

MINUTES
TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
APRIL 14, 2025 – REGULAR MEETING

The Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County met in a regular meeting on Monday, April 14, 2025, 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 Larry Chapman, Chairman Jason Chappell, Teresa McCall, and Chase McKelvey. Vice-Chairman Jake Dalton was out of town and unable to attend. County Manager Jaime Laughter, County Attorney Megan Silver, and Clerk to the Board Trisha Hogan were also in attendance.

Media: Laura Denon – *The Transylvania Times*

There were approximately 30 people in the audience.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Jason Chappell presiding declared a quorum was present and called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

WELCOME

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

The following comments reflect the opinions of the speakers.

Bruce Gleasman: Mr. Gleasman spoke about the County's budget, expressing concern that it has grown faster than the population. He said the budget has increased by 64% since 2015, while the population has only grown by 2%. He encouraged the Board to look for ways to spend money more wisely and consider the impact on taxpayers, especially those working multiple jobs or living on fixed incomes. He suggested the County aim to have the lowest tax rate in North Carolina and weigh future projects against that goal. (As his time ended, he had begun to mention a possible alternative site for the courthouse.)

Lisa Presnell: Ms. Presnell shared the good news about the Marine Corps JROTC program in Transylvania County Schools. She praised the program's leaders for their dedication and noted it has grown enough to qualify for federal funding. She highlighted recent student success at a regional competition in Tennessee, where local cadets earned top individual and team honors. One cadet received a full college scholarship through a Marine ROTC program, and two others plan to join the Marine Corps this summer. She said the program is making a meaningful difference in students' lives and encouraged continued support.

Sarah Carson: Ms. Carson, a teacher at Rosman High School, invited the Board to a community learning expo at Champion Park on April 25 from 9:00 a.m. to noon. The event will showcase her class's work with a program called "Trout in the Classroom," which focuses on river conservation. She also raised concerns about comments made by Commissioner Chapman on social media. She felt the posts were inappropriate for a public official. She said elected leaders should show professionalism and respect in public and online settings.

Gerald Yunker: Mr. Yunker asked the Board to consider food access when planning the new courthouse. He noted that the current courthouse is close to restaurants, which is helpful for jurors and others spending long days there. If the new courthouse is farther out, he suggested planning for a food option on-site.

AGENDA MODIFICATIONS

There were no agenda modifications.

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

CONSENT AGENDA

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

The Board approved the following:

PROCLAMATION - NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER

The Board proclaimed May 1, 2025, as *A Day of Prayer in Transylvania County*, aligning with the National Day of Prayer observed across the country. The theme this year is “*Pour Out to the God of Hope and Be Filled*,” inspired by Romans 15:13. A community event will take place that evening at the Courthouse Gazebo. The Board adopted Proclamation #13-2025 to support this observance.

PROCLAMATION # 13-2025 NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER

WHEREAS, Throughout the history of America we have poured out prayers to the God of hope; in times of crisis and celebration, in prosperity and need, in times of war and peace we have poured out praise to God for all He is, thanks to God for all He has done, confession and pleas for forgiveness when we have parted from His Word and will, and poured out intercession asking for His heart and hand to move for the sake of our neighbors and nation, and our history is filled with His grace, goodness, and abundant answers to those prayers; and

WHEREAS, From the first prayer of our Continental Congress in 1774 to the opening of every session of the House of Representatives and Senate, and throughout hearts and homes across America, the practice of prayer continues to seek God for guidance, wisdom, power, protection, and provision that has preserved hope and united us as one nation under God; and

WHEREAS, The National Day of Prayer is a Public Law established in the United States Congress in 1952 approved by a Joint Resolution and amended by Congress and President Reagan with Public Law 100-307 in 1988, affirming that it is essential for us as a nation to pray and directs the President of the United States to set aside and proclaim the first Thursday of May annually as a National Day of Prayer; and

WHEREAS, In Transylvania County and across America, the observance of the National Day of Prayer will be held on Thursday, May 1, 2025, with the theme, “Pour Out to the God of Hope and Be Filled” based on the verse in Romans 15:13 that is a prayer and a promise, “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”.

