

**MINUTES  
TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
JUNE 5, 2023 – REGULAR MEETING**

The Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County met in a regular meeting on Monday, June 5, 2023 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 John Kubis, and Clerk to the Board Trisha Hogan.

Media: *Brevard Newsbeat* – Dan DeWitt  
*The Transylvania Times* – Jon Rich

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 4:02 p.m.

**WELCOME**

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

**PUBLIC HEARING**

FY 2024 TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY BUDGET

The Manager presented an overview of the FY 2024 recommended budget. Below is a summary of the information she presented:

Summary

- The Manager presented FY 24 Recommended Budget on May 8
  - After the presentation, the Commissioners provided direction for the workshop on May 22
- During the May 22 Budget Workshop, the Commissioners reached a consensus on major budget items and directed staff to schedule public hearings for both June meetings

Highlights for FY 24

- The property tax base increased by 2%
- A total budget of \$78,063,791 (this figure changed slightly following the Budget Workshop)
  - 0.224 per \$100 to support the general operating expenditures of Transylvania County Schools
  - 0.09 per \$100 to finance the general operating expenditures of the Sheriff's Office, including the mandated jail
  - 0.24 per \$100 for all remaining County departments
  - 0.031 per \$100 to support the County's \$2.4 million annual capital improvement plan

- 0.03 per \$100 to support the County's network of partner fire and rescue agencies which supplements these agencies in addition to the service district rates
- 0.017 per \$100 to support the County's Solid Waste Fund which cannot support its operations through user fees
- The budget prioritizes maintaining staff levels/existing benefits and tries to combat economic inflationary impacts such as fuel
- Baseline annual capital proposed:
  - Includes five patrol car equivalents with equipment for Sheriff's Office
  - Computer replacements on a five-year cycle; evaluating system security
  - Planned IT infrastructure upgrades
  - Communications Tower replacement
  - Ambulance replacement
- The focus is on existing personnel and trying to maintain existing service levels, especially in public safety
  - No new personnel
  - Included the following reclassifications:
    - In DSS to allow front desk staff to assist in updating information in NCFAST due to increased Medicaid paperwork expected
    - Reclassify Sheriff's Office Narcotics Deputy to Investigator
  - Several planned retirement overlaps
- \$1.2 million for courthouse planning assigned fund balance fund
- \$1.2 million for pay-as-you-go funds for Economic Development, Emergency Services, and Parks and Recreation (modified during Budget Workshop)
- \$6.2 million for bond payments in Education Capital Fund (modified during Budget Workshop)
- Continues to support Community Center Wi-Fi and Capital Improvement Program
- Includes Rosman pool support
  - \$55,000 for one year- 10% increase)
- Continues leachate agreement with the Town of Rosman
  - \$50,000 annual fee+ 2.5 cents per gallon leachate
- Nonprofit funding requests were up, but the review committee recommended changes while staying within the same budget levels from the prior year
- Pursuing grant funding to assist in unforeseen radio needs and communications upgrades

The following projects will utilize separate capital funds, but will impact workload this fiscal year:

- Completion of the US 64 water and sewer line this fall
- EMS Base construction completion in 2024
- Sylvan Valley Industrial Building Phase 2 construction
- Kick off the Courthouse design process

#### Revenue Projections

- Property Tax is the primary revenue
- Local option sales tax designated for school funding

#### Expenditures

- The majority of the budget is for K-12 public school support – capital and operational
- The next two biggest expenditures are Public Safety and Health and Human Services
- These three expenditures are mandated by the State
- Personnel are the highest cost in providing County services; recommended budget shows a slight increase (when looking at expenditures by function)

- Education funding is the second largest expenditure (when looking at expenditures by function)

#### Education Funding

- 2% increase in operating expense
- \$6 million into Education Capital Fund
- \$7.9 million total County funding dedicated to capital
  - Education Capital Reserve
  - Appropriations for FF&E, vehicles, and projects
- Blue Ridge Community College recommended local operational funding at \$655,321 and capital funding at \$161,200

*Note: Education budgets are submitted with detail; however, once operational funding is approved those agencies may adjust how they spend funds without the Commissioners' approval based on their priorities.*

