

MINUTES
TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
APRIL 28, 2025 – REGULAR MEETING

The Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County met in a regular meeting on Monday, April 28, 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, and Teresa McCall. Commissioner Chase McKelvey was absent. County Manager Jaime Laughter and Clerk to the Board Trisha Hogan were also present. County Attorney John Kubis participated via Zoom meeting software.

Media: Laura Denon – *The Transylvania Times*

There were approximately 50 people in the audience.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Jason Chappell presiding declared a quorum was present and called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

WELCOME

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

PUBLIC HEARING

ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE-BASED INCENTIVE GRANT FOR PROJECT MOUND

The County Manager introduced Transylvania Economic Alliance Executive Director Burton Hodges to present information regarding Project Mound.

Project Mound is a nationally recognized, vertically integrated trail design and construction firm specializing in recreational trail infrastructure for developers, municipalities, and private landowners. With over 20 years of experience, the company operates in central North Carolina and maintains three offices in North Carolina and Utah.

The company is evaluating the purchase and renovation of an existing building in Transylvania County to serve as its new corporate headquarters and manufacturing hub. The project would consolidate operations, allowing the company to produce and sell components such as benches, kiosks, signage, ramps, and bridges used in trail systems.

Currently, the company employs five staff members at its North Carolina location and 17 remote workers. All five local employees would relocate, and the 17 remote workers would be based at the new Transylvania County location. Additionally, the company plans to create 28 new jobs in the county by 2029 with an average annual salary exceeding \$49,286 and robust healthcare benefits.

The total investment in real and business personal property is projected at \$1.49 million through 2029. The company is also considering sites in two other Western North Carolina counties, as well as Greenville-

Spartanburg and York County, South Carolina. The Economic Partnership of North Carolina is assisting with the coordination of state-level incentives, including a Building Reuse Grant, also on the Board's agenda. Based on the County's economic development incentive guidelines, Project Mound qualifies for a scorecard score of 75, making it eligible for a grant of 75% of ad valorem property taxes, rebated annually for five years for each year of new investment, contingent upon meeting job creation and investment targets.

Chairman Chappell invited comments or questions from the Board. Hearing none, he opened the public hearing at 6:07 p.m. There were no public comments. The public hearing was closed at 6:08 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The following comments reflect the opinions and perspectives of the speakers.

Bruce Gleasman: Mr. Gleasman suggested the County explore cost-saving measures through building consolidation. Drawing from his experience in large corporations, he explained that reducing the physical footprint of facilities often resulted in significant savings. He encouraged the Board to evaluate County-owned properties and consider consolidating staff into fewer buildings, with the potential to sell unused buildings for profit. He estimated that such actions could save the County between \$3 million and \$6 million and support efforts to maintain or reduce the tax rate. Mr. Gleasman advocated for the County to pursue the lowest tax rate in North Carolina, which he believed would attract new residents and businesses.

Hannah Bowers: Speaking on behalf of the Living Wage Coalition of Transylvania County, Ms. Bowers addressed County employee compensation. She reported that in 2024, nearly one-third of County employees earned less than the living wage of \$17.55 per hour. While some departments—such as Planning, Administration, and Finance—paid employees above this threshold, others, including Child Development, Housekeeping, and Parks and Recreation, had most employees earning below it. She noted that the percentage of County employees earning below a living wage is higher than in neighboring counties such as Henderson, Jackson, and Polk. The Coalition urged the Board to raise the County's wage floor to the living wage level, emphasizing that doing so would provide stability for employees and their families, especially in the post-Hurricane Helene economic environment. She added that living wages can also benefit the County by improving staff retention and reducing turnover costs. Ms. Bowers concluded by inviting the Board to demonstrate its commitment to the workforce and the broader community by making Transylvania County not only a great place to live, but also a great place to work.

Kristi Brown: Ms. Brown, Clerk of Superior Court, asked the Board to consider where court personnel would be housed and where court sessions would be held during any future courthouse expansion. She emphasized that expansion cannot occur while court is in session. Additionally, she recognized and commended the staff of the Clerk of Court's office and the Magistrate's office for earning a 100% score on recent departmental audits, expressing appreciation for their hard work and dedication to the citizens of Transylvania County.

AGENDA MODIFICATIONS

There were no agenda modifications.

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

CONSENT AGENDA

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

The Board approved the following:

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Monday, March 24, 2025, and a regular meeting on Monday, April 14, 2025, which was followed by a closed session with sealed minutes. The Board approved all minutes as submitted.