NOW, THEREFORE, the Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County does hereby proclaim, May 1st, 2025, as a DAY OF PRAYER throughout our County and we commend this observance to our citizens and

request that prayers be poured out for our County; for our neighbors as we live, serve, work, and learn together that we made be filled with all joy and peace and abound in hope.

This the 14th day of April 2025.

Jason R. Chappell, Chairman
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

PROCLAMATION - NATIONAL PUBLIC SERVICE RECOGNITION WEEK

The Board proclaimed May 4–10, 2025 as *Public Service Recognition Week* in Transylvania County to honor federal, state, and local government employees. A County Employee Appreciation Event is planned for Thursday, May 9 at the Library. The Board adopted Proclamation #14-2025 to formally recognize the contributions of public servants.

**PROCLAMATION # 14-2025
NATIONAL PUBLIC SERVICE RECOGNITION WEEK
MAY 4 – 10, 2025**

WHEREAS, the residents of Transylvania County are served each day by dedicated public servants at the local, state, and federal levels who work tirelessly to provide essential services and improve the quality of life for our communities; and

WHEREAS, public service is a noble calling, and those who work in local government—whether in administration, emergency services, law enforcement, public health, social services, parks and recreation, transportation, or other vital areas—demonstrate professionalism, dedication, and a commitment to serving their fellow citizens; and

WHEREAS, the work of local government employees is fundamental to the well-being and prosperity of Transylvania County to ensure the effective delivery of services; and

WHEREAS, National Public Service Recognition Week, celebrated annually during the first full week of May, is an opportunity to acknowledge and express gratitude for the dedication and contributions of public employees who serve with integrity and excellence; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County encourages all residents to recognize and appreciate the contributions of our local government employees, whose efforts make our county a better place to live, work, and visit;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners does hereby recognize May 4 – 10, 2025, as Public Service Recognition Week in Transylvania County and calls upon all residents to join in celebrating and honoring the service and dedication of our public employees.

Adopted this 14th day of April 2025.

Jason R. Chappell, Chairman
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

PUBLIC HEALTH REGION 1 WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STAFF OUT-OF-STATE TRAVEL REQUEST

The Board approved an out-of-state travel request for Region 1 Workforce Development Director Sarah Tennyson and Transylvania County Public Health Attorney Debra Bechtel to present at the 2025

NACCHO360 Conference in Anaheim, California. Ms. Tennyson will present successes from the Regional Public Health campaign. Ms. Bechtel will present lessons from the regional public health legal training offered for Region 1 Public Health Departments. All travel expenses will be covered by existing Workforce Development grant funds.

LIBRARY AMPHITHEATRE PROJECT: LIBRARY FOUNDATION BUDGET APPROVAL

The Board approved the project budget for a new roof over the Library Amphitheater. The project is fully funded by the Transylvania County Library Foundation. There is no direct cost to the County other than staff support. The estimated budget is \$626,000, including construction, design services, printing, and contingency.

APPROVAL OF DURALINE COPIER CONTRACT

The Board approved a new copier contract with Duraline for \$4,357.39 per month, the lowest of three bids received. The cost is slightly higher than the previous lease because three aging plotters were added to the agreement. Duraline is the County's current vendor.

PRESENTATIONS/RECOGNITIONS

EMERGENCY RESPONSE UPDATE

The Manager shared updates on the ongoing response and recovery efforts following Hurricane/Tropical Storm Helene and recent wildfires.

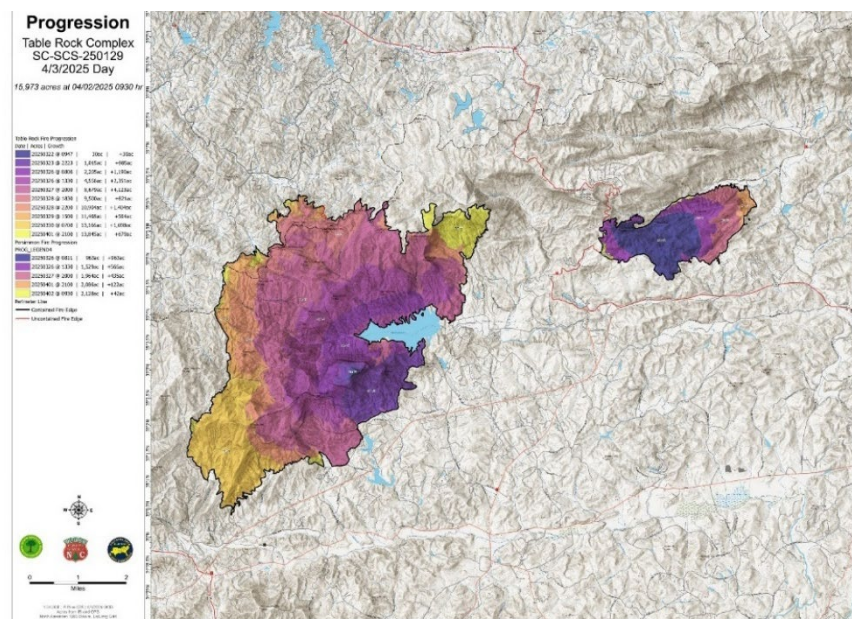
Hurricane/Tropical Storm Helene

- The deadline to apply for FEMA Individual Assistance (IA) has passed. Disaster relief loans are still available through the Small Business Administration (SBA). These loans help small businesses, nonprofits, homeowners, and renters recover from property damage.
 - Renters and homeowners can apply for loans up to \$100,000 to replace furniture, clothing, appliances, and vehicles.
 - Homeowners can apply for up to \$500,000 to repair or replace their primary residence.
 - Applications are due April 27.
 - More information is available at sba.gov/disaster.
- The deadline for economic injury applications is June 6.
- Resources for economic recovery in Western North Carolina are available at wncrecover@nc.gov/resources, including funding opportunities for communities, mental health support, repair assistance, sector-specific guidance for nonprofits, local governments, and more.
- Private roads or bridges damaged during Helene may qualify for funding through the Disaster Recovery Act – Part 1. Property owners can register for the program at ncdps.gov/Helene/prb.
- According to FEMA's latest report, all Transylvania County households that applied and qualified for long-term housing assistance and chose to accept it have completed the process. Some residents chose to find their own housing solutions or remain in their homes, even if damaged.
- The County has been approved for debris removal assistance by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). This includes:
 - Clearing debris from public roads
 - Demolition of unsafe structures on private property
 - Removing debris from waterways
- However, there have been delays and limited communication from the contractors. The public road contractor has already left the County, but debris remains. The County is working to resolve this.
- Waterway debris is a concern for flood risk. Large debris can block streams and rivers during storms or hinder firebreaks during wildfires. The County submitted 14 river sites to FEMA and USACE for debris assessment.

- Environmental and regulatory concerns have been raised by citizens and government officials. The County has confirmed that NC Fish and Wildlife is in contact with USACE and has provided them with habitat maps and debris guidelines. Still, questions remain about whether all environmental rules are being followed.
- County staff are not receiving consistent updates from USACE or its contractors about work locations, right-of-entry agreements, or schedules. This makes it difficult to provide accurate information to the public, even though the County is actively trying to get answers.
- A meeting between USACE and NC Emergency Management was expected to occur today to address concerns about debris removal. The County continues to push for better coordination and transparency, especially since it has no authority over federal contractors, or the environmental regulations involved.

Wildfires

- The State of Emergency for wildfires has been lifted. In Transylvania County:
 - No homes or structures were damaged.
 - Only 2.5 privately owned acres burned in the Table Rock Complex Fire on the NC side.
 - Over 600 acres burned in the state forest within the County.
- Transylvania County Emergency Management thanked local fire departments, out-of-town crews, and state and federal partners for their quick and effective response.
- The Table Rock Complex Fire (which included the Persimmon Ridge and Table Rock fires) is now fully contained, and cleanup is underway at the Rattlesnake Fire site.
- The US Forest Service has reopened Shining Rock Wilderness. Fire-related activity may still be happening in the area.
- The fire response was handled by national Incident Command Teams, which rotate responsibility across large-scale disasters. Thanks to the “Red Team” for their work in the forest that prevented the fire from making its way into Transylvania County. The “Blue Team” was in charge of the Table Rock Complex in our area. Interestingly, all four regional teams were deployed somewhere in North Carolina which is a rare occurrence.
- The Blue Team also shared a map that shows how the fires progressed day by day. While most of the fire damage occurred in South Carolina, the team contained the section that entered North Carolina.



Following the Manager's update, the Board was invited to ask questions or share comments.

Commissioner McCall asked whether FEMA had addressed all applications for storm damage assistance. The Manager clarified that while not all applications have been processed, all those who qualified for long-term housing assistance have received some support, either rental assistance, a FEMA unit, or a decision to decline services. The application deadline was April 7, and additional applications may still be under review. No timeline has been provided for when all applications will be fully processed.

Commissioner McCall expressed concern over residents reporting that FEMA has refused to inspect their properties after applications were submitted. The Manager encouraged individuals in that situation to contact their federal representatives—Representative Chuck Edwards or Senators Ted Budd and Thom Tillis—for help. With the applicant's permission, these offices can access case details that are not available to County staff. Commissioner McCall said she has been directing residents to these resources as well.

Commissioner Chapman shared that he traveled to the Hannah Ford Road area earlier today where he met the contractor managing river debris removal. He praised their work, noting it could save the County millions of dollars in future damages. He also mentioned that drones were being used to map the river for cleanup, and a large mulching operation was underway further up the road to process collected debris.

CAPITAL WORKSHOP PREP

The Manager began laying the foundation for the upcoming Capital Workshop, noting that ongoing wildfire recovery efforts have impacted the budget schedule. As a result, the originally planned spring workshop may be postponed until after the annual budget is adopted. Capital-related discussions will still be necessary during budget development.

Emergency Services Planning

- Two prior studies have guided infrastructure planning for emergency services, including:
 - EMS base location analysis for countywide response coverage.
 - Comprehensive emergency services and communications infrastructure needs assessment.
- The County has historically assigned fund balance to support these initiatives. The current year's plan included \$1.2 million, with allocations split among emergency services, parks and recreation, and economic development.
- Completed Projects:
 - Relocation of the main EMS base.
 - Countywide communications system upgrades.
 - Lake Toxaway Tower refurbishment.
- Projects Remaining on the Capital Plan:
 - Construction of an EMS substation in the Highway 276 area.
 - Development of two new communication tower sites to enhance coverage

The Manager noted that some of the originally assigned fund balance has now been committed to the EMS base loan, which will be reflected in the budget as debt service. Other assigned funds have already been used for the Toxaway Tower and communications upgrades.

Commissioner McCall inquired about the locations of the proposed towers. The Manager stated that while specific sites have not been determined, the general areas are Pisgah National Forest and Cedar Mountain, and property acquisition will be part of the planning process.

NEW BUSINESS

PROBATION PAROLE LEASE

The Manager informed the Board that the County has provided leased space for the Probation Parole Office for over 25 years. The current office is located off Caldwell Street, with the lease having expired on February 28, 2024, and now operating month-to-month. In fall 2024, the lessor placed the building on the market and requested an additional \$500/month in rent and that the lessee assume utility costs. No lease term has been offered with this increase.

While the new courthouse will eventually house Probation Parole, no interim location has been approved by the NC Department of Adult Correction (NCDAC). County staff have previously evaluated County-owned properties, but none have met NCDAC's criteria—though the current leased space also does not meet those standards.