#### Fire Department Budgets

- The recommendation is to set the district rates at 5.5 cents/\$100 valuation and supplement the remainder of the budgets from the General Fund property tax
  - This will require an increase in the portion of the tax rate that is dedicated to fire departments of approximately 0.43 cents
- The second year of subcommittee review of requests and making recommendations

#### Solid Waste Enterprise Fund Summary

- Balanced budget of \$3,948,851, a decrease from FY 23 of \$662,000
  - Fee revenue: \$2,651,741
    - Sticker fees are down 10% and staff have identified two cases of fraud that have been processed through the judicial system
    - Analyzing the convenience center sites to provide more detailed information about that business function for the Commissioners
- The existing revenue mix of fee adjustments from last year and the operational supplement from the general fund should be sufficient for a few more years, but there is currently not enough funding to save for expansions
- Next year's expansion of the new cell will require cash from the general fund balance (ARPA revenue replacement with other savings) totaling \$5.8 million

#### General Fund Summary

- Balanced budget of \$78,179,791
- Continuing the current level of services
- No new personnel, two reclassifications
- No tax rate increase; tax rate to remain at \$0.6033/\$100 valuation
  - 16% to fire and rescue agencies
  - 56% Public Safety salaries
  - 28% remaining salary study: \$1.59 million
  - Additional revenue is 72% public safety and necessary to ensure services continue without interruption

#### Modifications from the Recommended Budget

- Received information on premiums for worker's compensation premiums reflecting an increase of approximately \$88,000; statewide trend

- The modified Sheriff's Office budget to shift between line items to better meet its needs; no increase, but shifted line items dollars at the request of Sheriff Owenby
- An update on the EMS financing timeline indicated that a payment may become due in June FY 24 instead of the first months of FY 25
- Capital planning revisions to offset operational pressure in the budget and avoid a tax increase that was initially proposed with the recommended budget
  - Education Capital Fund cash distribution changed from \$6.2 million for FY 24 to \$6 million
    - The delay in the timeline for original projected bond projects has allowed the accumulation of cash in the Education Capital Fund. FY 23 will end with approximately \$24 million in cash in the fund
    - Articles 40 and 42 are partially restricted to education capital per statute and are projected to be \$3.1 million collected next year. \$1.2 million would go directly into the education capital reserve to make up part of the \$6 million
  - Courthouse distribution reduced to \$900,000 for FY 24 for a balance as of June 30 of \$5.8 million which is sufficient to move forward with the design
  - Parks and Recreation reduced to \$100,000 for FY 24 for a balance as of June 30 of \$1.4 million
  - Emergency Services and Economic Development remain at \$400,000 each; separate from Sylvan Valley lease payments and funding for the Transylvania Economic Alliance that are included in the budget

#### Modified Budget Proposal Post Workshop

- The total sum of annual appropriation is \$84.7 million
- Decrease in the General Fund from the recommended budget to \$77 million
- Other Funds include Self-Insurance Fund, Fire District Tax Funds, etc.

This concluded the Manager's overview of the FY 2024 Budget.

#### **Chairman Chappell declared the public hearing open at 4:13 p.m.**

*The following comments represent the speaker's point of view or opinion.*

Bruce Gleasman: Mr. Gleasman offered the Commissioners a solution to save the County \$40 million on a new courthouse. He suggested the Commissioners purchase the vacant bank building at the corner of Caldwell and Main Streets for \$1.75 million. It contains 26,000 sq. ft. on 1.1 acres with parking inside city limits. He suggested the Commissioners invest \$3 million to upgrade the building and thus have a courthouse for approximately \$5 million. Mr. Gleasman also commented on the compensation study. He cited data from the NC Department of Commerce website on the number of workers in both the private sector and government. He asked if the Board made any cost comparisons to the private sector when evaluating pay. He asked the Board to consider not giving pay increases to any employee that is considered a group leader or above. He felt that lower paid employees needed the money more than higher paid employees. Lastly, Mr. Gleasman recently suggested in a meeting that the Board consider giving seniors a tax break. He conducted research at the Tax Office and learned there are certain property tax breaks for qualifying seniors. He felt that the County should promote this information better. He also advocated for having a senior garbage day for seniors to dispose of their garbage for free on that day.

There were no further comments. **Chairman Chappell declared the public hearing closed at 4:18 p.m.**

The Board of Commissioners will hold a second public hearing on June 26 and consider approval of the budget at that time.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

There were no public comments.

### **AGENDA MODIFICATIONS**

There were no agenda modifications.

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

### **CONSENT AGENDA**

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

The following items were approved:

#### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Board of Commissioners met on May 22, 2023 for a regular meeting and budget workshop. The Board also met in a closed session and sealed the minutes (3). The closed session minutes will come forth for approval later. The Board approved the May 22, 2023 minutes as submitted.

#### REVIEW OF TCTDA CONTRACT WITH MARKET CONNECTIONS FOR MARKETING SERVICES

On April 27, 2023, the TCTDA approved a marketing plan for FY 24. The plan includes monthly marketing services from Market Connections. Subsequently, Market Connections provided a contract for marketing services covering the upcoming fiscal year. County Attorney Patrick Scott reviewed the contract and made minor adjustments to it. Market Connections approved the revised version of the contract. The TCTDA approved the contract on May 25, 2023. The Board of Commissioners must conduct a review of TCTDA contracts of \$50,000 or more as described in Transylvania County Resolution 35 - 2021 "to ensure the expenditure complies with the fiscal control laws, County policy, and other expenditure limitations imposed on the TDA". The Board approved the expenditure as having met the review requirement.

#### REVIEW OF TCTDA CONTRACT WITH MEDIA ONE FOR DIGITAL MARKETING

On April 27, 2023, the TCTDA approved a marketing plan for FY 24. The plan includes digital marketing services from Media One. Subsequently, Media One provided a contract for digital marketing services covering the upcoming fiscal year. County Attorney Patrick Scott reviewed the contract and gave legal approval of the agreement. The TCTDA approved the contract on May 25, 2023. The Board of Commissioners must conduct a review of TCTDA contracts of \$50,000 or more as described in Transylvania County Resolution 35 - 2021 "to ensure the expenditure complies with the fiscal control laws, County policy, and other expenditure limitations imposed on the TDA". The Board approved the expenditure as having met the review requirement.

#### OUT-OF-STATE TRAVEL REQUEST

DSS Attorney James Taylor requested to attend the National Association of Counsel for Children's Child Welfare Law Conference from August 9-12 in Minneapolis, MN. He has included funds in his FY 2024 budget to cover registration, lodging, and travel expenses. The NACC is a nonprofit professional membership

and advocacy organization dedicated to advancing justice for children, youth, and families. The NACC allows its members to seek credentialing as a child welfare specialist which Mr. Taylor plans to pursue. The Board approved the out-of-state travel request for DSS Attorney James Taylor to attend the NACC Child Welfare Law Conference in Minneapolis, MN August 9-12.

#### RESOLUTION FOR AUTHORIZED INDIVIDUALS TO CONDUCT BUSINESS WITH FIRST CITIZENS BANK

Under N.C.G.S. § 159-31, local government units in North Carolina must select depositories to act as the official depository for financial transactions that are the result of county business. First Citizens Bank, in its capacity as the primary recipient of County deposits, requires that local government boards (County Commissions and City Councils) in North Carolina pass resolutions officially identifying which members of County staff are authorized to conduct business with First Citizens Bank on behalf of a local government unit. With the recent resignation of Finance Director Jonathan Griffin, the resolution previously provided to First Citizens Bank, Inc. no longer accurately represents authorized individuals for Transylvania County. The resolution corrects that by identifying which individuals are authorized to discuss the investment of idle funds held by Transylvania County in bank accounts held by First Citizens Bank consistent with N.C.G.S. § 159-30. The Board approved a resolution identifying County Manager Jaime Laughter as the authorized official to conduct business with First Citizens Bank.

#### S.L. 2021-180 FUNDING ALLOCATION FORM UPDATE

The North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality set a deadline of June 30, 2023 to file for funds allocated in S.L. 2021-180. The Commissioners previously approved \$4,306,463 and will need to file for the remaining \$2,693,537. As initially indicated at the April 25, 2022 Board of Commissioners' meeting, staff have been working with the consulting engineer to identify water and wastewater projects that will make an impact locally and that can be completed within the established deadline for the funds to be spent and certified as of December 31, 2025. Completion of the form will secure the funding but can be amended as the scope of work progresses. Upon completion, staff will submit the funding allocation form and update the water and sewer project fund for signature. The Board approved the form and authorized the County Manager or the Chairman to sign it and directed staff to update the funding allocation in the Water and Sewer Project Fund.

#### TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

The Transportation Advisory Committee provided a brief report of their activities over the past year. No action was necessary other than to receive the report. The Board received the report as submitted.

#### PLANNING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT

The Planning Board provided an annual report to the Board of its activities over the past year. No action was necessary other than to receive the report. The Board received the report as submitted.

### **PRESENTATIONS/RECOGNITIONS**

#### RECOGNITION OF CITIZEN ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS

In July 2015, the Board of Commissioners implemented a recognition program to express their appreciation to citizens who volunteer their time and expertise on the County's many citizen advisory councils. The Board recognizes citizen advisory council members on a semi-annual basis. The Commissioners recognized citizens who came off a citizen advisory council during the period January 1, 2023 through June 30, 2023. The Chairman presented each person in attendance with a certificate of appreciation and an insulated mug with the County logo. The Clerk extended the invitation to both the June meetings and the July meeting. The Clerk will mail certificates to those citizen volunteers that are unable to attend. (There may be others added once the May and June appointments are finalized.)

Following the presentation of the certificates of appreciation and mugs, the Chairman encouraged citizens to consider applying to serve on a board or committee. Citizens may visit the County website or contact the Clerk to the Board for more information.

## A. Recognition of Citizen Advisory Council Members

Lauren Wise	Planning Board/Board of Adjustment
Beecher Allison, Jr.	Planning Board/Board of Adjustment
Karen Gleasman	Planning Board/Board of Adjustment
Aaron Bland	Transylvania Natural Resources Council
James Aaron Siniard	Agricultural Advisory Board
Kelvin Phillips	Board of Health
Dr. Anthony Fisher	Board of Health'
Dr. Jim Lyday	Board of Health
Devin Gentry	Agricultural Advisory Board
Melanie Spreen	Joint Historic Preservation Commission
Andrew VonCanon	Library Board of Trustees
James Cody Owen	Parks and Recreation Commission
Scott Sullivan	Planning Board/Board of Adjustment
Dr. Abraham Pallas	Mountain Area Workforce Development Board

### VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE ANNUAL REPORT

Veterans Service Officer Frank Pearsall gives an annual report to the Board of Commissioners regarding the distribution of VA expenditures in Transylvania County. Below is a summary of his report:

VA benefits to Transylvania County increased by \$4 million from FY 21 to FY 22. He stated the amount of VA expenditures rises each year likely due to the rising number of disability claims he files. The 2010 Census indicated there are 3,617 veterans in Transylvania County. However, the VA's latest figures indicate the number to 2,813. To him, that means Transylvania County has lost more than 800 veterans. Mr. Pearsall did not agree with these figures and was not able to get any resolution from the VA.

Mr. Pearsall also shared that last year the government signed the PACT Act which increased the number of presumptive injuries, illnesses, and diseases for which veterans can receive benefits. Veterans who were previously denied claims can reapply under the updated Act and receive backpay until August 2022. He intends to issue a press release to the local newspaper about the update.

Otherwise, Mr. Pearsall stated his office remains busy and all is going well. He announced that his office is open all day on Tuesdays and Thursdays for walk-ins. He will see appointments Monday, Wednesday, and Friday but will see walk-ins on those days as well.

Commissioner Chapman thanked Mr. Pearsall for all he does on behalf of the veterans of this community. He also thanked him for participating in the recent NCACC video production on veterans.

Chairman Chappell also thanked Mr. Pearsall for the amazing service he provides for the veterans, including his family members. His comments were met by applause from the audience.

## APPOINTMENTS

### DESIGNATION OF DEE DEE PERKINS AS TCTDA CHAIR IN 2024

Section 7, Part A, of Transylvania County Resolution #35-2021, which establishes the TCTDA, indicates, "The Authority shall annually, in December of each year, submit a nomination for Chair to the Board of County Commissioners. The Board of Commissioners shall designate a Chair for the Authority". At a meeting of County officials and staff and TCTDA staff, TCTDA Executive Director Clark Lovelace and TCTDA Chair Layton Parker noted that a December appointment of a Chair presents challenges for various reasons, including the need to have the Chair appointed early enough to work with and learn the ropes from the current Chair. They asked if the TCTDA could submit their nomination earlier and secure an appointment and were permitted to do so.

On May 25, 2023, TCTDA discussed the Chair position for 2024 and unanimously approved the nomination of Dee Dee Perkins as TCTDA Chair for 2024. The TCTDA has expressed the need to have a Chair who understands the complicated inner workings of the TCTDA, as well as the key strategies and objectives of the organization, and thus the members felt that Dee Dee Perkins was an ideal fit.

**Commissioner McCall moved to designate Dee Dee Perkins as Chair of the TCTDA Board of Directors for 2024, seconded by Commissioner Chapman and unanimously approved.**

### COMMUNITY CHILD PROTECTION TEAM

Teesie Stanton's term on the Community Child Protection Team expires on June 30, 2023. She is eligible and willing to serve another term. The members of the Community Child Protection Team serve in very specific roles per statutes and serves jointly with the Child Fatality Prevention Team. The Board of Commissioners has been given the authority to make some of the appointments for both teams.

**Commissioner McCall moved to reappoint Teesie Stanton to the Community Child Protection Team, seconded by Commissioner Dalton and unanimously approved.**

### REGIONAL COUNCIL ON AGING

Kathe Harris' term on the Regional Council on Aging expires at the end of June. She is eligible and willing to serve another term. LeeAnne Tucker with the Land of Sky's Area Agency on Aging recommended her reappointment. There are two vacancies on this council. The Clerk to the Board will continue working with the Land of Sky Regional Council to recruit applicants.

**Commissioner Chapman moved to reappoint Kathe Harris to the Regional Council on Aging, seconded by Commissioner Casciato and unanimously approved.**

### JURY COMMISSION

Artie Wilson's term on the Jury Commission expires at the end of June. He is eligible and willing to serve another term. Clerk of Superior Court Kristi Brown recommended his reappointment.

**Commissioner McCall moved to reappoint Artie Wilson to the Jury Commission, seconded by Commissioner Chapman and unanimously approved.**

### SOCIAL SERVICES BOARD

Jessica Shanor serves as the Commissioners' Appointee to the Social Services Board. Her term expires on June 30. She is eligible and willing to serve another term. At their April meeting, the Social Services Board voted to recommend the Board of Commissioners reappoint Ms. Shanor to another term.



**Commissioner McCall moved to reappoint Jessica Shanor to the Social Services Board, seconded by Commissioner Dalton and unanimously approved.**

JUVENILE CRIME PREVENTION COUNCIL

The Finance Director serves as the County Manager's Designee on the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council. The Finance Director also serves as the facilitator of the JCPC meetings and ensures the appropriate reporting to the State occurs so that programs may receive funding. With the recent resignation of the Finance Director, staff requested the Board appoint a temporary designee to facilitate a special called meeting of the JCPC on June 6. Staff will bring forth appointments to the full JCPC on June 26.

**Commissioner McCall moved to appoint Purchasing Agent Jennifer Galloway and NCACC Fellow Liam McKissock as the backup to replace Finance Director Jonathan Griffin as the County Manager's Designee, seconded by Commissioner Dalton and unanimously approved.**

**NEW BUSINESS**

AGREEMENTS WITH THE TOWN OF ROSMAN FOR CHAMPION PARK AND POOL AND LEACHATE DISPOSAL

The Manager presented this item to the Board. In 2015, the Commissioners approved a contract with the Town of Rosman for the Solid Waste Department to begin disposing of leachate into the Town's treatment system. The agreement has been beneficial to both the County and the Town and has been renewed several times since. The FY 24 Budget includes funding for a proposed agreement by the Town of Rosman that would require an annual July payment of \$50,000 and then charge a gallon rate of 2.5 cents for disposal.

