

**MINUTES
TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MARCH 24, 2025 – REGULAR MEETING**

The Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County met in a regular meeting on Monday, March 24, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. in the Multipurpose Chambers at the County Administration Building, located at 101 S. Broad Street, Brevard, NC.

Commissioners present were Larry Chapman, Chairman Jason Chappell, Vice-Chairman Jake Dalton, Teresa McCall, and Chase McKelvey. Assistant County Manager David McNeill, County Attorney Megan Silver, and Clerk to the Board Trisha Hogan were also present. County Manager Jaime Laughter joined via Zoom from Washington, DC, where she was scheduled to testify before a congressional subcommittee on the County's experience with FEMA following Hurricane Helene.

Media: Laura Denon – *The Transylvania Times*

Approximately 40 people attended.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Jason Chappell presiding declared a quorum was present and called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

WELCOME

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

Lisa Rodke: Ms. Rodke criticized the Board for not supporting the Fairhaven affordable housing project, stating the county has a serious housing shortage. She argued that projects like Fairhaven help residents stay in the community. She urged the Board to work with the City of Brevard to secure grant funding instead of outright rejecting funding requests.

Ellen O'Brien: Ms. O'Brien, a Connestee Falls resident, spoke in favor of affordable housing. She drew a connection between the housing crisis and the damage caused by Hurricane Helene, noting that many affected residents were those with the fewest resources. She urged the Board to prioritize solutions that help local workers stay in the county.

AGENDA MODIFICATIONS

There were no agenda modifications.

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

CONSENT AGENDA

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

The Board approved the following:

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Board approved the minutes from the March 10, 2025, regular meeting as submitted.

FEBRUARY 2025 DISCOVERY, RELEASE & MONTHLY SETTLEMENT REPORT

In accordance with N.C.G.S. § 105-312(b) and N.C.G.S. § 105-381(b), the Board approved the February 2025 Discovery, Release, and Monthly Settlement Report as submitted by the Tax Administrator. Tax dollars released totaled \$1,003.76 and refunds amounted to \$2,165.17.

OUT-OF-STATE TRAVEL REQUEST - SHERIFF'S OFFICE

The Board approved the Sheriff's request to send 10 School Resource Officers to the National SRO Conference in Las Vegas from July 28 to August 1. The total cost of \$14,000 will be split between the FY 2025 and FY 2026 budgets, with \$9,000 from the FY 2025 SRO training budget. The Sheriff noted this conference offers the best training opportunity available.

PROCLAMATION - CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

The Board approved Proclamation #08-2025 declaring April 2025 as Child Abuse Prevention Month to raise awareness and support efforts in protecting children and promoting family well-being.

Proclamation #08 - 2025 Child Abuse Prevention Month

WHEREAS, every family and child are filled with tremendous promise, and we all have a collective responsibility to prevent Adverse Childhood Experiences, foster the potential of every child, and promote positive childhood experiences; and

WHEREAS, positive childhood experiences – such as loving caregivers and safe, stable, and nurturing relationships – play a vital role in helping children thrive by mitigating trauma and the negative impact of adverse childhood experiences; and

WHEREAS, families who receive the support they need before a crisis occurs are better equipped to provide safe, healthy, and nurturing environments, leading to children who are safer, healthier, and more hopeful about their futures; and

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

WHEREAS, primary prevention of child abuse and neglect can reduce the lifetime economic burden associated with child maltreatment; and

WHEREAS, strengthening families through access to concrete economic, social, and community-based supports reduces the likelihood of abuse and neglect and ensures children have the foundation for lifelong well-being; and

WHEREAS, effective child abuse prevention activities succeed because of the partnerships created between child welfare professionals, education, health, community- and faith-based organizations, businesses, law enforcement agencies, and families; and

WHEREAS, communities must make every effort to promote programs and activities that create strong and thriving children and families; and

WHEREAS, we acknowledge that we must work together as a community to increase awareness about child abuse and contribute to promoting the social and emotional well-being of children and families in a safe, stable, and nurturing environment; and

WHEREAS, investments in prevention initiatives – such as home visiting programs, family strengthening policies, economic supports, and community-based child abuse prevention efforts – are essential to building safer, healthier communities for children and families; and

WHEREAS, prevention remains the best defense for our children and families.

THEREFORE, the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners does hereby proclaim **APRIL 2025** as **CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH** in Transylvania County. Together, we can create a state where every child can grow up happy, healthy, and safe with hope for their future.

This the 24th day of March 2025.

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

PROCLAMATION - NATIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH WEEK

The Board approved Proclamation #09-2025 recognizing National Public Health Week expressing their appreciation to Transylvania Public Health for their dedication to keeping the community safe, especially during the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Proclamation #09-2025 National Public Health Week

WHEREAS, the week of April 7, 2025, is National Public Health Week, and the theme is “It Starts Here” highlighting the importance of making a difference in our home, community and state; and

WHEREAS, this year is the 30th anniversary of celebrating National Public Health Week, and in the past 30 years significant strides have been made in public health; and

WHEREAS, public health organizations use National Public Health to educate public policymakers, public health professionals and the public on issues that are important to improving the health of the people of the United States; and

WHEREAS, public health professionals help communities prevent, prepare for, withstand and recover from the impact of a full range of health threats, ranging from infectious disease outbreaks to natural disaster preparedness; and

WHEREAS, efforts to adequately support public health and the prevention of disease and injury can continue to transform a health system focused on treating illness into a health system focused on preventing disease and injury and promoting wellness.

NOW, THEREFORE, the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners does hereby proclaim the week of April 7-13, 2025, as National Public Health Week in Transylvania County and calls upon its citizens to observe this week by helping our families, friends, neighbors, co-workers and leaders to recognize the contribution of public health in improving the health of the people of our state.

This the 24th day of March 2025.

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

PROCLAMATION - NATIONAL PUBLIC SAFETY TELECOMMUNICATORS WEEK

The Board approved Proclamation #10-2025 recognizing National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week from April 13-19, 2025, to honor the dedicated men and women of the Transylvania County 911 Communications Center. The Board expressed pride in their vital service to the community and their support of fellow emergency responders.

**Proclamation #10-2025
National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners declares the week of April 13-19, 2025, to be National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week in Transylvania County, in honor of the men and women whose diligence and professionalism keep our county and citizens safe.

This the 24th day of March 2025.

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

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES REQUEST TO OVERLAP A POSITION

Department of Social Services Director Amanda Vanderloef requested approval for an overlap period to ensure proper training for the Administrative Assistant II (AAII) position before the retirement of Monette Hopton in July 2025. Monette's role is critical to the agency's daily operations, encompassing responsibilities such as serving as the security officer, conducting employee orientations, managing records retention, providing clerical support, overseeing safety training, acting as the hearing officer, and

troubleshooting issues in NeoGov. Her extensive knowledge and contributions make a transition period essential for effectively training her successor. The cost would be covered by lapsed salaries. The DSS Board approved this request during its February 26, 2025, meeting. The Board of Commissioners approved the request as submitted.

RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF NORTH CAROLINA SENATE BILL 248

As District 1 Chair for the NC Association of Registers of Deeds (NCARD) and a member of its Executive and Legislative Committees, Transylvania County Register of Deeds Beth Landreth has been actively working toward a legislative goal to allow Registers of Deeds (RODs) to issue birth records for adoptees. This effort has resulted in the introduction of Senate Bill 248, which seeks to grant adoptees the same access to their birth records as all other North Carolina residents.

Currently, adoptees can only obtain a copy of their birth certificate through the NC Office of Vital Records in Raleigh, where wait times can extend for months. However, ROD offices statewide have implemented NCDAVE, a statewide vital records system, allowing them to process out-of-county birth certificate requests for individuals born after 1971—except adoptees. If SB 248 passes, adoptees' birth abstracts will also be available within this system, reducing delays and improving accessibility. Ms. Landreth intends to share a copy of the resolution with NCARD at their upcoming conference the week of March 24th. Henderson County recently passed a similar resolution in support of the bill, which was provided as a reference.

The Board of Commissioners approved the resolution in support of Senate Bill 248: "An Act to Make Access to New Birth Certificates for Persons Adopted Similar to Persons that are not Adopted."

RESOLUTION #11-2025 IN SUPPORT OF NORTH CAROLINA SENATE BILL 248

WHEREAS, the North Carolina Association of Registers of Deeds (NCARD) has diligently advocated for legislation to improve access to vital records for all North Carolina citizens, including those who have been adopted; and

WHEREAS, Senate Bill 248 has been introduced to authorize North Carolina Register of Deeds offices to issue birth records for adopted individuals, thereby expanding access to these records at the local level; and

WHEREAS, under current law, once adopted, the original birth certificate is returned to the state office, and all indexed information is removed from the county records. The adoptee cannot obtain a copy of their birth record from the county of birth, and they must request their birth certificate from the North Carolina Office of Vital Records (NCOVR) in Raleigh, often facing significant delays and administrative challenges; and

WHEREAS, Register of Deeds offices across the state have implemented the North Carolina Database Application for Vital Events (NCDAVE) system, providing access to statewide birth and death records, except in the case of adopted individuals; and

WHEREAS, the passage of Senate Bill 248 would alleviate burdens on adopted individuals by allowing them to obtain their birth records in a timely manner from their local Register of Deeds office, ensuring equitable access to vital records and improved customer service; and

WHEREAS, this legislative change would streamline government services, reduce wait times, and foster greater efficiency within the statewide vital records system; and

WHEREAS, the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners recognizes the importance of ensuring equitable access to vital records for all residents and supports the efforts of the North Carolina Association of Registers of Deeds to advance this critical legislation;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners hereby expresses its strong support for Senate Bill 248 and encourages its swift passage by the North Carolina General Assembly.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this resolution be forwarded to members of the North Carolina General Assembly representing Transylvania County, as well as to the North Carolina Association of Registers of Deeds.

Adopted this 24th day of March 2025.

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

DESIGNATION OF APPLICANT'S AGENT FOR FEMA PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Following the natural disaster declaration for Hurricane Helene, FEMA and NC Emergency Management (NCEM) established a web portal for agencies to register and submit expenses related to emergency response efforts. Transylvania County is eligible to apply for reimbursement through this portal. To proceed with the Public Assistance (PA) process, the Board of Commissioners must designate a Primary Agent and a Secondary Agent to coordinate with state and federal agencies. This formal authorization allows County Emergency Management staff to collaborate with FEMA and NCEM to recover some or all of the County's storm-related expenses.

The Board has approved similar designations for past emergencies, including the COVID-19 pandemic and Tropical Storm Fred. With each new disaster, the designation form is updated to reflect the assigned Disaster Number. For Hurricane Helene, the Board authorized Emergency Management Director Kevin Shook as the Primary Agent and Communications Director Cameron Sexton as the Secondary Agent. This approval ensures the County can effectively navigate the reimbursement process and maximize financial recovery.

PRESENTATIONS/RECOGNITIONS

FY 2026 BLUE RIDGE COMMUNITY COLLEGE CAPITAL AND OPERATING BUDGET REQUEST

Dr. Laura Leatherwood, President of Blue Ridge Community College (BRCC), presented the College's annual report and FY 2026 budget requests. She emphasized the College's commitment to workforce development, which is essential for community recovery and future economic growth following Hurricane Helene.

College Programs and Community Engagement

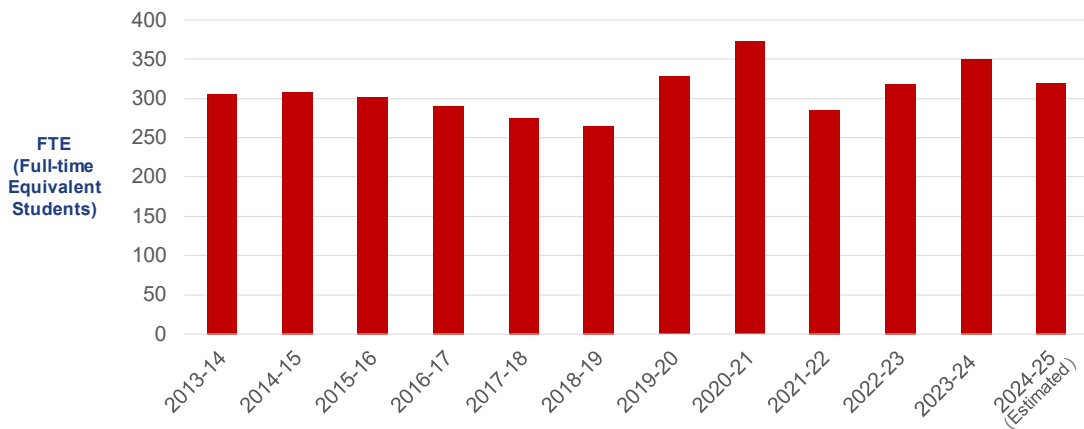
- BRCC offers degree programs in fields like nursing, automotive technology, criminal justice, human services, and welding. Additionally, the College provides 50 fully online programs.
- The newly established Respiratory Therapy program, launched in Fall 2024 in partnership with Southwestern Community College, is housed in Transylvania County and addresses the growing need for licensed respiratory therapists.

- BRCC continues to expand guaranteed admissions agreements with universities, now offering transfer pathways to Appalachian State, Gardner-Webb University, Lenoir-Rhyne University, and UNC Asheville, in addition to 150 other transfer agreements.
- The Small Business Center supported 62 businesses and provided training for 92 entrepreneurs in the past year, contributing to local economic development.
- BRCC partners with various local organizations, including the Rotary Clubs, Chamber of Commerce, Transylvania Economic Alliance, Sharing House, Transylvania County School Educational Foundation, Cindy Platt Boys and Girls Club, and Vision Transylvania, offering support for both students and the wider community.

Enrollment

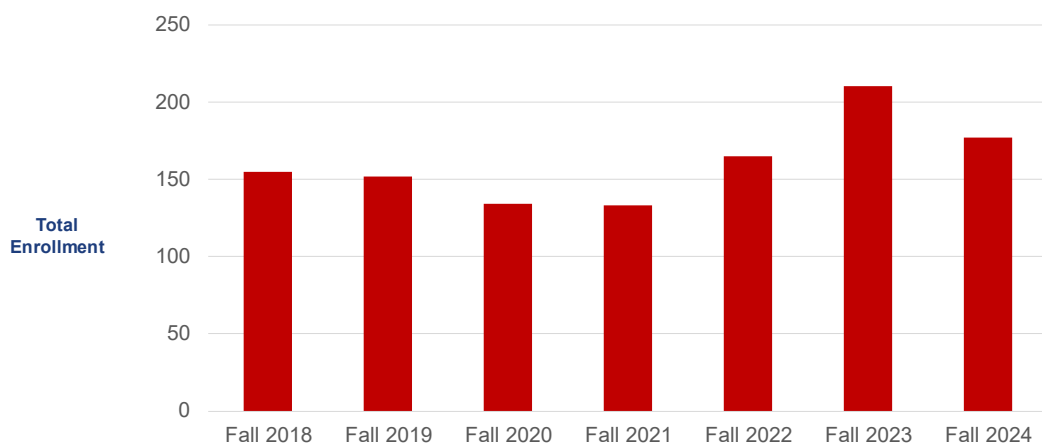
TCC | ENROLLMENT GROWTH (FTE)

19



TCC | HIGH SCHOOL (CCP) ENROLLMENT

20



Hurricane Helene Response

- The College served as a disaster relief hub in Transylvania and Henderson Counties, providing supplies and resources to the community.
- The College collaborated with partners to revive the Transylvania Tomorrow initiative to sustain small businesses with grant funding.
- While the Transylvania County campus experienced flooding, the Henderson County campus sustained severe infrastructure damage, impacting regional operations.
- The College also administered student emergency grants totaling \$1.7 million, with an additional \$1 million allocated for tuition assistance.

Future Plans and Requests

- BRCC is planning to expand programs in advanced manufacturing, engineering, biotechnology, construction trades, and public safety training to support the region's economic growth.
- Efforts are underway to strengthen partnerships with local fire departments and the Sheriff's Office for public safety training. EMT courses will also be introduced in both high schools and on campus. Anatomy and physiology courses will be offered giving students an early start to earning a nursing degree to help meet the growing demand for healthcare professionals.
- Dr. Leatherwood reiterated the need for additional facilities to accommodate program growth. The College is seeking long-term support for a new campus in Transylvania County.

FY 2026 Budget Requests

- Operating Expenses: \$731,920 to maintain and expand existing programs.
- Capital Expenditures: \$196,306, including \$75,000 for the facilities study recently approved by the Board.

Long-Term Vision for a New Campus

Dr. Leatherwood reiterated her long-term vision for a new campus to support program growth and better serve the community. She has submitted a special appropriation request to the General Assembly on behalf of Transylvania County and committed to continuing advocacy efforts during her visits to Raleigh.

She emphasized the importance of a comprehensive long-term plan and expressed appreciation for the Board's approval of the recent facilities assessment. Dr. Leatherwood hopes the results will guide discussions on the future of Blue Ridge Community College and its role in regional development.

Dr. Leatherwood concluded by expressing appreciation for the County's support and invited questions from the Board.