The Manager cited N.C.G.S. §15-209, which requires counties to provide suitable space for probation officers with active caseloads. The statute does not require that the space meet NCDAC's specific parameters, and the Manager suggested that County-owned space could serve as a temporary alternative. Negotiation would be necessary given the constraints.

The Manager requested Board approval for:

- \$6,000 to cover the increased rent for one year.
- \$3,000 to begin covering utility costs (exact costs TBD).
- Total request: \$9,000 for continued month-to-month occupancy while the County works with NCDAC on an interim solution, should relocation become necessary.

Commissioner McCall asked how much notice would be required to vacate; the Manager confirmed it could be very little, given the month-to-month status.

Commissioner Chapman inquired about office space needs; the Manager said five offices were required.

Commissioner McKelvey suggested a 12-month lease for added stability and shared that the property owner had recently implied such a lease might be possible. The Manager committed to relaying that information to NCDAC, as lease negotiations must be handled by them.

Chairman Chappell affirmed this aligns with written correspondence from NCDAC. If the owner's position has changed, it would be a positive development.

Commissioner McCall asked if the County would have the authority to place Probation Parole in available County space even if it doesn't meet NCDAC's full criteria. The Manager responded that while the County can offer reasonable space—as supported by statute—it has been difficult to get NCDAC to accept that reality. She noted that prior alternatives offered by the County have been more compliant than the current space yet still rejected.

The Manager emphasized that NCDAC had even suggested the County construct a new building, but with the courthouse project underway, that option was not practical.

Commissioner McCall moved to approve the additional funds for probation and parole lease month to month, with funds not to exceed \$9,000 without approval from the Board, seconded by Commissioner McKelvey and unanimously approved.

Chairman Chappell thanked staff for their ongoing efforts, acknowledging the challenges and the County's responsibility to provide required office space within its means.

MANAGER'S REPORT

- The School Projects Committee has completed interviews for a Project Manager, and the hiring process is underway. The candidate's name is not yet public.
- BHS Scope #1 project has begun with demolition underway, but the project is delayed due to a required review by the NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI). Despite being a minimal renovation with no major design changes, NCDPI is requiring a full plan review, including five plan sheets, with an estimated 6–8 week backlog. This delay means the project cannot be completed before the start of the school year. The County requested expedited approval to move forward with the roof replacement like-for-like replacement—but NCDPI has not responded. As a result, demolition has stopped to avoid damaging the building without assurance of when the replacement can begin.

Commissioner McCall questioned whether a similar review was required for the Rosman roof project, suggesting this may be an atypical request. The Manager was unsure of the review requirements for the Rosman roof review requirements since the School System managed that project. She noted that the County had asked NCDPI early on what projects required review but received vague answers. The project architect had difficulty reaching NCDPI for clarification.

Chairman Chappell, with Board support, directed staff to draft a letter to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the County's state legislative delegation to request expedited review and assistance in resolving the delay.

Commissioner Chapman observed the site and noted that work had paused. The Manager confirmed that the team is ready to proceed, pending approval.

Commissioner McCall expressed frustration and hoped state leaders would intervene to help move the project along.

- America 250 NC Grant: Transylvania County received a \$10,000 grant from the NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources to fund a Revolutionary Garden and an Edenton Tea Party Reenactment in honor of the 250th anniversary of the United States.
- Two Lights for Tomorrow: On April 18, 2025, communities nationwide are invited to place two lights in recognition of the cooperation and courage that sparked the American Revolution. This symbolic gesture honors the historic lantern signal from Paul Revere's ride.
- 5th Annual Poetry Contest: This year's theme is "US Revolutionary Heroes" to align with the America 250 commemorations. Open to all ages, with cash prizes, and entries are accepted through April 30. Flyers are available in the foyer.
- County Tier Designation Study: HB 649, filed April 1, 2025, calls for a study of the county tier designation system, including ranking criteria and frequency of updates. The Manager noted that current metrics do not favor Transylvania County, due in part to public land ownership and skewed population data. She emphasized the importance of remaining engaged in the state-level conversation.
- Chairman Chappell was recognized for being appointed to the Rural Advocacy Committee for the National Association of Counties (NACo), which works on behalf of counties at the federal level.
- The County recently celebrated Public Health Appreciation Week, and this week marks Telecommunicator's Appreciation Week. Staff and community members are encouraged to express their gratitude.
- Cameron Sexton, Communications Director, was selected as the NCACC District Hometown Hero and will be recognized at the upcoming district meeting.

- The Manager recently presented in Washington, DC alongside a NACo representative and Florida's Emergency Management Director on needed improvements to FEMA processes. She shared Transylvania County's experiences during Hurricane Helene, including detailed testimony, and thanked the Board for their support in allowing her to advocate at the federal level.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ashley Hart: Ms. Hart requested recognition for the brave men and women of the Connestee Fire Department, who responded without hesitation when the Table Rock Fire threatened Transylvania County. She commended their tireless efforts, courage, and dedication to protecting homes and land and ensuring the safety of the community. Ms. Hart asked the Board to consider inviting members of the department to a future meeting for formal recognition of their selfless service and invaluable contributions.

COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

Commissioner Chapman announced that on Tuesday, April 22nd, Transylvania County will host the District 16 NCACC Meeting in the Board of Commissioners Chambers. District 16 includes Transylvania, Henderson, Buncombe, and Madison counties. Commissioners and key staff from each county, along with NCACC staff, will be in attendance to receive updates on state-level matters. Cameron Sexton will also be honored during the meeting.

Commissioner McCall extended heartfelt thanks to the County Manager for her exemplary representation of the County during her recent testimony in Washington, D.C. She praised the Manager's leadership, professionalism, and expertise, especially during Hurricane Helene and the recent wildfires, and noted how fortunate the County is to have her at the helm.

Commissioner Chapman asked for thoughts and prayers for Representative Mike Clampitt, who publicly announced he is facing serious health issues. His staff will continue to respond to constituents on his behalf.

Chairman Chappell thanked all the agencies and individuals involved in the recent wildfire response, highlighting the coordinated effort that resulted in no loss of life or homes and only 2.5 acres of private land affected. He praised the Emergency Management team, County departments, state and national partners, and the County Manager for managing the crisis. He requested that the presentation slides shared by the Manager be posted to the County website to show the fire's progression and impact.

He also commended law enforcement for their heroic response to a recent high-speed tractor trailer incident, which posed a major threat to public safety, including to a local school. A County deputy—off duty from patrol—put his life on the line to help stop the vehicle, and thanks to his and others' actions, a potential tragedy was averted.

Chairman Chappell echoed earlier comments about the County Manager's statewide reputation, calling her an outstanding leader and a tremendous asset to Transylvania County.

Chairman Chappell moved to enter into a closed session per N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(4) To discuss matters relating to the location or expansion of industries or other businesses in the area served by the public body, after a 10-minute recess, seconded by Commissioner McCall, and unanimously approved.

CLOSED SESSION

Per N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(4) To discuss matters relating to the location or expansion of industries or other businesses in the area served by the public body, a closed session was entered into a 5:10 p.m. Present were

Chairman Chappell, Commissioners Chapman, McCall, and McKelvey, County Manager Jaime Laughter, County Attorney Megan Silver, Transylvania Economic Alliance Executive Director Burton Hodges, IT Director Nathanael Carver for IT support, and Clerk to the Board Trisha Hogan.

The Board received information on a potential economic development project and directed staff on how to proceed.

Chairman Chappell moved to leave the closed session, seconded by Commissioner McKelvey and unanimously approved.

OPEN SESSION

Chairman Chappell moved to seal the minutes of the closed session until such time that opening the minutes does not frustrate the purpose of the closed session, seconded by Commissioner McCall and unanimously approved.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, **Chairman Chappell moved to adjourn the meeting at 5:22 p.m., seconded by Commissioner McCall and unanimously approved.**

Jason R. Chappell, Chairman
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

Trisha M. Hogan, Clerk to the Board