In 2016, the Commissioners signed Champion Park and Pool over to the Town of Rosman for ownership and operation. The Town was eligible for grant funding that aided in improvements to the pool at that time. The agreement provided for County funds annually at \$50,000 for three years. The agreement has since been renewed in annual increments with the budget. The FY 24 Budget includes funding for one year at \$55,000 with approval of the Town's proposed agreement. Both parties have agreed to discuss longer-term plans for the facility over the next year.

Staff recommended the Board approve both agreements and authorize the Chairman or the Manager to sign on behalf of the County pending the County Attorney's agreement on insurance feedback from the Town.

Chairman Chappell stated that in meetings with Town officials, he assured them the County would have ongoing discussions over the next year about future operations.

Commissioner McCall requested a modification to the Champion Park and Pool agreement to include reporting requirements so that the Board has a full accounting of the operational costs when considering future year's budgets. The Manager will modify the agreement to include the reporting requirements.

Commissioner Chapman stated that Champion Pool is a major asset to Rosman and the surrounding area, so it was important to ensure the facility remains operational.

Commissioner Dalton pointed out that allowing the Town of Rosman to have ownership of the pool allows them to apply for grants to make improvements. They need playground equipment and other safety features.

Commissioner Casciato noted that the Town of Rosman is installing handicapped river access which is very beneficial to the community.

**Commissioner Dalton moved to approve both agreements and authorized the Chair or the County Manager to sign on behalf of the County pending attorney agreement on insurance feedback from the Town and modifying the Champion Park and Pool agreement to include reporting requirements, seconded by Commissioner McCall and approved unanimously.**

#### MANAGER'S REPORT

The Manager reported the following:

- Employers: Register now for the “\$17 - \$20/Hour & Beyond Job Fair” on Thursday, June 29 from 11:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. at the WNC Ag Center in Fletcher. There is no cost to participate, and all employer booths will be inside the air-conditioned Expo Building. Job seekers are encouraged to register but it is not required. Everyone is welcome to attend.
- Kudos to Nathanael Carver, IT Director, on his interim Finance Director appointment. The finance team is working together to transition the finance department as we prepare for the year-end, a new budget, and the audit process.  
Kudos from Indiana resident Rick Underhill to the 911 operators, dispatchers, rescue responders, police, paramedics (Scott and Autumn), and TRH medical staff.
- Staff went out for bids for financing the EMS base and received four bank proposals (two for each bank). Staff are looking at a 15-year loan at 3.56% which is an excellent rate and a testament to the County’s financial management. Staff will be moving forward with the Local Government Commission in July and close on July 13.
- NC Association of County Commissioners kicked off a new video series to show the ins and outs of county functions and to illustrate the responsibilities, processes, and hard-working people that make up county governments operate in North Carolina. The first episode was shared in February, and it gave a general overview of county government. The Manager shared the second episode which gave an overview of county finance functions.
  - NCACC also produced a video documentary on veterans which will feature familiar faces from Transylvania County and in future videos featuring County government in North Carolina. Hopefully, these videos will help our citizens learn more about County government processes.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

*The public comments represent the speaker’s point of view or opinion.*

Craig Wilson: Mr. Wilson stated that he was unaware whether a firm had been selected to conduct the school maintenance reserve study. He was curious about the status and the process of that project. With the School System hiring a new superintendent and their finance officer leaving as well, it did not appear to him that this project was moving along. Mr. Wilson also stated that the Board’s decision to go out for RFQs on the courthouse design led him to believe the County was not going to retain the services of the previous architect that conducted the initial phases of the work. He was curious about the status of the design work on the courthouse project as well. He asked if the Manager would give an update.

#### **COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS**

Commissioner Chapman shared that he recently began receiving preprinted postcards from many citizens. The postcards stated, “You have our money, fix our schools.” He was unsure if they were referring to the bond projects or the annual allocation of funds to the School System. Nonetheless, he said there seems to be a misconception about the role of the Board of Commissioners. He asked the media to consider writing an article on the history of the bond and the current status so the Board of Commissioners can avoid receiving

accusatory mail. Commissioner Chapman shared that Transylvania County (\$3,340 per student) ranks 4<sup>th</sup> in the State in terms of local appropriation for education behind Orange, Dare, and Durham Counties. The North Carolina average for all 100 counties is \$1,879. Transylvania County ranks 26<sup>th</sup> in teacher supplements with \$4,205 for each teacher. Transylvania County has the 32<sup>nd</sup> lowest tax rate in the State out of 100 counties. Concerning the school bond projects, Commissioner Chapman stated that the Board of Commissioners has not received any detailed drawings or bids which are needed for the County to issue the bond. Until the Board gets that information, the County cannot move forward with issuing the bond. Commissioner Chapman pointed out that the bond referendum that was put before the citizens only addressed three schools, but nine schools in the County are all in need of repair. The \$68 million would go a long way toward fixing many of those schools. He supported the maintenance reserve study process that entails professionals conducting a thorough review of all the schools to determine the needs, then the Board of Education can prioritize those needs. Commissioner Chapman stressed that the County Commissioners have no responsibility for the maintenance of the schools. The Board of Commissioners is only responsible for providing the funding. He stressed that the Board of Commissioners is not the entity that is holding up the bond projects.

Commissioner McCall stated that each year during the budget deliberations, people come before the Board with the perfect solution on how the County can save money and cut costs. While the public does provide good ideas, oftentimes, the information lacks facts to go with their solutions. She assured the public that the Board has explored every possibility for courthouse locations, including empty buildings. Regarding the property tax breaks for seniors, the Board of Commissioners has made this information available in open meetings and on social media. She stressed that none of this information is new, and the Board continues to do its job. Commissioner McCall stated she will not apologize for the vote to implement the compensation study. She said the County is not responsible for private sector salaries, but they are responsible for setting the salaries for the hard-working employees of the Transylvania County government. Commissioner McCall also addressed the postcards she received urging the Commissioners to fix the schools. She assured the public she had not taken anyone's money. The money that has been collected on the bond is in an educational capital fund for payments once the bonds are issued. Commissioner McCall stressed that the Board of Commissioners is not refusing to fix the schools. The Board of Commissioners has offered to take over maintenance, project management assistance, etc., and each time the Board has been turned down. Transylvania County has allocated \$30 million for the School System over the last six fiscal years. There remain projects approved since FY 2020 that have yet to be completed. She said she would love to see the schools repaired.

Commissioner Casciato shared that he also received several postcards. He thanked everyone who attended the Memorial Day ceremony. The event drew in a good crowd. The speakers and Honor Guard did a fantastic job. There was also a wreath-laying ceremony to honor those who are no longer with us and fought for this nation. He recognized the American Legion, the VFW, and the Veterans History Museum of the Carolinas for hosting the event. He hopes the parade will return next year.

Commissioner Dalton thanked the Board for allowing him to read the proclamation at the Memorial Day ceremony. He was honored and humbled to share the stage with many of our veterans and to listen to the names being read of the Transylvania County veterans who perished over the last year. Commissioner Dalton shared there are over 80,000 men and women POW/MIA who never came home, and he said it is important that we never forget them either.

Chairman Chappell echoed the comments made about the postcards. He received approximately 19 preprinted postcards organized by various groups with no disclaimers on the postcards, which is likely a violation. He said the Manager's recommended budget includes monies for the bond payments. This County has allocated tremendous resources to Transylvania County Schools for which he has strongly advocated. With a child enrolled in Transylvania County Schools, he stated that education is very important to him. He also has many family members serving in the School System. Chairman Chappell shared that at the next meeting, the Board will vote on the RFP and share additional information on the school committee and the maintenance reserve

study. He shared that some of the progress is being held up due to the Board of Education's directive to wait until the students were out for the summer. The maintenance reserve study will determine what is needed in all the schools to help both the Board of Commissioners and the Board of Education to plan for the future. The Board of Commissioners has a fiduciary responsibility to use taxpayers' funds wisely which should be expected by the public. Chairman Chappell also reiterated Commissioner McCall's comments that the Board has evaluated numerous sites for courthouse space, including vacant sites. Many of the vacant sites either are not available or for sale, under contract, or not suitable for a courthouse. The Board of Commissioners and staff have done their due diligence. Lastly, Chairman Chappell thanked his fellow Commissioners for their dedication to their jobs and for serving each citizen in Transylvania County.

#### ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, **Chairman Chappell moved to adjourn the meeting at 5:17 p.m., seconded by Commissioner Chappell 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