MARCH 2025 DISCOVERY, RELEASE & MONTHLY SETTLEMENT REPORT

In accordance with N.C.G.S. § 105-312(b) and § 105-381(b), the Tax Administrator submitted the March 2025 Discovery, Release, and Monthly Settlement Report. Releases totaled \$1,094.57 and refunds totaled \$911.14. The Board approved the report as submitted.

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

The Board approved out-of-state travel for Workforce Development Director Sarah Tennyson to attend the National Rural Health Conference in Atlanta, GA, on May 20–23, where she will co-present an abstract titled “Using Area-Level Vulnerability Measures in Policy and Practice.” All expenses are covered by Workforce Development grant funds.

PROCLAMATION - OLDER AMERICANS MONTH

The Board approved a proclamation declaring May 2025 as Older Americans Month in Transylvania County. The national theme, “*Flip the Script on Aging*,” highlights efforts to reshape societal perceptions and conversations around aging.

**Proclamation #16-2025
Older Americans Month 2025**

WHEREAS, Older Americans Month is observed nationally as a time to recognize the contributions of Older Americans, highlight aging trends, and reaffirm our commitment to serving older adults; and

WHEREAS, the 2025 theme for Older Americans Month, “Flip the Script on Aging,” focuses on transforming how society perceives, talks about, and approaches aging; and

WHEREAS, Transylvania County’s growing population of older adults enriches our community with their strength, wisdom, and diverse life experiences, and Transylvania County is committed to honoring their contributions, exploring opportunities for them to stay active and engaged, and highlighting opportunities for purpose, exploration, and connection that comes with aging; and

WHEREAS, Transylvania County, in alignment with the 2025 Older Americans Month theme, is dedicated to empowering aging and educating and encouraging older adults to prepare and plan for the future while actively participating in the present;

NOW, THEREFORE, the Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County hereby proclaims May 2025 as Older Americans Month in Transylvania County and calls upon all residents to join us in recognizing the contributions of our older citizens.

This the 28th day of April 2025.

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

PROCLAMATION - HISTORIC PRESERVATION MONTH

The Board approved a proclamation declaring May as Historic Preservation Month in Transylvania County, recognizing local efforts to celebrate and preserve the County's history through various events.

**Proclamation #17-2025
Historic Preservation Month**

WHEREAS, Historic preservation is an effective tool for managing growth, revitalizing neighborhoods, fostering local pride, and maintaining community character while enhancing the livability of a community; and

WHEREAS, Historic preservation is relevant for communities across the nation, both urban and rural, and for Americans of all ages, all walks of life, and all ethnic backgrounds; and

WHEREAS, It is important to celebrate the role of history in our lives and the contributions made by dedicated individuals in helping to preserve the tangible aspects of the heritage that has shaped us as a people; and

WHEREAS, Transylvania County and the City of Brevard have two National Register Districts and 21 individual local landmarks; and

WHEREAS, In May, there will be a host of events that have been prepared by local historical organizations and co-sponsored by the Transylvania County Joint Historic Preservation Commission, who are appointed by the County Commissioners, to help preserve the historical identity of all Transylvania County;

NOW, THEREFORE, the Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County does hereby proclaim and recognizes the month of May 2025 as Historic Preservation Month.

This the 28th day of April 2025.

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

PROCLAMATION - FOSTER CARE AWARENESS MONTH

The Board approved a proclamation declaring May as Foster Care Awareness Month to recognize the efforts of foster families, child welfare professionals, and advocates, and to raise awareness about children in foster care.

**Proclamation #19-2025
Foster Care Awareness Month**

WHEREAS, the youth of North Carolina are our most precious resource and hope for the future, and all children deserve a safe, loving, and nurturing place to call home; and

WHEREAS, in Transylvania County, there are approximately 34 children of all ages in the custody of the Department of Social Services, with most residing in foster care homes or with relatives; and

WHEREAS, the primary goal of foster care is to provide safe, secure, and stable homes through the compassion and nurturing of foster families or kinship families; and

WHEREAS, foster families and kinship families open their homes and hearts to children whose families are in crisis, playing a vital role in helping children and families heal and reunify, while also aiding children in launching into successful adulthood; and

WHEREAS, dedicated foster families and kinship families sometimes adopt foster children, resulting in a greater need for more foster families; and

WHEREAS, through the partnerships of numerous individuals, communities, and public and private organizations, there is a collaborative effort to raise public awareness of the needs of children both in foster care and exiting foster care, and of the enduring and valuable contributions made by foster and kinship families; and

WHEREAS, “Foster Care Awareness Month” is an opportunity to recognize foster families, child welfare professionals, and advocates working to ensure children’s safety, well-being, and permanence, and to spread awareness on behalf of the children in foster care;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED by the Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County that May 2025 will be recognized as “Foster Care Awareness Month” in Transylvania County, and encourages individuals and families to volunteer their time, energy, and talents on behalf of children in foster care and their biological families, kinship caregivers, and foster families during the month and throughout the year.

This the 28th day of April 2025.

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

PROCLAMATION - CLERKS TO THE BOARDS OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS’ WEEK

The Board approved a proclamation declaring May 4–10, 2025, as Clerks to the Boards of County Commissioners Week. Commissioner Chapman requested that the proclamation be read aloud and recognized Clerk to the Board Trisha Hogan for her service as President of the NC Association of County Clerks. Chairman Chappell also expressed appreciation for her 18 years of dedicated service to the Board and the citizens.

Proclamation #18-2025 Clerks To The Boards Of County Commissioners Week

WHEREAS, the role of the clerk to the board of county commissioners (clerk) is crucial for maintaining an informed community and facilitating effective local governance through communication among citizens, governing bodies, and administrative departments; and

WHEREAS, the position of clerk, one of the oldest in local government, continues to be essential as the official recordkeepers of their counties, with responsibilities that are deeply rooted in history; and

WHEREAS, North Carolina General Statute 153A-111 requires every board of county commissioners to appoint or designate a clerk to the board to perform any duties that may be required by law or the board of commissioners including, but not limited to, the preparation, filing, and protection of local government records, which are vital for accountability and transparency; and

WHEREAS, clerks enhance their professional skills through active participation in the North Carolina Association of County Clerks to Boards of Commissioners, which, in partnership with the University of North

Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Government and the International Institute of Municipal Clerks, offers nationally recognized certification programs and continuous professional education; and

WHEREAS, clerks, through their dedication to professional development, not only improve the efficacy of their offices but also bring positive recognition to their counties by participating in advanced education and obtaining professional-related certifications.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT PROCLAIMED by the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners that May 4 through May 10, 2025, will be recognized as “Clerks to the Boards of County Commissioners Week” in Transylvania County and extends its appreciation to Clerk to the Board Trisha Hogan and Deputy Clerk to the Board Jennifer Wright, and to all county clerks for the vital services they perform and their exemplary dedication to the county they represent.

ADOPTED this the 28th day of April 2025.

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

APPROVAL OF ARCHITECT CONTRACT FOR SCHOOL BOND RENOVATION PROJECTS

The Board approved a \$2,815,160 contract with LS3P for architectural services related to all three scopes of the school bond renovation projects. The firm was selected by the Joint School Bond Project Committee based on a formal RFQ process. The Committee will review the plans at 50% completion and prior to bidding to ensure alignment with the intended scope.

PRESENTATIONS/RECOGNITIONS

SEMI-ANNUAL DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS - FY 2026 BUDGET KICKOFF - SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Sheriff Owenby reported on his office's accomplishments over the first six months of the year and on trends that may be reflected in upcoming budget years.

Summary of Sheriff's Office Semi-Annual Report

- Crime & Incidents
 - 15% decrease in total crimes from 2022 to 2024.
 - Serious crimes decreased by 14.5%.
 - Patrol Division: 1,243 reports, 13,258 calls, 889 arrests
- SRO Statistics
 - 4,257 logged activities; 13.5% increase from the previous year.
 - 1,207 student contacts, 601 administrative duties, 459 parental contacts, 150 home visits
- Jail-Based Reentry Program
 - Focus on substance use disorder (SUD) treatment, mental health counseling, and reentry services.
 - Reduced recidivism and rule violations among participants.
 - Significant cost savings and improved outcomes for detainees with SUD.
- Court Services
 - 239 court sessions in 2024, projected increase in 2025.
 - There is a need for additional court security personnel due to increased court days.
- Narcotics Investigations
 - 61 felony and 22 misdemeanor charges, significant narcotics and weapons seizures.
 - Ongoing investigations and drug take-back programs.

- Sheriff's Office Trends
 - Addressing staffing challenges, technology advancements, evolving crime patterns (cybercrime, scams, etc.), and the need for specialized training.
 - Focus on continued mental health crisis intervention and officer well-being.

Sheriff Owenby concluded his presentation and invited comments and questions from the Commissioners.

Commissioner Chapman asked Sheriff Owenby about what triggers a home visit by a school resource officer. Sheriff Owenby explained that SROs make home visits for reasons like excessive absences, disciplinary issues, or concerns about abuse at home. He emphasized that there's strong communication between SROs, teachers, and counselors regarding student well-being.

Commissioner Chapman also inquired about the role of nonprofit organizations in the reentry program. Sheriff Owenby shared that his office works closely with local organizations, such as the Episcopal Church, to help released inmates with transportation, housing, and rehab services. Reentry staff follow up with these organizations to ensure that the inmates receive the help they need and track their progress after release.

Commissioner Dalton asked about the jail housing inmates from other counties. Sheriff Owenby confirmed that the jail is currently housing 75 inmates, with 25 federal inmates and 25 from the State Misdemeanant program. The County is paid \$40 a day by the state to be housed in Transylvania County.

Commissioner Dalton also asked about the jail's capacity. Sheriff Owenby clarified that the jail has a capacity of 115 inmates and is not currently facing issues with overcrowding.

Commissioner McCall wanted to know how much fentanyl it takes to kill a person. Sheriff Owenby explained that even a small amount—about the size of a grain of salt—can be lethal. He mentioned the growing concern over fentanyl in the community, noting that it is becoming more prevalent, often coming from areas like Atlanta.

Commissioner McCall then asked if the amount of fentanyl being seized had increased over the past year. Sheriff Owenby confirmed it had, mentioning that fentanyl seizures are on the rise in the area, which reflects a larger trend in the region.

Commissioner McCall also raised a question about whether the situation at the border would affect the flow of drugs. Sheriff Owenby said that it is too early to tell, as many drugs are already in the country, including in their local community. He emphasized the need for continued diligence from law enforcement.

Commissioner McCall also asked about the projected increase in court days for 2025. Sheriff Owenby explained that the Sheriff's Office works closely with the Clerk of Court and other officials to project court days. He mentioned that the court system is working to clear a backlog, and the Sheriff's Office is doing its best to assist.

Commissioner Dalton asked about the transition from Explorers to Tahoes for patrol vehicles. Sheriff Owenby said that the Tahoe is working well, though deer have damaged some vehicles. He noted the Tahoe has been a good fit for the department overall.

Commissioner McCall asked how long it takes to receive a new vehicle once it is ordered. Sheriff Owenby explained that it depends on the dealer's ability to get parts and equipment from vendors. Typically, it takes 2-3 months for unmarked cars and longer for marked vehicles with specialized equipment.

Commissioner Chapman shared concerns from the NC Association of County Commissioners about vaping, noting that vape products are unregulated, and many people do not know what is in them. He urged the public to be aware, especially with children experimenting with vapes. Sheriff Owenby agreed, adding that the School System does not allow vaping on school property, and SROs are dealing with the issue, but it is a growing problem that is harder to regulate.

Chairman Chappell acknowledged the increase in narcotics seizures, while the membership of the Narcotics Task Force has decreased. He expressed appreciation for Sheriff Owenby and his team for continuing to tackle these issues despite fewer resources. Sheriff Owenby shared that the Task Force will be giving a presentation about the dangers of fentanyl at the Methodist Church.

Commissioner Chapman asked about the Sheriff's Office aiding the Brevard Police Department while they are understaffed. Sheriff Owenby explained that the Brevard Police Department had reached out to request help with night shifts, and his office plans to provide additional officers to cover the midnight to 6:00 a.m. shift. This assistance will impact the Sheriff's budget, but discussions are underway, and he hopes the plans will be finalized soon.

There were no further comments or questions.

TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY SCHOOLS FY 2026 BUDGET

Dr. Lisa Fletcher, Superintendent of Transylvania County Schools, presented the School System's FY 2026 budget request. Before beginning her remarks, she introduced the directors present in the audience, noting that they were available to help answer questions, if needed.

She began by highlighting the current state of Transylvania County Schools under the theme *Rising to Excellence: Successes and Opportunities for Growth*.

Strengths

Dr. Fletcher emphasized that the School System's greatest strength is the community - teachers, staff, parents, and other stakeholders. She reminded the Board that the School System is the largest employer in Transylvania County, and everyone involved shares a mission to support every student. Their focus is on lifelong learning and student growth. Dr. Fletcher spoke about the importance of prioritizing personal development alongside academics, emphasizing that by focusing on consistent growth rather than one-time measures, the schools are developing students who are resilient and ready for the future. These collective efforts give her confidence that the district is rising to new levels of excellence.

Proficiency and Growth

Dr. Fletcher distinguished between proficiency and growth. Proficiency is reaching a specific grade-level goal. Growth is how much a student improves over time. Both are important, but growth tells them how well they are supporting students, no matter where they start. She highlighted that Transylvania County students, particularly those with disabilities, have shown significant gains in just one year, which she attributed to focused support and the dedication of their teachers.

Growth Index Gains in One Year

Dr. Fletcher was proud to report that several schools in the district ranked among the highest for student growth in the region and even in the State. Brevard High School, Rosman High School, Brevard Middle School, and Rosman Middle School were all noted for their exceptional progress. She specifically pointed out that Rosman Middle is now in the top 5% statewide for growth among students with disabilities, reflecting the School System's commitment to equitable support and academic progress for all students.

Elementary Milestones

Dr. Fletcher shared positive developments in early grade performance, particularly in reading and math. Pisgah Forest Elementary reported a 20-point increase in 4th grade math scores, while TC Henderson Elementary saw a 17-point gain. These improvements highlight the success of targeted literacy and math interventions at the elementary level.

District and Statewide Rankings

Transylvania County Schools are currently ranked 25th out of 115 districts across the state, with the high schools ranked as high as 10th. The district continues to aim for top placement in North Carolina. Independent assessments have also ranked Transylvania County Schools highly in key categories. They are ranked #2 for Best Teachers and #15 for Best Places to Teach in North Carolina. Additionally, 83.5% of eligible students earned their industry credentials, placing the district #2 statewide for career readiness.

Teaching Working Conditions

Dr. Fletcher noted the importance of positive working conditions and culture within the School System. Results from the State-mandated teacher working conditions survey showed improvement, with 91% of staff indicating that Transylvania County Schools is a good place to work and learn. This compares favorably to prior years, when the approval rate was 85.06% in 2020 and 84.51% in 2018. These gains reflect the school system's efforts to build and maintain a supportive environment for educators and students alike.

Key Focus Areas

While the school system is proud of its progress, Dr. Fletcher acknowledged that there is still more work to be done. She identified several key focus areas for the coming year, including providing additional targeted support to schools such as Brevard Elementary, TC Henderson, and Davidson River School. Efforts will continue to improve K-2 literacy and strengthen reading across grades 3 through 8. There will also be a concentrated focus on better supporting students with disabilities and English learners. Recruiting and retaining high-quality staff remains a top priority, as staffing plays a critical role in student success.

School Funding

Dr. Fletcher transitioned the presentation to focus on how the School System is funded.

Funding Sources

She explained that, unlike counties, school systems do not have taxing authority and must rely on a combination of State, federal, and local funds, along with other sources such as scholarships and Medicaid reimbursements. For Transylvania County Schools, State funds make up the largest portion at 51.3%, followed by local funds at 29.6%, federal funds at 13.5%, and other sources at 5.6%.

Local Funding

Dr. Fletcher expressed appreciation to the Board of Commissioners for their support through local funding. She noted that the local contribution is divided into two categories: Personnel and Operational. The Operational category includes a wide range of day-to-day expenses such as utilities and general school operations.

Small County Funding

Because Transylvania County Schools serves fewer than 3,300 students, it qualifies for \$1,548,200 in Small County Funding. Dr. Fletcher said all of this amount goes towards staffing, with only \$1,800 allocated to support the All-District Chorus.

Fun Budget Facts

She reminded the Board that school budgets are developed prior to the State passing its budget, a challenge the County government is also familiar with. The School System manages 131 separate budgets and over

15,000 account codes. Each of these budgets must follow specific rules depending on its funding source, whether State or federal, making the budgeting process both detailed and highly regulated.

Enrollment & Positions

Dr. Fletcher provided an overview of current enrollment trends and how staffing is supported across the School System.

Enrollment Trends

She reported that total enrollment is just over 3,100 students. This number does not include the 66 homeschooled students who receive special education services, nor does it account for students in the four Pre-K classrooms or seniors who completed high school after the first semester. Including those groups, the School System is serving approximately 3,250 students.

While overall enrollment appears to have declined slightly, Rosman Elementary and TC Henderson have both experienced increases in student numbers this year. Dr. Fletcher also noted that the Exceptional Children (EC) population is at 18.4%, or 598 students. However, the State only funds EC services for up to 13% of the student population, leaving the School System to cover the gap. Additionally, they are serving a growing number of multilingual learners, now at 206 students, but funding for this subgroup also remains limited.

Full-Time Position Trends

Dr. Fletcher explained that staffing is supported by a mix of State, federal, and local funding. As State-funded positions have been reduced, federal and local dollars are increasingly important to maintain high-quality services. This year, the number of locally funded positions was reduced from 141 to 122, a shift that reflects ongoing efforts to move eligible positions into State allotments whenever possible.

School staffing is funded based on the total Average Daily Membership (ADM) across the district, not on a per-school basis. If TC Henderson has 25 kindergarten students but the classroom size is capped at 18, the State will provide a teacher. If a similar situation occurs at Pisgah Forest, the State is only going to provide one teacher, but two schools need to be supported. This is why the School System relies on local funding.

FY 25 Budget Highlights

Dr. Fletcher shared that in FY 2025, the State raised the beginning teacher salary to \$41,000 and increased benefit rates. Specifically, the retirement contribution rate increased to 24.04%, and the medical insurance cost rose to \$8,095 per employee. The School System has been advised to anticipate further increases in all three of these areas for FY 2026. When the State raises salary and benefit rates, the School System must also cover those increases for any positions that are funded locally.

FY 2026 Local Fund 2 – Operating Request

To sustain current locally funded positions while accommodating anticipated increases in State-mandated pay and benefit rates, Dr. Fletcher reported that the School System will require an additional \$264,962 in County funding. This increase is based on the following assumptions:

- A 5% pay increase for certified personnel
- A 3% pay increase for non-certified personnel
- An employer matching retirement rate of 24.5%
- The health insurance cost of \$8,662 per employee

Operational Budget Request – Increase in Local Supplement

Dr. Fletcher noted that the School System is not requesting any new positions for FY 2026. Instead, the focus is on maintaining the strong staffing foundation already in place. A key component of that effort is improving the local salary supplement.

An increase in the supplement is intended to help retain current staff and attract new educators to the district. Dr. Fletcher emphasized that while Transylvania County Schools is the largest employer in the County, the benefits of staff retention and recruitment extend beyond the School System. Even employees who reside outside the district contribute economically through local spending and sales tax revenue.

She acknowledged that Transylvania County's supplement currently lags behind neighboring Henderson County. Without a more competitive supplement, the district risks losing high-quality teachers and staff to surrounding areas with more attractive compensation packages. By increasing the supplement, the School System hopes to retain its experienced employees, attract new talent, and reduce turnover, providing greater continuity and stability for students. With support from the Board, Dr. Fletcher believes Transylvania County can continue to be a rewarding and financially viable place to work.

Proposed Increase to Local Supplement for FY 2026

Dr. Fletcher presented proposals for increasing the local salary supplement, with the goal of either matching or slightly exceeding what is currently offered in Henderson County. She shared that Henderson County provides a 9% supplement for certified staff and 6.75% for non-certified staff.

Currently, Transylvania County's supplement rates are:

- 8.5% for certified teachers
- 4% for district administrators
- 2% for classified staff
- 9% for staff with 25 or more years of service in North Carolina (based on State hire date)

Two proposals were offered for consideration:

Option A

- 9% for all staff
- 9.5% for staff with 25+ years of service
- FY 2026 cost: \$3,047,320
- Represents an increase of \$846,816 over the current year

Option B

- 9.5% for all staff
- 10% for staff with 25+ years of service
- FY 2026 cost: \$3,215,811
- Represents an increase of \$1,015,307 over the current year

Operational Budget Request – Other Requests

Dr. Fletcher explained that the middle and high schools are currently using capital funds to cover the costs of school resource officers (SROs) and athletic officials. To better align these expenses with their purpose, she proposed shifting these costs to the operational budget. Based on information provided by each school, the total amount needed is \$92,191. This funding would be returned directly to the schools so they can continue paying for SROs and athletic officials next year using operational funds instead of capital.

Projected State Planning Allotment

Dr. Fletcher reported that the State's planning allotment projects a reduction in staffing for FY 2026, including:

- A loss of two teaching positions
- One month of assistant principal funding
- One position in school health

- Seven months of Career and Technical Education (CTE) funding

These reductions amount to \$500,000 in lost funding. However, the School System expects to manage the impact through staff attrition.

Operational Budget Request – How the School System is Helping

Dr. Fletcher highlighted proactive steps the School System is taking to support employee retention and recruitment, while also addressing student needs. One major initiative is the launch of new programs aimed at both staff and students.

The School System plans to introduce an Early Childhood Instructional Program at the high school level. Through this program, students will gain hands-on experience by interning in the district's childcare center, helping prepare them for future careers in education or childcare.

Building on this initiative, a new TCS Employee Childcare Program is planned for the 2025–2026 school year. This center will provide affordable childcare services for children ages six months to three years and will be supported by high school students participating in the instructional program. This effort responds directly to feedback from current and potential employees who have expressed that high childcare costs can make it more feasible to stay home rather than work. With support from the Board, this program could help reduce that financial barrier and encourage staff to remain in or return to the workforce with confidence.

Strategic Staffing to Support Student Well-Being

While the School System is not requesting new positions in the FY 2026 budget, Dr. Fletcher emphasized that key student support needs persist. These areas include:

- Services for multilingual learners
- Counseling and academic support
- Social work and mental health services
- Behavioral support
- School nursing

The School System will continue exploring ways to redirect and reallocate existing positions to better meet these growing needs.

Capital

Capital Request – Safety System and Visitor Management

Dr. Fletcher expressed appreciation to the County and the Sheriff's Office for providing School Resource Officers at every school, emphasizing that school safety remains a critical priority.

Following a recent school shooting in Georgia, the School System began evaluating new tools to strengthen security. In particular, they are exploring the implementation of the Centegix Crisis Alert and Visitor Management System (Soul Source System). Two presentations on the system have been held, one of which was attended by the Sheriff. Dr. Fletcher characterized the system as a potential game changer for school safety.

She requested that the Board consider using lottery proceeds or capital funding to purchase the system. The proposed system would provide multiple safety and security enhancements, including:

- CrisisAlert badges for all staff to instantly activate emergency alerts

- A visitor management system that scans IDs and conducts background checks (Current visitor sign-in relies on a Google sheet, with no verification of visitor identity.)
- A wireless alert infrastructure installed across all facilities
- A tool to support swift and organized reunification during emergencies

The total cost of the system is \$432,690, with the option to spread payments over five years.

Fund 4 – Capital Outlay

Dr. Fletcher explained that capital outlay supports long-term, ongoing needs for maintaining school facilities. She also expressed appreciation for the progress on bond projects that fall outside of this funding category, and the collaboration with the County Manager, and the continued support of the Board of Commissioners.

The capital outlay request includes funding for building maintenance, major equipment, and furniture replacements. Dr. Fletcher emphasized the need to invest in updated classroom furniture and cafeteria equipment across the district. She shared that principals had been replacing furniture for two classrooms each year using their school allotments, but she is now proposing a centralized, district-wide furniture replacement schedule. This approach would ensure equity, remove pressure from school leaders, and result in better pricing through bulk purchasing.

The capital request also includes one non-bond-related facility repair: the elevator at Rosman Middle/High School, where the hydraulic system is failing. The estimated repair cost is \$60,000.

Additional capital needs presented include:

- Two handicapped accessible activity buses at a total cost of \$332,000. Currently, no activity buses accommodate students in wheelchairs, and yellow buses require NCDPI approval for non-routine use.
- Snowplows for maintenance vehicles for \$18,500. During the last winter storm, the district paid \$2,500 to have the TC Henderson parking lot cleared. With plows, the district's staff could manage snow removal themselves.
- Walk-in freezers for Rosman Elementary and TC Henderson to meet increasing food storage needs due to enrollment growth.
- Replacement of turf fields at two schools in the future. The district is requesting \$100,000 to begin setting aside funds for turf replacement in approximately ten years.
- Replacement of cafeteria tables, classroom desks and tables, and outdated bus cameras and radios.
- Systemwide replacement of student Chromebooks, teacher laptops, and select camera systems.
- An allocation of \$167,650 for routine furnishings, fixtures, and equipment (FF&E), a slight reduction from prior years.
- Funding for the Centegix safety and security system, which Dr. Fletcher again proposed to be covered through lottery proceeds.

Full FY 2026 Request

Dr. Fletcher closed the presentation by summarizing the full budget request, which includes both operational and capital components. She acknowledged that the overall request represents an increase over the prior fiscal year, driven by rising personnel costs and the proposed increase to the local salary supplement. Both Option A and Option B were presented for consideration, with Option B providing a higher supplement rate and surpassing the current level provided by Henderson County Schools.

Dr. Fletcher pointed out that not all school employees currently receive a local supplement, including social workers and ROTC instructors. As part of the FY 2026 request, the School System aims to extend the supplement to all employees to ensure equity across roles.

Option B proposes a 9.5% supplement for all employees and a 10% supplement for those with 25 or more years of service in North Carolina. Dr. Fletcher emphasized that investing in the School System's employees offers the greatest return, helping retain experienced staff, attract qualified professionals, and ensure consistent support for students.

She concluded by thanking the Board of Commissioners for their attention, time, and continued partnership with Transylvania County Schools.

Discussion

Commissioner McCall inquired about the elevator repair at Rosman Middle/High School, asking how long the issue had been ongoing. Dr. Fletcher responded that the problem had been present for about two months. Kerry Putnam confirmed the elevator is still functioning but needs a plan for repair, as the hydraulic system is failing, and the system is outdated. Commissioner McCall asked if there had been any incidents of individuals getting stuck. Mr. Putnam said not this year, but such issues have occurred in the past. When asked whether the \$60,000 estimate was firm, Mr. Putnam confirmed that it came from a contractor. Commissioner McCall stressed the importance of accessibility and asked whether the School System could front the cost and seek reimbursement later. Dr. Fletcher said that option is available, or they could reach out to the County directly if preferred. Commissioner McCall emphasized she would rather see urgent requests like this brought to the Board sooner rather than delayed.

On the topic of employee childcare services, Commissioner McCall asked about licensing requirements. Dr. Fletcher confirmed that at least one licensed adult is required and that high school students could intern as part of their coursework. She also noted licensing requirements for playgrounds, which prevented the use of Pre-K equipment.

Regarding the proposed security system, Commissioner McCall asked about the timing for requesting lottery funds. Dr. Fletcher said both Boards must approve the request and that she was waiting to hear which funding path the Commissioners preferred. She believes lottery funds would qualify since the system is considered capital. The County Manager confirmed that lottery funds or bond funds could be options.

Commissioner McCall noted that the total FY 2026 request, including capital, represented a 9% increase. School staff confirmed that Option A would result in a 6% operational increase and Option B in a 7% increase. Commissioner McCall asked if the \$14,987,293 figure was strictly for operational needs. Dr. Fletcher clarified that it included the proposed supplement to exceed Henderson County. Staff added that lower-paid employees would benefit the most. The Manager explained that the figure represents a 10.1% increase over FY 2025 local current expense.

Commissioner McCall expressed gratitude for the collaboration between the Superintendent and County Manager and appreciated the thoughtful approach to the budget. Dr. Fletcher, in turn, expressed appreciation for the County Manager's mentorship.

Commissioner Chapman asked about services for exceptional students. Dr. Fletcher explained that it includes students with disabilities and academically gifted students (AIG).

Commissioner Chapman also asked about available lottery funds; Dr. Fletcher said the School System has just over \$700,000.

Commissioner Chapman inquired about the County's ranking in local contribution percentages. The Manager said Transylvania County ranks well compared to peer counties, especially in per-student spending. She noted opportunities for advocacy, including full funding for exceptional children and increased small school

funding. Transylvania County does not qualify for low-wealth funding despite having a relatively high child poverty rate.

Chairman Chappell asked if the proposed five-year security system cost included maintenance and what happens afterward. Dr. Fletcher said the plan includes maintenance and upgrades, but the School System would need to evaluate future renewal at the end of the term.

Chairman Chappell then asked about the activity bus timeline. Keith Wilmot said one bus is currently in stock, but new orders could take a year. Chairman Chappell asked if the cost could be split over two fiscal years. Mr. Wilmot said the School System had been on a rotation to replace one bus annually but had not received one in the last three years. He added that the current fleet lacks any handicapped-accessible activity buses. In response to Commissioner McCall, he reported that no down payment is required for new orders.

Commissioner Chapman asked if student bus usage was tracked. Mr. Wilmot said student counts are conducted, and that 66-passenger buses are now the standard due to size and cost efficiency. Commissioner Chapman also asked about electric buses. Mr. Wilmot said they have two electric buses funded through the Volkswagen settlement, with no local tax dollars involved.

Chairman Chappell asked whether the plan to centralize FF&E purchases was a one-time shift. Dr. Fletcher said she intends for this change to be ongoing so that principals can focus on classroom needs rather than furniture procurement and benefit from cost savings through systemwide purchases.

Commissioner Dalton asked about the County's tier status and its impact on funding. The Manager confirmed that Transylvania County's tier status does not reflect the actual state of the economy, which affects Public Schools Capital Grant eligibility.

Chairman Chappell returned to the lottery fund eligibility question for the security system. The Manager said she is confident it qualifies as a capital expense, although the software component can sometimes fall into a gray area. She added that if needed, funds set aside in the bond for safety upgrades or other budget avenues could also be explored.

There were no further questions or comments. The Board thanked Dr. Fletcher for her presentation.

CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT FOR EXCELLENCE IN FINANCIAL REPORTING

The Board of Commissioners recognized the Transylvania County Finance Department for receiving the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Finance Officers Association for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023. This award is the highest form of recognition in governmental accounting and is given to entities that produce comprehensive and well-organized financial reports in compliance with GAAP and GASB standards.

Finance Director Meagan O'Neal and her staff were congratulated for this significant accomplishment. Commissioner McCall expressed her appreciation for Ms. O'Neal's professionalism and diligence since joining the County. Chairman Chappell echoed those remarks, noting the challenges of completing the audit under tight deadlines and during Hurricane Helene. Commissioner McCall also commended Ms. O'Neal for her commitment and presence at the Emergency Operations Center during the storm.

MONTHLY CAPITAL UPDATE

The County Manager provided an update on ongoing capital projects as requested by the Board. These updates will be shared monthly during the Board's second regular meeting and posted online for public transparency. No update was provided in March due to staff focus on wildfire response.

Key Highlights

- Over \$150 million in capital projects are currently in progress or planned.
- