great leadership program. He was appreciative of their willingness to participate in ceremonies at the Veterans History Museum. He also thanked the cadets for their service to the community.

Commissioner Chapman commented about the Raiders Team which is outside the perusal of the funding from the School System. The team is raising money for the program. The upcoming pancake breakfast is one of those fundraising efforts. He encouraged citizens to make donations to the program.

## **APPOINTMENTS**

### LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

There is a vacancy on the Library Board of Trustees due to a recent resignation. The Clerk to the Board advertised the vacancy and received two applications. Library Director Rishara Finsel reviewed the applications and recommended the appointment of Michael Baker to fill the vacancy.

**Commissioner Dalton moved to appoint Michael Baker to fill the vacancy on the Library Board of Trustees, seconded by Commissioner Chapman and unanimously approved.**

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### EDUCATION CAPITAL WORK GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

The Manager recapped the presentation from the joint meeting with the Board of Education held on March 4 and presented the next steps for moving forward on education capital.

### **Education Capital Workgroup**

The Board of Commissioners and Board of Education agreed to a collaborative effort to identify the capital needs for Transylvania County Schools and to provide options on how to move forward to improve

the schools together. The Education Capital Workgroup was comprised of County Manager Jaime Laughter, Superintendent Dr. Lisa Fletcher, retired Henderson County Manager Steve Wyatt, and retired Henderson County Superintendent Dr. Bo Caldwell.

The Workgroup was tasked to work with a qualified consultant, Axias, who was hired to assess the school buildings and identify the capital needs of the existing buildings. The County agreed to contract and provide the funding for the consultant at the request of the Board of Education. The County issued a request for qualifications in the spring of 2023 for the building assessment/maintenance reserve study. Following a review of the three responses, the Commissioners awarded the contract to Axias and approved the necessary funding.

### Workgroup Assumptions

- The Boards and community are not interested in the consolidation of schools as an option.
- Focus on the existing building conditions to identify projects needing investment throughout the system.
- The original expectation of the bond projects cannot be built for the amount of the bond as evidenced by the bid processes previously undertaken.
- The 2018 School Bond Referendum for \$68 million is still a financing tool available for use to finance investment in the schools and can be used for sites beyond Rosman High and Middle Schools and Brevard High School.

### Building Assessment – Axias

Axias took a methodical approach to conducting the building assessments. They held a site visit, interviewed staff from the School System and the County, reviewed documentation, performed additional studies to test for safety measures, mold, and structural issues, prepared a draft assessment for the administrative building and each of the school facilities, and prepared a draft project dashboard that can be used to help with capital planning. The Workgroup utilized these tools prepared by Axias.

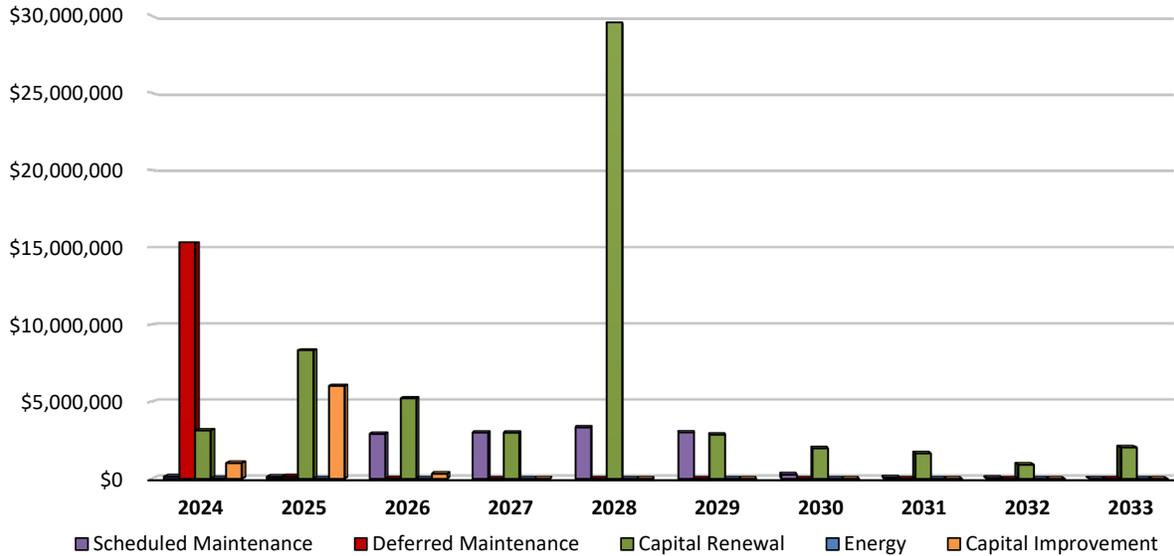
Axias identified an overall 10-year need of \$94 million in construction expenses, which translates into a total of \$121 million after including contingency, professional fees, and other project costs. Axias classified each project by urgency level, deficiency type, and risk category. The cost estimation is based on current pricing and projected escalation for the projects identified for future years. Since the joint meeting on March 4, staff have posted site-specific reports on the County's website.

Axias provided a report of expenditures by school that totals \$94 million in construction expenses. They identified that each school has needs, with the most being Brevard and Rosman High Schools.

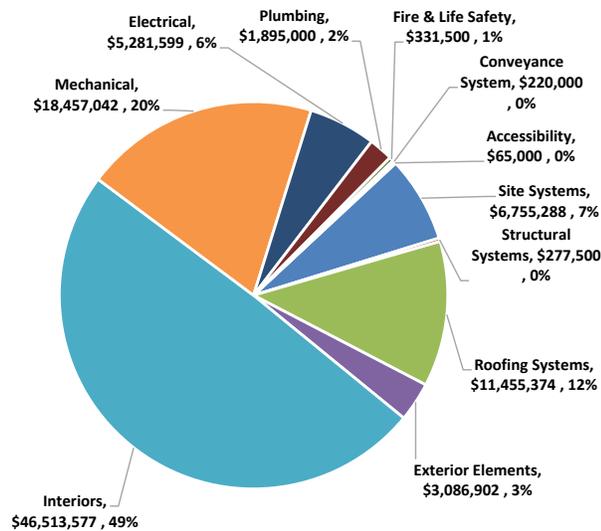
School Facility	10-Year Expenditures
Brevard Elementary	\$11,487,210
Brevard Middle School	\$11,466,210
Brevard High School	\$29,896,843
Davidson River School	\$2,173,724
Pisgah Forest Elementary	\$7,623,303
Rosman Elementary	\$6,907,940
Rosman Middle & High	\$19,041,791
TC Henderson Elementary	\$4,349,205
Plant Operations	\$543,906

Morris Education Center	\$848,750
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$94,338,781</b>

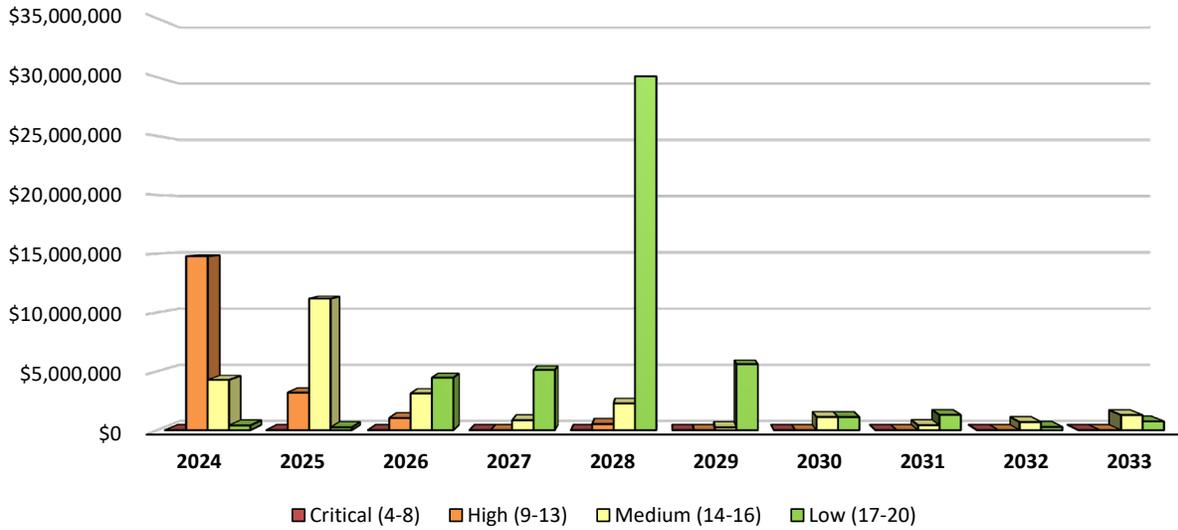
By category over the 10 years, Axias identified deferred maintenance and capital renewal as nearer-term projects. The chart then shows the expenditures beginning to decrease over the timespan, except in 2028. The cost spike in 2028 involves the grouping of interiors to reflect the total renovation of all schools.



In the total recommendation, a good portion is comprised of interior elements. There is more room to negotiate on how to spend funds on interiors. The remaining funds are related to site systems that are important to the buildings’ integrity and for the buildings to remain functional.



Axias also categorized the projects by risk. Fortunately, there were not a large number of projects that met the critical category. Most were categorized as high, particularly those slated to be completed in the near term, with a heavy load in 2024.



During the joint meeting, Axis presented a facilities condition index which indicated that overall, the school facilities are in fair to good shape; however, their projection indicates that if no investments are made in the next 10 years, some buildings will fall into the renewal category which means they will be in too poor condition to reinvest in or they will drop to poor condition. This helps to emphasize the importance of investments in the coming years.

Facility	Current FCI	10-Year FCNI	Current FCI	10-Year FCNI
Brevard Elementary	0.10	0.47	Fair	Poor
Brevard Middle School	0.10	0.42	Below Average	Poor
Brevard High School	0.16	0.64	Below Average	Renew
Davidson River School	0.01	0.33	Excellent	Poor
Pisgah Forest Elementary	0.01	0.38	Excellent	Poor
Rosman Elementary	0.06	0.45	Fair	Poor
Rosman Middle & High	0.10	0.42	Below Average	Poor
TC Henderson Elementary	0.09	0.54	Fair	Renew
Plant Operations	0.04	0.27	Good	Poor

Morris Education Center	0.02	0.21	Good	Poor
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### Education Capital Workgroup Recommendations

The Manager reported that part of this process included reviewing documents that were related to the school buildings. It is important when approaching renovation projects to have as much information on hand about the existing structures. School staff provided limited information to Axias. That is one of the concerns highlighted in the recommendation is to ensure that renovation plans, scopes of work, etc. are documented for future renovation projects. Unknowns going into a renovation project could increase contingency costs.

The Manager stated that both Boards agreed to the team of professionals who comprised the Workgroup. During the joint meeting on March 4, staff shared the extensive levels of experience that Mr. Wyatt and Mr. Caldwell brought to the table. She felt it was important to highlight that Mr. Wyatt and Mr. Caldwell collaborated in Henderson County to bring their respective Boards together to address education capital. They were very successful, which was one of the benefits of having them as consultants on the Workgroup.

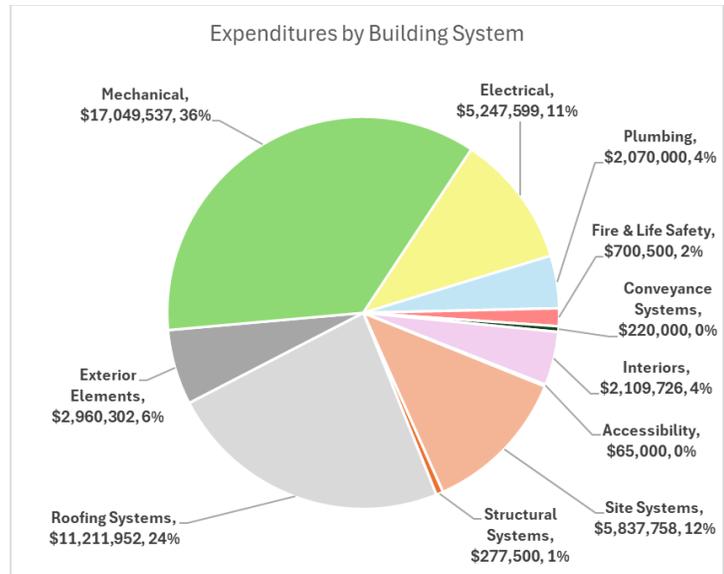
The Workgroup proceeded with its first meeting in September including a review of assumptions going into the work. After the initial meeting, the Board of Commissioners commissioned additional studies to conduct environmental air quality testing, a safety and security assessment, and a structural assessment. The Workgroup held four in-person work sessions with Axias to review the assessment results. An electronic dashboard will be the final product from Axias. During the work sessions, the members asked questions, requested additional analyses and scenarios, and formulated a path forward for the two Boards to jointly consider. The Superintendent and County Manager held an additional virtual session with Axias to review the assessment information. The Workgroup finalized the recommendations unanimously in a work session in February and continued to communicate in preparation for a joint presentation to both Boards on March 4. The guiding principle was that the Workgroup wanted both Boards to receive the results of the work at the same time so they could consider the recommendations and the path forward.

### Step-by-Step Plan

The Workgroup recommended a step-by-step plan. Step 1 is an investment. The Workgroup agreed this step is necessary to address the critical and high-priority issues. Step 2 is to refresh. These are more negotiable areas. Step 3 is an ongoing collaboration. This is built on much of the advice provided by the retired consultants both during the work sessions and during the March 4 joint meeting urging the two Boards and their staff to work together on a long-term joint facilities assessment that is revised every few years. The benefit of developing a long-term capital plan is that the School System can rely on the plan and understand the upcoming projects. It helps the County plan for the financial expenditures.

### Step 1 Investment Workgroup Plan

Step 1 does not include many interiors in the near term. It focuses more on mechanical systems, roofing systems, exterior elements, and those areas that are critical to protecting investment in the facilities. Millions of dollars have been invested in these buildings. The chart below reflects a list of projects that are necessary to protect that investment.



Facility	Expenditures
Brevard Elementary	\$4,687,788
Brevard Middle School	\$4,339,430
Brevard High School	\$17,823,962
Davidson River School	\$717,084
Pisgah Forest Elementary	\$3,025,833
Rosman Elementary	\$4,452,310
Rosman Middle & High	\$10,336,991
TC Henderson Elementary	\$1,861,080
Plant Operations	\$401,156
Morris Education Center	\$178,240
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$47,823,874*</b>

**Step 1 Investment**

The Education Capital Work Group recommended that the Board of Commissioners and Board of Education invest in schools by moving forward projects from the assessment identified as high-priority, critical needs and deferred maintenance with a focus on safety, building envelope (roofs and structure), major systems (mechanical, electrical) and site improvements. The focus should be on updating the existing structures except for cases where a critical need is not in place, such as vestibules recommended from the safety assessment, and projects scheduled before 2031 in the assessment. By having the bond financing mechanism in place, it is possible to pull many of those projects forward and use the bond to fund them.

The project list issued on March 4 for Step 1 is in a similar format to the capital documents the Commissioners see during an annual request. The list needs to go through a scoping process to help determine and refine the professional percentage costs.

The recommendation is to use the 2018 General Obligation Bond to fund as a first tranche. The project list includes \$62 million in projects, so the Board could finance the remaining in a second tranche. The

Manager pointed out that renovations generally only need a scope of work and a project budget for submission to the Local Government Commission to sell the bonds, but any new construction requires designs to be complete and bids in hand. This is one reason there is not a lot of new construction in Step 1 because, from a timeline standpoint, it makes sense to move forward with the renovation components as a first tranche.

### **Step 1 Investment Next Steps**

The Workgroup recommended the Board of Commissioner and the Board of Education review and agree to the project list for Step 1 investment and then allow a group of both County and School System staff to meet with Axias for a project scoping session to refine the project packages and ensure all is in order to sell the bond. This would involve removing projects that have been completed since the assessment was conducted last summer. It would also involve grouping projects to help bring down the cost. Then the group would format the scope and project budgets to provide documentation required for the bond sale.

County staff would then schedule the bond sale to fund the investment in the Step 1 round of projects as soon as possible. The financial process for the bond sale is projected to take 90 days. The group should prepare the project list by July 1 to be on the Local Government Commission's agenda in October 2024. That would allow for financing to be available to begin projects by the end of the calendar year.

The Manager pointed out that one of the challenges in terms of the timeline is a blackout period that will start in November and run until the new audit is completed. Typically, the new audit would not be available until the spring of 2025. So, it is important to be prepared for an October bond sale, otherwise it would be 2025 before construction could commence on any projects.

### **Step 2 Refresh**

Step 2 is an opportunity for both Boards to work together to determine what a refreshment of the schools looks like. This is the step in which the interiors that were budgeted into the overall assessment would fall. It would allow the Board of Education to identify priorities for interior renovation or new construction and present those separately from practical needed projects, and thus allow the Board of Commissioners to develop a funding plan.

Under Step 2, the Board of Education could prioritize certain upgrades and defer other interior renovations. Some of the options for upgrades are those already considered by the Board of Education, such as updating or constructing a new cafeteria or auxiliary gym at Brevard High School, alternative energy such as geothermal at Rosman Elementary School, or turf for the field at Rosman High School. The Manager noted, however, that for the turf project, County staff recommended the Board of Education request funding in their annual capital budget request as a priority.

The school functionality assessment for recommendations on interior changes to enhance education support could be another option for consideration in Step 2. These types of studies look at the efficiency of space and should occur in Step 2 versus Step 1.

### **Step 3 Ongoing Collaboration**

The projects beyond Step 1 can be prioritized for annual capital requests by the Board of Education or grouped for financing purposes like Step 1 and worked into the capital plan for a second bond sale tranche. Basing the multi-year capital planning on building assessment in the future will make sure that major building system needs are maintained. The Workgroup recommended the Boards conduct a joint assessment of the facilities every five to seven years to identify what may have previously been overlooked. They also recommended seeking methods to retain documentation on all the projects and facilities to guide future work.

### **Funding Considerations**

The Manager pointed out that the Workgroup did not present funding considerations at the joint meeting; however, they issued recommendations in the report. She highlighted some of the Workgroup's discussions on the funding component that drove their Step 1 recommendation.

The Workgroup discussed readily available funding which is primarily the bond. They also discussed the limitations of local government funding in North Carolina and how the funding would be needed to shape Step 1. The bond funding is approved for \$68 million and can be used at all school sites. The estimated payments on \$68 million worth of bonds are higher than the initial planning due to higher interest rates. That means some of the cash collections from FY 2020 may be needed to offset the higher payments to avoid having to increase taxes. The bonds can be sold in tranches. Renovations can be submitted as scopes of work which is important in the timing component for selling the bonds whereas bids must be in-hand for new construction projects. The Workgroup also discussed a timeline. If the group can prepare sufficient scopes of work by July 1, then projects could realistically begin before the end of the calendar year 2024.

### **Funding Options**

The only revenue for local government in North Carolina to back lending is property tax and the County's ability to generate property tax. Counties can use dedicated sales tax for education capital to make debt payments, but when a local government goes into debt in North Carolina, the local government is pledging its ability to tax property. Options for financing include the following:

- Cash/pay as you go which requires saving ahead
- \*Bonds up to 20 years- General Obligation requires referendum or Limited Obligation Bond requires more cash upfront
- \*Private lending up to 20-year loans, but in smaller increments
- State allocation or grants, if available
- Lottery funds: Transylvania County received \$700,000 last year in lottery funds; both Boards must agree to apply lottery funds to a specific project

\*The Local Government Commissioners must approve bonds and private lending financing methods before issuing debt. The financing process takes time and does not occur overnight.

### **Funding Planning Data**

The Board of Commissioners has previously discussed the possibility of a ¼ cent sales tax referendum for Blue Ridge Community College. This would be a new revenue source that the County is not currently leveraging.

- Estimated that ¼ cent proceeds would bring in \$1.5 million annually; equivalent to 2.5 cents of property tax; would cover payment of \$15 million project under current rates at 20 years
- The County collects almost \$600,00 for every 1 cent of property tax; for every \$10 million borrowed at the current rate is 1.7 cents of property tax

Under the current plan, the payments have been calculated into the budget. These are considerations the Board should make about funding beyond the \$68 million.

### **Funding Information**

There are grants available at the State level whereby some of the lottery funds have been set aside for the Needs-Based Public School Grant. Transylvania County has applied but has not been awarded any of these grant funds. Transylvania County does not score well in that matrix primarily because the County is not a Tier 1 ranked county, and several other criteria focus more on consolidation projects and having a larger

percentage of students. Franklin High School in Macon County is a Tier 2 county like Transylvania County, and they just announced an award of \$62 million to build a \$110 million high school for 1,400 students.

The Board of Commissioners allocates education capital funding annually from dedicated sales tax revenue and property tax. In FY 2024, the County allocated \$3 million in capital funding for the School System. Over a third of their capital request is for furniture, fixtures and equipment, and vehicles and also includes maintenance items and projects the School System may want to prioritize. The County may use the annual funding appropriation (dedicated sales tax or property tax) to pay debt service.

The Manager pointed out that the County will need to determine a payment schedule during the bond sale process and readjust the assumptions that were made in 2018. The interest rates have increased since the original timeline.

### **Best Practices Shared from Retired Professional Consultants**

- Collaboration is important
  - Henderson County uses a subcommittee to review capital with representatives from both organizations
  - Henderson County hired a project manager to handle county and school projects and streamline construction, bidding, and payment processes for efficiency purposes and to avoid duplication of processes, especially since the county is the funder
- Communication
  - Both boards received the same information on projects at the same time
  - Communicated to get projects completed with minimal impact on school operations

### **Recommendation for Action**

The basis behind the recommendation for action is that both Boards are responsible for ensuring that students have adequate facilities for learning. That requires cooperation between the two Boards. Both Boards have acknowledged the schools need work and that it is important to protect the investments the community has made.

Both Boards tasked a professional workgroup to chart a path forward with trust in their capabilities, including the leaders of each organization, Superintendent Fletcher and Manager Laughter. The intent was collaboration and unity for this process with a practical approach.

Collaboration takes commitment and follow-through from both parties. The Manager stressed that the timeline is sensitive. July 1 is the target to complete the scoping and development budgets for the projects to be on the LGC's October agenda for financing approval to begin projects in this calendar year.

A professionally prepared assessment identified projects that need to move forward at all the school facilities as soon as possible or risk compounding problems like roof leaks, mechanical systems, and repairs that cannot be delayed any longer.

The Manager recommended the Board of Commissioners endorse the recommendations of the Workgroup as presented as a commitment to collaboration and authorize her to implement the next steps as quickly as possible following word the Board of Education has agreed to endorse the recommendations as well. She challenged the Commissioners to "Let's Go Invest Together."

Chairman Chappell agreed with the Manager's recommendation for the next step forward. He called for comments and questions from the Commissioners.

Commissioner Chapman asked if the Workgroup was confident of the estimated project costs. The Manager stated that one of the services Axias provides is cost estimation. They maintain market information. Thus, the Workgroup felt very confident about the construction costs. The professional services and fees will vary depending on how the scoping group bundles the projects, but they do not expect these costs will exceed 30%.

Commissioner Chapman agreed that it is critical to track and document the projects. Because of the lack of information provided, it was difficult to show how funds were spent in past years.

Commissioner McCall supported the Manager's recommendation. She stated she was pleased with the presentation during the joint meeting. She commented that the recommendation from the Workgroup was not one-sided in that it involved the County Manager, the Superintendent, two well-respected retired individuals who have navigated these issues successfully, and a professional firm who is an expert in conducting these assessments across the country. Commissioner McCall stated the assessment report provided a great deal of information not only for today but also to help future Boards plan and perform preventative work to protect the investment. She reemphasized her support of moving forward with the project list without any further delay.

Commissioner Casciato also agreed with the recommendation. He felt it was extremely important, after the Step 1 projects are completed, to maintain this investment so that the two Boards are not back in this same situation years from now.

Chairman Chappell echoed the Commissioners' comments. He said one of the things that is the most telling about the report is that the recommendations were not made in a vacuum and had the unanimous support of the Workgroup. The entire process was a collaborative effort. Now there is a workable timeframe whereby there could be some improvements at the school facilities using bond funds in this calendar year. The assessment recommends improvements at every school.

Commissioner McCall commented that this is the first plan that has come to the Commissioners that can go forward with the sale of the bonds because it involves renovation projects that do not require having designs and bids in hand. To pivot into projects requiring designs and bids would delay the work even further.

Chairman Chappell stressed the timeframe to meet the LGC's October meeting. If the timeframe is delayed, the County would have to delay until its next audit is completed which pushes the projects to at least the spring of 2025.

Commissioner Chapman agreed with the recommendation to hire a qualified and experienced project manager to manage these projects.

**Commissioner McCall moved to endorse the recommendations of the Workgroup as presented as a commitment to collaboration and authorize the County Manager to implement the next steps as quickly as possible following word the Board of Education has agreed as well, seconded by Commissioner Chapman and unanimously approved.**

## NEW BUSINESS

### LIBRARY AMPHITHEATER CONCEPT AND ISSUANCE OF REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

Assistant County Manager David McNeill presented this item to the Board. The Library Foundation is interested in an Amphitheater improvement project and is requesting approval from the Board of Commissioners on the conceptual design and to issue a request for proposals on the project's probable cost,

construction design, and management. The Library Foundation plans to fundraise and is committed to funding the project if the Board of Commissioners approves the conceptual design. The Library Foundation is committed to funding the architectural and engineering design fees necessary to obtain the project's probable cost. After receiving the total probable project cost from the selected architect, the Library Foundation will collaborate with staff to present the probable cost to the Board of Commissioners and provide the Board with a financial commitment to fund the project in total, including all architectural design, engineering, construction management, and construction cost.

David Watkins of the Library Foundation and Library Director Rishara Finsel were present to answer questions from the Board.

Commissioner Chapman inquired about the timeline. Mr. McNeill responded that the timeline includes the process of issuing the RFQ, negotiating a contract, and collaborating with the Foundation on the design. Ms. Finsel added that the process would begin with the issuance of the RFQ, and the timeline depends on the availability of staff. The Library Foundation intends to fundraise to supplement existing funds. Mr. Watkins informed the Commissioners that the Foundation anticipates fundraising during the summer months into the fall. He stated that the Foundation has the funds available for engineering and RFQ costs. He said the Foundation looks forward to making the Amphitheater area more useful with this project.

Chairman Chappell noted this is another project that requires an opinion of probable cost. This is the process the County utilizes on all its projects.

Commissioner Dalton pointed out that the City of Brevard is trying to force the County into its new downtown overlay district which could create a setback problem if they do not honor the County's request not to be included. He was concerned that could add to the cost of the project if design changes had to be made to meet the new code. He asked how the County should approach the project knowing these issues. The Manager stated that the architect on the project must work with the City to comply with all their code requirements.

**Commissioner Dalton moved to accept the conceptual design for the Amphitheater and to authorize staff to issue an RFQ for a probable cost estimate, construction design and drawings, and construction management, seconded by Commissioners Casciato/McCall simultaneously and unanimously approved.**

The Manager thanked Chairman Chappell for highlighting the need to obtain an opinion of probable cost. She said it is important for all the County's partners and the public to understand that project development takes time and determining the funding for a project is a critical component in the process.

#### TASK THE JOINT HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION WITH COMMEMORATING AMERICA'S 250TH ANNIVERSARY

On July 4, 2026, our nation will commemorate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States. Citizens have approached the Commissioners to share their interest in helping the County plan a celebration. The US Semi-quincentennial Commission has created a website to help communities plan and it can be found at [www.america250.org](http://www.america250.org).

The Board discussed this topic briefly on September 25. At that time, Commissioner Chapman stated that he intended to bring the topic forth to the Transylvania County Tourism Development Authority at its next meeting to seek interest in coordinating celebratory events. The TCTDA did not feel it would be the right entity to coordinate but did express support for the effort. The staff feels it is appropriate to task the Joint

Historic Preservation Commission with coordinating activities or events and partnering with the TCTDA or other interested organizations to accomplish this instead of creating another public committee.

**Commissioner McCall moved to task the Joint Historic Preservation Commission with coordination of activities and/or events to commemorate America's 250th Anniversary in 2026, seconded by Commissioner Dalton.**

Commissioner Chapman said he has been approached by several people and groups interested in planning for America's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary. He felt it was critical to establish a primary contact for coordinating the events and activities. Commissioner Chapman said he would like the Heritage Museum and Veterans History Museum to be involved. He felt it was important for the people of this nation to come together in celebration. He offered to be part of the planning. Commissioner Chapman suggested the County consider contributing funds toward the effort once the plans are known. **The motion was unanimously approved.**

MANAGER'S REPORT

The Manager reported the following:

- Thank you to Congressman Chuck Edwards for working with County staff to secure a \$1 million grant for the Sheriff's Office
  - Address Kenwood radio replacements issue discussed in FY 24 budget preparations (match funds budgeted for this grant)
  - Allow time to incorporate capital planning strategies without a large expenditure to the County all at once
  - Thank you to the Sheriff's office and Emergency Management for working to provide backup information in support of the request
  - More information to come!
- Kudos to transit from DSS for pulling together a last-minute backup plan to assist with the transport of children in an emergency. Our County departments support each other's work!
- Budget for FY 2025 is in full swing with target recommendations at the first meeting in May. Staff are behind on the budget preparations due to all the other projects going on. The Manager will be asking the Commissioners to serve on various budget review committees and then she will schedule individual meetings with the Commissioners to review the budget.
- Capital Project Updates
  - The courthouse contract is under review
  - Interconnect water project for Brevard and Rosman started
  - EMS project slated for spring completion
  - Solid Waste's new cell project starting
  - The County's Project Manager keeps projects moving and works on cost-saving measures
- Next monthly County and school project staff meeting is tomorrow morning to continue communicating about education capital projects and working together on them; the intent is to continue a collaborative effort
- Kudos to the team at Solid Waste from State DEQ Inspector Lee Hill who emailed the following to the Manager:

*"I just wanted to take a moment to brag on your staff; The landfill was in great shape and the staff is doing a wonderful job. I was extremely happy with the landfill, and it was a great opportunity for me to show Summer what you should expect during an inspection. The landfill had good cover, proper size working face, correct paperwork, good management of special wastes (electronics, tires, white goods)...etc. "*

Commissioner Dalton asked if there were any updates on the other internet providers in the County. The Manager stated she received a phone call from the NC Department of Information Technology regarding a discussion on GREAT grants. Two entities received GREAT grant funding in Transylvania County: Zitel and

Comporium. She returned the call but has not been able to connect. She hopes to connect with them this week to determine the status.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Don Surrette: Mr. Surrette commented on the planning efforts for the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration and invited a Commissioner to ring the courthouse bell 250 times. He recommended the Commissioners purchase a new rope because it broke during the County's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration.

Beth Privette: Ms. Privette is a retired schoolteacher. She taught at Brevard Elementary School and commented on the condition of her classroom and stated it was not maintained. For this reason, she was pleased with the work the County and the School System have put into a plan to address these issues within the school facilities.

### **COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS**

Commissioner Chapman thanked the County's State and federal representatives for allocating funds to Transylvania County this year. The State allocated \$40 million for infrastructure projects. The County just received the announcement about the money from the federal government to replace the Kenwood radios. While these allocations are all in the form of tax dollars, the allocation prevents the Commissioners from having to raise property taxes to fund these projects. Commissioner Chapman thanked all those who voted for him during the primary.

Commissioner Dalton praised the MCJROTC program. He said he wished this program existed when he was in school. He was impressed with the cadets and how they held themselves to such class and dignity. He knows firsthand how serving in the military can impact one's life.

Commissioner Casciato added that his daughter was a product of an ROTC program. She graduated from West Point. The program she was affiliated with had 32 academy appointments. He envisioned seeing the program in Transylvania County grow. He shared that the Veterans History Museum and the Toni Lee Casciato Memorial Scholarship award a \$1,000 scholarship to a cadet each year to help them further their education or other pursuits. Commissioner Casciato urged everyone to support the MCJROTC program by attending the pancake breakfast fundraiser on May 11. He thanked Col. Blankenship and Sgt. Maj. Oufnac for all they do.

Chairman Chappell stated that the Board of Education has called a special meeting for 6:00 p.m. this evening. Following the adjournment of this meeting, he intends to hand-deliver a letter stating the action taken by the Board of Commissioners at this meeting. He read aloud the letter to include it as part of the official record. It read:

March 11, 2024

Mr. Richard Kimsey Jackson  
Chairman, Transylvania County Board of Education  
225 Rosenwald Lane  
Brevard, NC 28712

Dear Mr. Jackson:

The Education Capital Work Group was an endeavor that required both of our boards to commit to a collaborative process placing the interest of our community as the central focus of our next steps to fix our schools together. We tasked our organizational leaders- Superintendent Dr. Lisa Fletcher and County

Manager Jaime Laughter to represent us on the work group. Last Monday we were jointly presented with a plan endorsed by our staff that was well thought out, clear and that addresses necessary improvements for all of our schools with funds that we have the ability to access this year if we take the next step as quickly as possible. Our staff stood alongside two retired peers- retired County Manager Steve Wyatt and retired Superintendent Dr. Bo Caldwell in a unified presentation based on a professional building assessment that presented clear steps starting with investment in our schools to protect the investments we have made together as a community with the school bonds already approved by citizens.

Mr. Wyatt and Mr. Caldwell shared valuable insight from their success in Henderson County that emphasized how important continued collaboration is and that working in silos separately does not work. They challenged the two boards to step forward together with Step 1 Investment establishing a new and improved way of assuring our school facilities are maintained. The list of projects and the next steps are clear. We must act now to fix leaking roofs, improve school safety, and repair deteriorating exteriors and aging mechanical systems to protect the school buildings our community built. We know that you join us in the desire to get those improvements started to support our teachers and our students in those buildings.

Commissioners entered into this process with a commitment to the Board of Education to see this process through in the spirit of collaboration and we know you did the same. We recognize that time is of the essence and our Superintendent and County Manager along with the work group have made it clear that we can start these improvements by the end of this year. That timeline hinges on joining together and committing to the next steps outlined by the work group for Step 1. There is no time to waste.

Tonight, the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners unanimously voted to empower our staff to move forward as quickly as possible with Step 1 Investment as recommended in detail by the work group as soon as the Board of Education votes the same. We have taken this step with faith in the work that we commissioned together, and we are ready to take the next step as two boards- together.

Sincerely,

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

#### ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, **Commissioner McCall moved to adjourn the meeting at 5:30 p.m., seconded by Commissioner Casciato and unanimously carried.**

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Jason R. Chappell, Chairman  
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

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Trisha M. Hogan, Clerk to the Board