Discussion

Commissioner Chapman inquired about the previous study estimating the cost of a new campus at \$50 million and whether that estimate remains realistic. Dr. Leatherwood explained that no further assessments have been completed. She noted that while the initial request for the General Assembly was for \$40 million, she has since increased the request to \$50 million due to rising costs.

Commissioner Chapman noted that while other counties have received state funding, Transylvania County has not. Dr. Leatherwood clarified that the College had received state funds for a classroom addition, though large appropriations like the current request are uncommon.

Regarding site selection, Commissioner Chapman asked if any locations had been considered. Dr. Leatherwood explained that no specific sites have been identified as the College has not been authorized to pursue land options. However, the County Manager previously reviewed potential sites, considering properties of at least 10 acres.

Chairman Chappell stated that the next steps involve the Axias facilities study, which is assessing current facilities, similar to the study conducted for the public school system. The same consultant is evaluating all county facilities to provide estimates on costs, life expectancy, and other key data. This information will help the Board make informed decisions moving forward. He also emphasized the Board's continued advocacy with General Assembly partners to address the county's needs and support the community and region.

Commissioner McCall questioned whether the \$75,000 facilities assessment cost was still part of the College's budget request. Dr. Leatherwood confirmed the assessment was approved by the County and could be removed from the request. Chairman Chappell noted that the \$75,000 appropriation for the facilities assessment was a mid-year decision, not part of the previous budget cycle. The Commissioners chose to fund it now to gather the necessary information for making more informed decisions in the upcoming budget cycle.

Commissioner McCall also pointed out that the \$50 million estimate excluded costs for land, utilities, and site improvements, which Dr. Leatherwood acknowledged.

Commissioner Chapman inquired about a timeline for when a decision on a new campus might become critical. Dr. Leatherwood highlighted the challenges of maintaining the aging Strauss Building. While the building continues to function, it remains susceptible to issues like flooding, and the state's assessment identified significant infrastructure concerns. She emphasized that the upcoming facilities study would provide more clarity.

Commissioner Chapman also asked about the future of the current property if a new campus is constructed. Dr. Leatherwood noted that the college's Board of Trustees owns the property and would consider selling it to contribute toward a new campus. The property's tax value was previously assessed at \$6 million.

The Board concluded the discussion, with Chairman Chappell expressing appreciation for the longstanding partnership between the County and Blue Ridge Community College.

PRESENTATION BY AEROSTAR ENVIRONMENTAL, LLC ON PRIVATE PROPERTY DEBRIS REMOVAL

Project Manager Darlene Abbott of Aerostar Environmental, LLC, presented information on the Private Property Debris Removal (PPDR) program, which is managed through a contract with the US Army Corps of Engineers. The program assists private property and small business owners who lack debris removal insurance by clearing eligible storm debris or demolishing unsafe structures following Hurricane Helene.

To participate, property owners must submit a Right-of-Entry form, which allows contractors access to inspect and remove eligible debris. Applications can be submitted in person at an intake center, online via the County website, or through a call center. Required documents include proof of ownership, identification, and insurance records.

Eligible debris includes hazardous limbs and trees in commonly used areas, debris impacting waterways, and unsafe structures. However, debris on vacant lots, unimproved property, or agricultural land is ineligible. FEMA determines final eligibility.

As of the report date:

- 116 Right-of-Entry forms were initiated, with most applicants applying in person.
- 62 inspections were completed.
- 25 PPDR packages were submitted to the US Army Corps of Engineers.

Aerostar is considering setting up pop-up intake centers in severely impacted areas. The current deadline for applications is the end of April.

During the discussion, Commissioner McCall raised concerns about debris removal for farms and agricultural lands, particularly large debris like damaged hay and equipment. Ms. Abbott stated that such debris is ineligible but agreed to look into other potential resources. Commissioner McCall suggested that Commissioner Chapman inquire about farm restoration funding during his upcoming trip to Raleigh. Chairman Chappell thanked Ms. Abbott for the presentation and encouraged property owners to apply promptly, as assistance is time-sensitive.

CAPITAL WORKSHOP PREP - COURTHOUSE HISTORY

The County Manager, joining remotely via Zoom, provided an overview of the courthouse's history in preparation for the upcoming capital workshop.

The Manager emphasized the importance of reviewing past studies that have shaped capital planning. The courthouse project, having been under discussion the longest, warranted a historical review before the upcoming presentation by Sizemore Architects.

Courthouse History & Timeline

- Since 2005, multiple Boards of Commissioners have evaluated courthouse needs.
- Under state law, counties must provide court facilities but do not staff them, aside from security and maintenance.
- Under state law, a judge can order the County to provide adequate space if deemed necessary.
- Numerous studies and stakeholder engagements have informed planning, with key concerns including:
 - Safety risks due to inadequate circulation and space.
 - Legal requirements for inmate security and attorney-client access.
 - ADA compliance challenges.
 - Overcrowding in hallways

Key Milestones

- 2005-2007: Initial studies identified courthouse safety and space deficiencies. The 2007 Rural Court Commission inspection resulted in recommendations for improvements. Commissioners formed two committees: one to assess the impact of relocating the courthouse outside downtown and another to study space needs.
- 2008: An architectural study estimated costs at \$38.6 million for downtown expansion (including a required parking deck) and \$30 million for a new courthouse on Morris Road.

- 2009: Due to the economic downturn, the Board requested a cost reassessment. A revised estimate projected an 81,000 sq. ft. facility on Morris Road at \$21 million. A mid-term alternative proposed relocating the County offices to free up courthouse space for \$10 million.
- 2010-2012: The Tax and Register of Deeds offices were moved out of the courthouse to an adjacent county-owned building.
- 2013: Renovations provided expanded space for the District Attorney, Clerk of Court, and Public Defender. Another architectural study explored options for an on-site courthouse expansion.
- 2015: A courthouse programming study identified a 60,000 sq. ft. requirement, with expansion options. Updated cost estimates:
 - Downtown: \$16 million (plus \$5 million for a parking deck).
 - Morris Road: \$31 million (including a 30,000 sq. ft. expansion shell for future growth).
- 2016-2017: Public discussions were held. The Board selected Morris Road for the new courthouse and began the process of hiring an architect.
- 2018: Project stalled due to public requests to explore alternative downtown locations, including privately owned properties (e.g., the former Kmart and BI-LO sites).
- 2019: The Chief District Court Judge declared the second courtroom inadequate and ordered it removed from district court scheduling. The Board considered temporary courtroom solutions and mid-term renovations.
- 2020: A site analysis compared four potential locations:
 - Morris Road (adjacent to Public Safety Facility) – \$36.7 million.
 - Existing courthouse site – \$45.5 million (due to renovation constraints).
 - South Broad Park – Mid-range cost but required relocating child development facilities.
 - The property behind the courthouse was ruled out due to the lease-only option.
 Two committees were engaged: one with courthouse stakeholders and another with interested citizens.
- 2021: The Elections conference room was designated as a temporary second courtroom two days per week. Staff compared courthouse sizes across NC based on docket volume, revealing a wide range of facility sizes, with many counties reporting inadequate space.
- 2021 Commissioners request a comparison of courthouses by docket size in NC.
- 2022: Updated cost estimates:
 - Morris Road: \$44 million
 - Existing site: \$56.8 million.
 - South Broad Park: \$53 million (including relocation costs).
 Rising construction costs post-COVID drove up estimates.
- 2023: The Board reaffirmed Morris Road as the selected site. The estimated cost:
 - \$37 million for 60,000 sq. ft.
 - \$45.5 million for 60,000 sq. ft. plus a 30,000 sq. ft. expansion shell.
- 2024: Commissioners issued an RFQ and hired Sizemore Architects. Before design began, they directed the firm to:
 - Evaluate reducing the courthouse size while maintaining functionality.
 - Explore phased construction options.
 - Assess alternative construction methods to reduce costs.
- 2024: The probation and parole offices are currently in a month-to-month lease. The County is under pressure from the state to secure a permanent location. The new courthouse is expected to house these offices, but there is no interim plan.

Architect's Presentation & Next Steps

- Sizemore Architects began their work by completing a program verification phase, engaging courthouse stakeholders and the County's project team to confirm space requirements, refine budget estimates, and establish a construction timeline. This phase also involved:
 - Evaluating options for a smaller, but fully functional floor plan.
 - Assessing alternative construction methods for cost efficiency.
 - Considering phased construction to spread costs over time.
- Next Steps: The Board of Commissioners will review Sizemore's programming study, which outlines possible reductions in the initial build, phasing strategies, and alternative construction techniques. The Board will receive multiple alternatives with updated budget projections for consideration.
- Once the Board approves the final square footage and project budget, the design phase will begin, followed by financial planning and eventual construction.

Financial Planning

- In 2018, the Board initially planned to finance the courthouse via a USDA loan, but this may no longer be viable due to federal uncertainties and lengthy approval processes.
- In 2021, the County began allocating \$1.2 million annually toward courthouse design. By 2024, \$3.6 million was available in the fund balance to cover architectural fees.
- No additional capital transfers were made in 2024 due to Hurricane Helene's impact and financial uncertainties.
- Based on the school bond sale in 2023, a \$50 million bond at a 20-year term would require an estimated \$6.5 million annual payment, subject to interest rate changes and the County's bond rating.
- The Local Government Commission will assess the County's financial position, debt service, and audit performance before approving any debt issuance.

Discussion

Commissioner McCall asked about the existing courthouse size (~20,000 sq. ft.), noting that some space is constrained due to the building's design. The Manager estimated total usable space at 21,000 sq. ft., including probation and parole offices.

Chairman Chappell recalled a prior document detailing courthouse space needs and requested that the Manager provide it.

The Manager concluded the discussion, and the Board proceeded to the Sizemore Architects presentation.

NEW COURTHOUSE PROGRAMMING

The Manager introduced Joel Helms of Sizemore Architects, who presented a programming study for a new courthouse. He was joined by:

- Patrick Haramija (Remington and Vernick Engineers) – Civil and site design
- Joshua Thomas (Axias) – Cost estimating and cost control
- Keith Fentress (Fentress Inc.) – Courthouse planning and programming expert

Mr. Helms explained that the study includes four development options, each with a path toward achieving a fully built 90,000 sq. ft. courthouse. The presentation covered programming, site layout and infrastructure impacts (e.g., stormwater, topography, parking), and budget considerations. The proposed site is directly adjacent to the Public Safety Facility.

Site Plan Options

Option 1A

- 60,000 sq. ft. fully functional upfit courthouse
- Two stories with a partial basement
- Includes 30,000 sq. ft. of shell space on the third floor
- Public, staff, and secure parking included, with capacity for future expansion when third-floor shell space is upfitted

Option 1B

- 60,000 sq. ft. fully functional upfit courthouse
- Two stories with a partial basement
- The layout allows for a future 30,000 sq. ft. two-story addition
- Parking phased similarly to Option 1A

Option 2A

- 45,000 sq. ft. fully functional upfit courthouse
- Includes 45,000 sq. ft. of shell space (on the third floor and to the side of the building)
- A phased parking plan similar to previous options

Option 2B

- 45,000 sq. ft. fully functional courthouse
- Two stories with a partial basement
- The layout allows for a future 45,000 sq. ft. two-story addition
- Phased parking plan consistent with previous options

Commissioners asked several questions regarding building features across the site plan options. Mr. Helms explained that the partial basement is made possible by the site's natural slope and could accommodate holding cells, storage, or mechanical rooms. The Manager noted that this would improve inmate security by enabling short-term holding before transfer to the detention center.

Commissioner McCall asked about the shell space and was informed it would be a heated, unfinished area without drywall. While it could potentially be used for storage, that would trigger additional life safety design considerations. She also clarified that Option 1B's future addition would include 15,000 sq. ft. on each of two floors, totaling 30,000 sq. ft.

Chairman Chappell asked about the size of the partial basement. Mr. Helms stated it would be approximately one-third the size of the building footprint.

Major Site Considerations

Mr. Haramija reviewed major site considerations for the proposed courthouse project, including parking, topography, and stormwater management.

Parking

Each site plan option accommodates phased parking development, with two-thirds built initially and the remaining third added during expansion. Most options feature three separate lots to provide secure, staff, and public parking. Option 1B, due to its layout, includes only two lots and lacks full physical separation for secure access.

Topography

The site has significant grade changes, necessitating retaining walls and split-level parking to ensure ADA compliance and functionality. These grading needs are included in the project cost estimates.

Stormwater

To manage increased impervious surfaces, the design includes relocating and enlarging the existing stormwater basin. The current basin is in a proposed parking area, and a new basin is proposed for the lower portion of the site. Final basin dimensions will depend on site layout, parking needs, and city requirements, with typical depths around 6–8 feet. Assistant County Manager McNeill clarified the existing entrance pond will remain.

Circulation and Security

A proposed loop road would improve internal site circulation and security. Discussions with the Sheriff's Office will continue to refine layout needs.

Commissioner Chapman inquired about inmate transport between the Public Safety Facility and the courthouse. Mr. Haramija confirmed the current plans require vehicle transport due to cost and safety concerns with building a secure breezeway. The Manager noted that an originally proposed tunnel was rendered unfeasible by later design changes to the Public Safety Facility.

Commissioner McCall asked about practices in other counties. The Manager said while short vehicle transport is common, the new courthouse design—with dedicated holding areas—will significantly improve logistics compared to the current facility.

Commissioner Dalton raised concerns about local rainfall and the basin's ability to manage runoff. Mr. Haramija explained final basin size will be determined after the design is finalized and reviewed with the City of Brevard for requirements like setbacks, landscaping buffers, and parking.

Commissioner Dalton also asked about sidewalk obligations under the City of Brevard's Unified Development Ordinance. Mr. McNeill noted the County previously paid a fee-in-lieu when the Public Safety Facility was built. The County will revisit this agreement with the City to determine any new obligations.

Staffing and Building Program

Mr. Fentress of Fentress Inc. presented the methodology and outcomes of the courthouse space planning analysis. He reviewed the team's engagement with all component groups, steps taken to reduce square footage, and design adjustments to ensure proper security, adjacencies, and courtroom sizing.

Fentress Inc. analyzed caseload trends, demographics, and economic factors to forecast staffing needs over a 20-year horizon. Using industry best practices and courthouse space standards, they validated the County's 2001 study and identified areas for efficiency, resulting in a reduced program size.

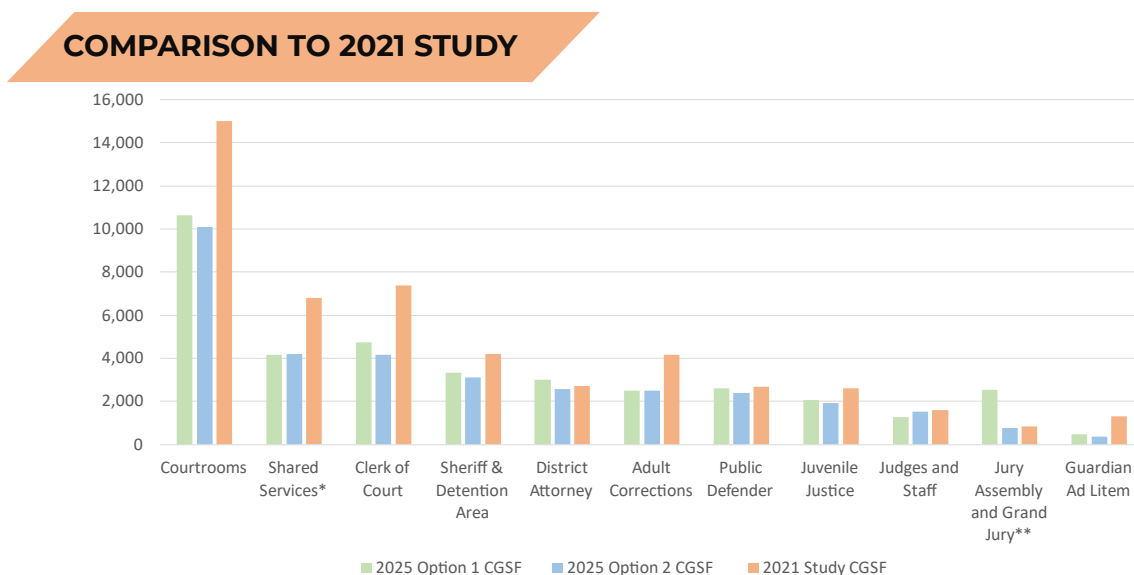
Mr. Fentress noted that projected staffing across departments is expected to grow by 19% over the next two decades. A comparison of options showed:

- Option 1 provides a more comprehensive program with full departmental needs.
- Option 2 represents a more streamlined, "bare bones" approach, reducing programmatic space needs.
-

TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY COURT - STAFFING PROJECTIONS AND SPACE SUMMARY					
COURT COMPONENTS		Judges, and Departmental Staff		Option 1 Projected Space Need 2045 (CGSF)	Option 2 Projected Space Need 2045 (CGSF)
		2025	2045		
COURT COMPONENTS					
1	COURTROOMS	N/A		10,652	10,112
2	JUDGES AND STAFF	6	8	1,288	1,528
3	CLERK OF COURT	11	16	4,734	4,181
4	JURY ASSEMBLY AND GRAND JURY	N/A		2,554	766
5	DEPARTMENT OF ADULT CORRECTIONS	5	9	2,489	2,489
6	DISTRICT ATTORNEY	9	13	3,004	2,564
7	GUARDIAN AD LITEM	3	3	486	366
8	JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION	5	6	2,063	1,943
9	PUBLIC DEFENDER	8	11	2,628	2,387
10	SHERIFF'S OFFICE AND DETENTION AREA	N/A		3,321	3,106
11	SHARED SERVICES	N/A		4,159	4,213
TOTAL STAFF		47	66		
TOTAL CGSF				37,378	33,655
Building Grossing Factor (40%)				14,951	13,462
BUILDING GSF - TOTAL				52,329	47,117

Comparison to the 2021 Study

The main reason for the reduction in square footage compared to the 2021 study was the elimination of one courtroom. This provided significant space savings but could be revisited in future expansion options.



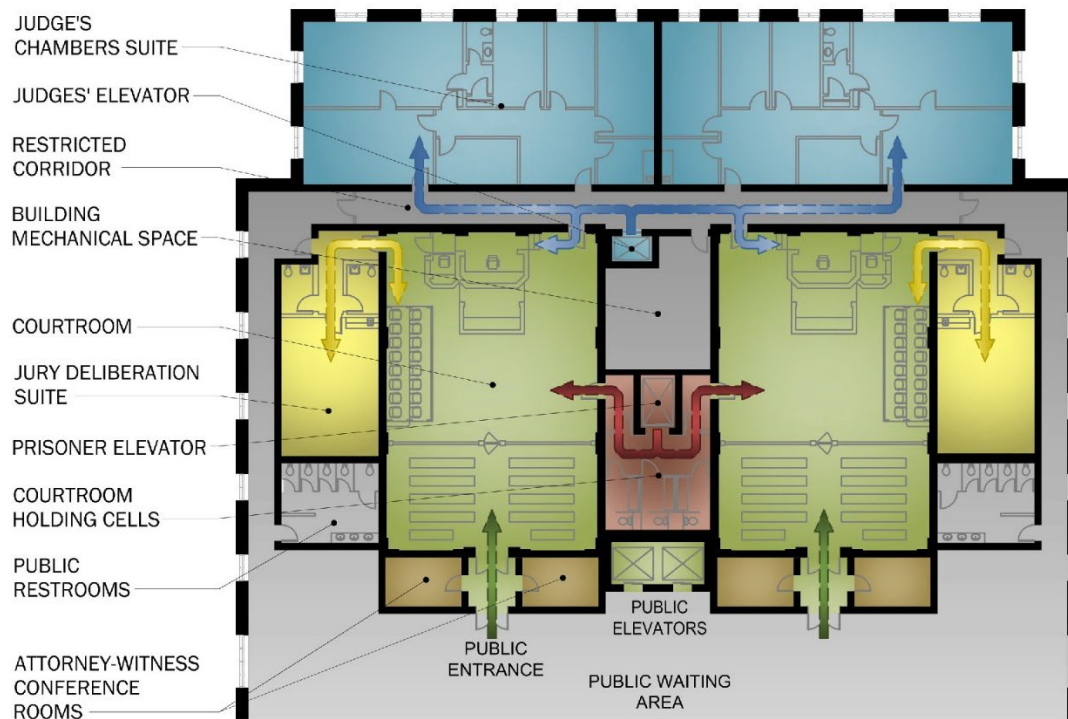
Optimal Organization Concepts for Courthouses

Mr. Fentress continued by describing a detailed table that compared the 2021 study with Option 2, the more compact, bare-bones alternative. He noted that this line-by-line comparison highlights specific reductions in space while aiming to maintain functionality. The intent was not to reinvent the original plan but to take an objective look at space needs and make strategic adjustments to conserve both space and cost. He emphasized that their team benchmarked space allocations against the Henderson County courthouse to ensure consistency in what was being proposed.

In explaining the circulation design, Mr. Fentress described the fundamental “building blocks” of a courthouse and how different user groups—detainees, judges/staff, and the public—move through the building:

- Red circulation paths represent secure routes used exclusively by detainees, who enter through a secure entrance, are held in dedicated holding areas, and transported—typically via secure elevators—to the courtrooms.
- Blue paths are for judges and key staff, who have secure entrances and dedicated elevators leading to their chambers and private areas.
- Green paths are for the public, who access the courthouse through a main entrance and have access to all public-facing departments.
- Yellow sections indicate security circulation within the courtroom itself.

He pointed out that these three circulation routes are designed not to cross, maintaining strict separation of parties for security and operational efficiency, with the courtroom being the only point where they may intersect.



Option 1A Floor Plan Summary

Mr. Fentress provided an overview of Option 1A, the more expansive courthouse layout, starting with the ground floor:

- A sallyport serves as a secure entry point for detainees.
- Holding cell areas in proximity to this entry.
- One courtroom on the ground floor.
- A small hearing room is intended to be shared by judges and the Clerk of Court.
- The public entrance is at the opposite end of the building.
- Jury assembly and the Clerk of Court are positioned for ease of public access.
- Adult Corrections offices are located on the right-hand side.
- The layout emphasizes key adjacencies and functional groupings to support operational efficiency.

On the second floor:

- Two courtrooms occupy the central area.
- Holding cells are again centrally located, with judges' chambers and offices positioned behind them.
- The District Attorney's Office and the Public Defender's Office are situated on opposite sides of the building to maintain the required separation.

The third floor consists of shell space, which would be built out in the future as needed. Mr. Fentress noted that including this space during the initial construction would provide long-term flexibility and cost savings. The Phase 2 addition would expand outward rather than upward, allowing for future growth such as additional offices or courtrooms.

Option 2A Floor Plan Summary

Mr. Fentress presented an overview of Option 2A, the bare-bones courthouse layout:

- The design includes a partial basement, which takes advantage of the site's natural topography. This space would house prisoner holding areas and mechanical systems. Detainees would be transported via elevator to the first floor.
- On the first floor, there are:
 - One centrally located courtroom.
 - A vertical layout for the Clerk of Court's office, positioned on the right side, is still easily accessible to the public.
 - Juvenile Justice and other departmental functions are situated to the left.
 - A slightly off-center public entrance, with security screening immediately inside.
- On the second floor:
 - Two courtrooms are arranged differently than in Option 1A.
 - The District Attorney's Office and Public Defender's Office remain separated.
 - Judges have secured access to their chambers and the courtrooms, ensuring no overlap with public circulation.

The third floor consists of shell space. A small annex to the left could provide future expansion. An alternative larger annex is also an option, allowing for additional courtroom or office space as needs grow.

Commissioner Chapman noted that Henderson County had initially planned their courthouse to last longer before needing expansion. He expressed concern about avoiding a similar situation in Transylvania County and asked how confident the team was that current planning would accommodate future needs. Mr. Haramija responded that Transylvania County is planning wisely by incorporating shell space and

options for expansion into the design. He noted that Henderson County has seen explosive population growth, which is a key driver of their increased caseload and need for expansion. By contrast, Transylvania County's unique geography, with a significant portion of state and federal land, limits explosive growth potential. Mr. Haramija stated that while the County will grow, the growth will be steady and manageable, not exponential, making it easier to anticipate and plan for future space needs. The Manager added that Henderson County's situation is also influenced by how their courthouse incorporates additional county functions in addition to their Tax Office and Register of Deeds which added strain on the space.

Commissioner Chapman remarked that the County should keep long-term use in mind and consider relocating offices like Tax and Register of Deeds into the new courthouse in the future. He mentioned that while the current building housing those offices is in good condition, it is worth considering its long-term viability and potential for disposal.

He also asked whether there is a courthouse of comparable size to the proposed options that Commissioners could visit and evaluate firsthand. The Manager suggested that Cherokee County has a courthouse of 43,000 sq. ft., which includes Administration, Tax, Register of Deeds, and a Magistrate hearing room. She also mentioned Macon County, which has a 32,000 sq. ft. courthouse with a slightly higher docket size.

Commissioner McCall emphasized the importance of considering population data, noting that Transylvania County's population is not growing rapidly, has a high median age, and has one of the lowest crime rates in North Carolina. She agreed that a courthouse in the 45,000–50,000 sq. ft. range seems appropriate for the County's needs. The Manager shared that the population for Cherokee and Macon Counties are 30,000 and 38,000, respectively.

Chairman Chappell agreed, stating that demographics and trends must be key factors in planning. He affirmed that while it is helpful to learn from other counties, Transylvania County should focus on what works best locally. He emphasized the County's strong track record of preserving and reusing older buildings, pointing to the current meeting location as an example, and underlined the importance of upkeep and strategic use of existing resources.

Commissioner McCall then asked about the condition of the current Tax and Register of Deeds building, specifically whether it had been fully renovated. The Manager confirmed that during renovation, plumbing, electrical, and other systems were updated and brought to code, and the building is structurally sound. While there may be a future need to relocate or repurpose the building, it is currently well-maintained, accessible, and serving the public effectively.

Construction Methodology

Mr. Helms reported that the team was tasked with evaluating alternative construction methods for the new courthouse. They assessed three primary options:

1. Traditional Construction – A steel frame structure with metal stud walls and brick veneer exterior. This method is familiar, widely used, and currently the most cost-effective.
2. Total Precast Concrete Structure – Prefabricated concrete panels are used for both the structural and exterior components of the building.
3. Hybrid System – A combination of a steel superstructure with precast exterior walls.

Mr. Helms noted that while the precast and hybrid systems can significantly reduce construction time, these options come at a higher cost. He emphasized that unless there is a critical time constraint requiring

the project to be completed on a shortened schedule, the cost premium for precast or hybrid systems does not justify the investment. Based on the current analysis, Mr. Helms recommended proceeding with the traditional construction method as the most financially prudent approach. He added that detailed cost comparisons for each method are available upon request if the Board would like to review them.

Commissioner McKelvey inquired about the long-term cost difference between traditional construction and precast, particularly regarding maintenance and building longevity. While acknowledging that precast construction saves time, he questioned whether the higher upfront cost might be offset by lower maintenance costs over the building's lifecycle. Mr. Helms responded that precast construction is 10% to 15% more expensive than traditional construction. However, he agreed that when considering a long-term investment, especially factoring in lower maintenance, tighter building envelope, and greater energy efficiency, the added cost may be justifiable. He noted that precast buildings are built with precision, with fewer trades overlapping and a more controlled environment that reduces potential failure points.

Commissioner McKelvey reiterated that while traditional construction may be cheaper upfront, it may come with higher long-term maintenance costs. He emphasized the importance of looking at the full lifecycle cost of the facility. Mr. Helms confirmed that the team can provide additional cost analysis to help the Board evaluate the options based on long-term performance.

Commissioner Chapman raised concerns about the aesthetics and emphasized the importance of the building being a showcase for Transylvania County. Mr. Helms assured the Board that precast panels can be customized with various architectural treatments but at an increased cost.

Commissioner Dalton added that he had requested the exploration of alternative construction methods based on the County's recent experience with the Sylvan Valley Industrial Building, which used precast panels with flexible internal walls to accommodate different tenants. He noted that the building had a modern appearance and suggested that precast can be designed to meet both functional and aesthetic needs.

Project Cost Estimate

Option 1A – 60,000 SF Day One + 30,000 SF Shell Space

- Base Construction Cost: \$44.2 million
 - Includes \$7 million in site costs and \$7 million in shell construction
- Total Construction Cost (with contingency & markup): \$52.25 million
- Soft Costs (design, permits, FF&E, etc.): \$5.2 million (10%)
- Owner's IT Budget (network cabling, racks, etc.): \$1.57 million (3%)
- Total Project Cost: \$61.1 million

Option 1B – 60,000 SF Day One + 30,000 SF Future Addition

- Base Construction Cost: \$37.1 million
- Total Construction Cost (with contingency & markup): \$43.8 million
- Soft Costs (10%): \$4.38 million
- Owner's IT Budget (3%): \$1.31 million
- Total Project Cost: \$47.5 million
- This does not include the cost of the future 30,000 SF expansion

Option 2A – 45,000 SF Day One + 45,000 SF Shell Space

- Base Construction Cost: \$40.8 million
- Total Construction Cost (with contingency & markup): \$48.2 million

- Soft Costs (10%): \$4.82 million
- Owner's IT Budget (3%): \$1.45 million
- Total Project Cost: \$52.3 million

Option 2B – 45,000 SF Day One + Future Expansion (not priced)

- Base Construction Cost: \$29.8 million
- Total Construction Cost (with contingency & markup): \$35.2 million
- Soft Costs (10%): \$3.52 million
- Owner's IT Budget (3%): \$1.06 million
- Total Project Cost: \$38.2 million
- The most cost-effective day-one option
- This does not include the cost of the future 45,000 SF expansion

Next Steps

Mr. Helms emphasized the team is now seeking direction regarding which option the Board prefers, along with an indication of an acceptable budget range, so they can proceed with developing design and construction documents.

Board Discussion

Chairman Chappell asked for cost estimates for all four options using precast construction to allow a true side-by-side comparison of traditional vs. precast methods. Mr. Thomas (Axias) explained that due to tariffs and fluctuating material costs, the gap in pricing between precast and traditional construction may narrow significantly over the next year.

Commissioner Chapman asked about the expected project duration following Board approval. Mr. Helms responded that the team was ready to begin. Although the initial schematic design schedule was 62 weeks, they are confident it can be reduced to approximately 48 weeks, despite delays caused by Hurricane Helene.

Commissioner McCall inquired about when renderings would be available. Mr. Helms confirmed that, upon Board approval, the team's immediate next step would be to develop architectural renderings showing what the building is expected to look like. These will be presented to the team for review as soon as possible.

Chairman Chappell revisited a point raised earlier by Commissioner McKelvey regarding the ongoing maintenance costs associated with traditional versus precast construction methods. He asked whether there was a way to project lifetime maintenance costs to evaluate the return on investment of each approach. Mr. Helms confirmed that his team has experience conducting life cycle cost analyses, as it is a requirement for many state-level projects, and they can provide that comparison.

Commissioner Dalton asked about the type of roof design being proposed — flat or pitched. Mr. Helms responded that the roof design is still to be determined. The Commissioners expressed a preference for a pitched roof due to the County's high rainfall levels and the potential for leaks with flat roofs.

Commissioner Chapman asked for clarification on the full construction period. Mr. Helms estimated the construction itself would take 18 months, with a firmer timeline to be established as the design progresses.

The Manager advised that the project timeline will affect the financing track, particularly for a potential bond sale. If the Board moves forward now, with 48 weeks projected to reach bid-ready design documents, the ideal timeframe for a bond sale would be October 2026. If the project timeline is delayed past that point, the County would need to wait for a new audit, which could push financing into spring 2027. To stay on track, the Board would need to decide within the next two months.

Commissioner McCall suggested that the Board decide by the second meeting in April to stay aligned with the project timeline and financing goals.

Commissioner McCall asked for clarification on the various percentages, particularly the contingency and FF&E allocations, and the possibility of experiencing cost savings in these areas. Mr. Helms explained that there are two contingencies included in the estimate. A design contingency is expected to work its way to zero as the design becomes more detailed and moved into the base bid. The owner's contingency, which is built into the \$500 per sq. ft. estimate, is reserved for the County to use in case of unexpected costs, such as change orders or site conditions. For new construction, a 5% owner's contingency is typical. Mr. Helms confirmed that there is a possibility of savings if the contingency funds are not fully used during construction. He also responded that the FF&E number is a conservative estimate and could be lower depending on actual furnishing needs and prices at the time of procurement.

Chairman Chappell highlighted the importance of contingency funds, referencing experience with the Public Safety Facility and the unanticipated requirement to install sidewalks not originally in the design.

Commissioner McCall asked how soon the County could begin to identify potential external requirements and costs. The Manager explained that as the project moves into more detailed design, that will allow for formal reviews from the City of Brevard, the Building Permitting Department, and other relevant agencies. As this happens, the budget will become more refined, and those types of requirements will become clearer.

Commissioner Chapman asked how much tax increase may be needed to support any of the courthouse options, noting this information is essential for the Board's comparison and decision-making. The Manager responded that while an exact figure is not yet available due to the ongoing property revaluation, there are estimates based on the current tax base. One cent on the tax rate last year generated approximately \$720,000. For a project ranging from \$50 million to \$61 million, estimated annual payments could range from \$4.8 million to \$7.8 million. That would equate to a tax increase of 6.5 to 10.8 cents, depending on final costs. The Manager further explained that the County is working on a long-term capital plan that will include last year's school bond sale, the scheduled 2027 bond sale, and this courthouse project. The goal is to smooth tax rate impacts across all three, potentially using fund balance to offset higher years and reduce the full burden on taxpayers at any one time. Additionally, the operating costs for the new courthouse will increase. The Manager noted the County would likely need additional maintenance/grounds, housekeeping, and IT staff, increased utility costs, and more security personnel given the size of the property facility.

Commissioner Dalton asked about soil conditions encountered during the construction of the Public Safety Facility, referencing issues during the construction of the Sylvan Valley Industrial Building where pylons were needed due to uncompacted soil. The Manager responded that the soil at the current site is good, noting that material from the site is being used for phase two of the Sylvan Valley Industrial Building. Mr. McNeill confirmed that the Public Safety Facility did not experience any foundation issues, and standard methods were used. The Manager added that while the County has a reputation for difficult soils, all current information suggests the site has suitable material, though contingency is included to account for any unexpected findings.

Commissioner McKelvey returned to the topic of precast construction, noting the earlier mention of a 10% higher cost and asking about potential shifts due to tariffs. Mr. Thomas clarified that while precast is typically 10-15% more expensive, ongoing tariffs and the volatility of construction material sourcing may narrow the gap, potentially making precast cost-competitive in the long term. The Manager commented that staff had a positive experience with stand-tilt construction on the Sylvan Valley Industrial Building.

Chairman Chappell emphasized the need to be cautious in discussing tax rates while the property revaluation is ongoing, and the Board has not yet selected a preferred courthouse option. He confirmed that the Board will act on this matter at its second meeting in April.

Commissioner McCall reiterated her goal of providing a functional, appropriate courthouse that meets the County's needs. She noted that all of the proposed options offer significant improvements over the current 20,000 sq. ft. facility. The smallest proposal more than doubles existing space, and the largest triples it. She stressed the importance of considering taxpayer impact, especially following the challenges of Hurricane Helene, and expressed confidence that the Board would arrive at the right decision.

Chairman Chappell thanked Commissioner McCall for her comments and reaffirmed that all proposed options include plans for future expansion, highlighting the long-term planning being considered regardless of which path is chosen.

Chairman Chappell then called a brief recess, and the Board reconvened at 8:32 p.m.

OLD BUSINESS

RESOLUTIONS ESTABLISHING SERVICE DISTRICTS

Assistant County Manager David McNeill presented this agenda item.

Transylvania County currently has eight fire service districts established through Board-adopted resolutions dating back to the 1980s and 1990s. These resolutions were enacted under N.C.G.S. § 153A, Article 16, which allows counties to establish service districts for specific purposes and fund them through district taxes.

Since the time the original resolutions were adopted, fire departments contracted by the County have expanded their services to include rescue and EMS (medical first response and care). However, the current service district resolutions do not explicitly authorize the use of tax funds for EMS and rescue services.

Following a legal review and consultation with the UNC School of Government, staff confirmed that the resolutions should be updated to reflect the actual services provided and ensure compliance with state law.

Options for Board consideration:

1. Update and adopt new resolutions for all eight districts to reflect current services and become compliant with N.C.G.S. § 153A-302.
2. Add EMS/Rescue to existing resolutions as outlined in N.C.G.S. § 153A-309. This option does not resolve vagueness or outdated language in the original resolutions.
3. Establish a single countywide service district to fund fire, EMS, and rescue services, effective July 1, 2025. Services districts are distinct from response districts. Creating a single service district does not alter response areas but decouples funding from geography which allows the County to respond more flexibly as departments evolve or add resources, such as new substations.

Legal costs will be incurred under all options. Estimated costs for notification/mailings if resolutions are updated or a new district is established are \$18,000-\$20,000.

Staff requested guidance on which option to pursue to ensure continued legal compliance, service transparency, and long-term operational effectiveness.

Board Discussion and Action

Chairman Chappell asked about the procedural timeline for establishing a single countywide fire service district, specifically whether the required public hearing could be held on the same night as the County's budget hearing. Mr. McNeill confirmed this is feasible, though separate advertisements would be required. The Manager added that the timeline aligns with holding the public hearing at the second meeting in June, which could allow consolidation with a single budget hearing if needed. If the Board proceeds with a single district, the Manager will present a recommended budget based on that structure but emphasized the need to be prepared to pivot if the Board chooses a different path.

Commissioner Chapman asked for clarification on the tax implications under a single district model. Mr. McNeill confirmed that all citizens outside the City of Brevard would pay the same tax rate, assuming the municipality opts out. Municipalities may choose whether to participate. It is anticipated that Brevard may opt out, while Rosman may opt in based on how the municipality currently provides fire protection services. The Board has the flexibility of setting an equitable tax rate under the new structure. The final rates will be determined after receiving property valuation data from the current revaluation.

Commissioner Chapman asked whether insurance ratings would be affected. Mr. McNeill confirmed that insurance ratings are based on response districts, not tax districts. Thus, creating a single service district would have no impact on ratings.

Chairman Chappell noted that citizens are already funding fire services at the same tax rate. However, the district revenues fall short, so the Board supplements the shortfall from the general fund. Mr. McNeill added that all current fire service districts, except for Brevard, have a rate of 5.5¢, but only one district raises enough revenue at that rate to cover its full operational budget.

Chairman Chappell suggested the Board would be open to allowing municipalities to opt in. Mr. McNeill emphasized that under state law, a service district cannot encompass the entire county. To comply, national forests and state parks would be excluded, as they do not generate tax revenue.

Commissioner Dalton asked for confirmation that the proposed single district would include Fire, Rescue, and EMS services. Mr. McNeill confirmed it would, clarifying that the EMS portion refers to the first medical response provided by fire departments. However, he noted that the Board could choose to expand the district's scope to include full EMS services or the Rescue Squad.

Commissioner McCall acknowledged that citizens already pay the same 5.5¢ fire tax, so there would be no change to the rate itself if a single district were established. She asked how the City of Brevard would be handled if it opted out. Mr. McNeill explained that Brevard funds its fire services through its general municipal taxes, not through a separate fire tax. They would continue to operate independently within city limits. However, the County would still contract with Brevard for fire protection services in the Sylvan Valley II service district. The cost-sharing between the County and City is currently based on property valuations and call volume and will continue as such. Last year, the County covered 45% and the City 55% of the contract costs, which aligns with call volume.

Chairman Chappell asked what would happen if the City of Brevard ever chose not to provide services to Sylvan Valley II in the future. Mr. McNeill responded that the County could adjust response districts to cover the area, ensuring no lapses in fire protection. Such changes would likely require the addition of substations to maintain insurance rating standards.

Commissioner Dalton inquired whether this change would affect Cedar Mountain's contract to serve Caesar's Head in South Carolina. Mr. McNeill clarified that it would not impact that arrangement, as that is governed under a separate agreement.

Commissioner McCall commented that a single district would benefit all fire departments, as it would pool funding across the entire tax base (except Brevard if it opts out). Mr. McNeill agreed, noting that funding and operations would be separated, allowing the Board greater flexibility in how funds are allocated. Mutual aid among departments, especially in relation to maintaining insurance ratings, makes a single funding structure more efficient. This approach allows the Board to fund services strategically across the County, regardless of which department responds.

Commissioner Dalton asked if the Chiefs Association supports the move to a single district. Mr. McNeill confirmed that at least one chief expressed strong support. According to feedback from the Fire Marshal after a recent Chiefs Association meeting, the consensus was that this structure reflects current practice operationally, even if not formally adopted. He emphasized that there would be no initial operational changes. Response districts would remain the same unless adjusted in the future due to station expansion or other factors.

Chairman Chappell asked how this change would reflect on citizens' tax bills. Mr. McNeill explained that tax bills (excluding Brevard) would still show a separate fire tax line, just like they do now. However, the internal processing would be simplified. Instead of breaking collections into eight separate district accounts, the Tax Office would handle one account, streamlining staff work and reporting.

Commissioner McCall asked if this approach would eliminate the need for general fund supplements to fire budgets. Mr. McNeill responded that it depends on the fire tax rate set by the Board.

Commissioner Dalton used Rosman as an example, where based on budget needs, their true rate should have been closer to 32¢, but they only received 5.5 from the fire tax, creating a large funding gap. He noted other districts, like Balsam Grove, operate on extremely lean budgets.

Commissioner McCall highlighted the disparity among departments, with some having a strong tax base and others barely able to maintain services.

Commissioner Dalton raised concerns about the decline in volunteerism, pointing out that many departments are requesting paid staff to meet ISO requirements, which increases costs across the County. Mr. McNeill said that most counties reconsidering service districts today are shifting toward a single-district model.

Commissioner McCall said moving to a single district provides a lifeline to smaller, struggling departments. It also allows departments to request additional funds in times of emergency. Mr. McNeill added that currently, funds must stay within the district in which they are collected. Any excess becomes that district's reserve. Some districts have managed their reserves well. Under a single district, reserves would be pooled and available countywide, allowing the Commissioners to respond to emergencies in any district, invest strategically in fire service improvements, or let the reserve grow for future capital needs. As for existing reserves, the Board could either leave them in place for future needs within the original district or redistribute the funds to the departments serving that district.

Commissioner McKelvey noted the trend toward single fire districts across the state and asked how many counties have made the change or are considering it. Mr. McNeill responded that, in his experience, counties looking to revise their service district models are typically considering consolidation into a single district, rather than adding or modifying multiple districts. Some counties fund fire protection through the general fund, others use multiple service districts, and some have hybrid models. Staff have previously compiled a statewide comparison and can provide an updated breakdown.

Commissioner McKelvey acknowledged concerns from some departments that have strong local tax bases and fear subsidizing weaker districts. He contrasted this with departments like North Transylvania, which struggle with dated equipment and facilities, despite serving the same County residents. He raised a misconception that departments with paid staff might be required to shift personnel between departments if a single district is adopted. Mr. McNeill clarified that there is no intention of moving toward a county-operated fire department. Each department remains a private nonprofit, responsible for its staff. Paid personnel will not be shared across departments unless voluntarily agreed upon.

Commissioner McCall added that some volunteers serve across multiple departments, but this is their personal choice. Mr. McNeill confirmed that membership rules have been relaxed in recent years due to volunteer shortages, allowing for more flexibility across departments.

The County Manager emphasized that this change does not impact budgeting, only how revenue is collected. There are administrative efficiencies to be gained by eliminating the need to manage eight separate district accounts. Historically, districts were created based on whether residents had fire service at all; now, all County residents have access, which supports moving to a modernized, unified funding model.

Mr. McNeill added that original service areas were based on five-mile coverage, later expanded to six miles. If designed today, the county would not be divided into the same eight districts based solely on geography or tax base. The perception that some departments "earned" better funding stems from geographic placement in wealthier areas, not from operational decisions. Since the Commissioners equalized the fire tax rate to 5.5¢ across all districts, only one district is fully funded while the rest rely on general fund supplements.

Commissioner McKelvey asked about long-term goals, especially if the Board were to include EMS and Rescue, and whether that might require raising the fire tax rate beyond 5.5¢. Mr. McNeill clarified that he is not proposing adding EMS at this time. EMS is typically funded by the general fund. It is up to the Board to either maintain the flat 5.5¢ rate and supplement as needed from the general fund or set a rate high enough to fully fund all fire departments and the Rescue Squad through the fire tax.

Chairman Chappell concluded that these are important discussions that will take place in upcoming budget workshops. The existing resolutions regarding fire service districts are outdated and vague and must be revised. The Board has been given three options for consideration. Any change would become effective July 1, 2025.

Commissioner Chapman moved that the Board pursue establishing a single countywide service district for fire protection, EMS, and rescue services (Option 3), effective July 1, 2025.

Commissioner McCall seconded the motion. Mr. McNeill requested that the Board set a public hearing date, so staff could begin working backward to meet statutory advertising and notice requirements. Chairman Chappell responded that staff would coordinate with the Manager to determine the appropriate date and handle all necessary advertising. Commissioner McCall voiced her support, stating that Commissioner McKelvey made the point that although all departments are funded through the fire tax, not all feel they are funded equally because the revenue currently stays in the district where it is collected.

By creating a single service district, the Board ensures all citizens of Transylvania County have access to adequate fire protection, regardless of the tax base in their specific district. Commissioner McKelvey expressed reservations noting that he had heard from three departments that do not support this and only one that does. He saw the potential benefits and the efficiency, but before fully supporting this, he wanted to hear from all the departments and see updated data from other counties in North Carolina. The Manager reminded the Board that holding a public hearing does not obligate the Board to adopt the proposal. A final vote will still be required following the public hearing. **The motion passed 4–1, with Commissioner McKelvey voting in opposition.**

NEW BUSINESS

MANAGER'S REPORT

Mr. McNeill provided the Manager's Report as follows:

- FEMA has extended the deadline to apply for assistance related to Hurricane Helene to April 7, following a request from the State. Assistance may include temporary lodging, home repairs, personal property replacement, or other needs.
- The Brevard/Rosman Water Interconnect Project continues to move forward.
- BHS Scope #1 Project: Decking material has been ordered, and design work is nearing completion with drawings 90% complete. Staff were recently notified that NCDPI architects must review the drawings, which could affect the timeline. Preliminary work has started, with demolition (including gym floor removal) scheduled to begin shortly.
- Tax Administration Update: Staff are actively working on collections for the 2024 tax bills and handling reappraisal appeals.
 - As of March 10, the tax collection rate was 98.47% (an increase of 0.18%).
 - As of March 12, approximately 1,000 informal appeals had been filed (3% of parcels). The informal appeal period lasts 30 days.
 - The Board of Equalization and Review will convene in mid-April to hear formal appeals.
- Citizens having trouble obtaining a driver's license or experiencing other DMV-related issues are encouraged to contact Representative Mike Clappitt's office for assistance.
- On March 19, the NC House approved the Disaster Recovery Act of 2025, allocating \$524 million for Helene recovery in Western NC, plus \$110 million in additional statewide relief for farmers.
- Due to hazardous wildfire conditions, a statewide burn ban is in effect. Violators face fines and may be liable for fire suppression costs. On March 21, the Transylvania County Fire Marshal issued a local ban, including burning within 100 feet of an occupied dwelling. Recreational fires, bonfires, and outdoor fireplaces are prohibited. Grills and BBQs are exempt. Questions can be directed to the Fire Marshal's Office at 828-884-3108 ext. 3.
- Staff from Congressman Chuck Edwards' office will be available at Silvermont Mansion, 364 E. Main St., Brevard, on Tuesday, March 25 from 9:30–11:00 a.m. to assist constituents with Helene-related or general federal concerns.
- The next Board of Commissioners meeting is scheduled for Monday, April 14. There is an extra week between this meeting and the next due to the calendar layout.
- Axios is conducting site assessments of various county buildings this week, including the BRCC Transylvania Campus.
- Employee Recognition:
 - Jennifer Galloway (Finance) received her Certification as a Local Government Purchasing Officer from the NC Association of Governmental Accounting. She plays a key role in purchasing, contracting, and RFQ/RFP processes.

- Neill Cagle (Environmental Health) was recognized for his work in state mosquito vector surveillance, contributing to mosquito-borne illness control. He presented the importance of vector control at a recent staff safety meeting.

Commissioner Chapman inquired whether citizens wishing to protest during Congressman Edwards' office hours at Silvermont would require a permit, similar to demonstrations on courthouse grounds. Mr. McNeill responded that he assumed a permit would be necessary but would follow up with further information.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Kristi Brown: Ms. Brown, Clerk of Superior Court, addressed the Board and distributed docket data. She expressed concern regarding courtroom capacity in the new courthouse plans. Initially, the largest courtroom was projected to hold only 40 people, which she noted is insufficient for jury trials, especially without a designated jury assembly room. Criminal traffic court days often have 190–200 cases on the docket, which does not include additional attendees such as witnesses or victims. Ms. Brown acknowledged that new information suggests the largest courtroom may now hold between 120–140 individuals, which is more feasible. She encouraged the Board to visit the court system to better understand space needs and emphasized the importance of adequate courtroom design to avoid continued reliance on overflow space like the Board of Elections or the current courthouse. She expressed appreciation for the project's progress and acknowledged the Board's fiscal responsibility.

COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

Commissioner Chapman encouraged Commissioners to visit the home purchased by Isaac Homes, which is planned to serve 15–20 children. He urged anyone able to support the effort to consider donating. He also noted he would be in Raleigh for the next two days.

Commissioner McCall reported receiving concerns from citizens about possible actions by the Army Corps of Engineers along the French Broad River, including dredging and debris removal, which some worry could harm tourism and fishing. She clarified that these efforts are being coordinated by NC Emergency Management and FEMA, not the County. The County has requested assistance, but contracts for the work are held by the USACE in partnership with FEMA and NCEM. She emphasized that concerned citizens should direct their inquiries to those agencies.

Commissioner Dalton added that he had spoken with Mr. Hinkleman, one of the future educators at Isaac Homes. He noted the organization has secured grants to assist with renovations and opening the facility.

Chairman Chappell expressed condolences to families who have recently lost children, acknowledging the tragedy and noting that GoFundMe pages have been established for those who wish to help financially. He thanked Congressman Edwards' staff for their prompt assistance in securing a Capitol tour for Brevard Middle School, noting their quick response helped avoid a last-minute cancellation. He also commended County staff for their ongoing efforts and offered support for the Manager, who is scheduled to testify during a FEMA hearing at 10:00 a.m. tomorrow in Washington, DC. He noted her participation speaks to her leadership and dedication in that she attended the Commissioners' meeting electronically to present courthouse updates. Chairman Chappell apologized for missing the previous meeting due to illness and thanked Commissioner Dalton for presiding in his absence.

Commissioner McCall added that the FEMA hearing would be recorded and available for later viewing.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, **Commissioner Dalton moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:24 p.m., seconded by Commissioner McKelvey and unanimously carried.**

Jason R. Chappell, Chairman
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

Trisha M. Hogan, Clerk to the Board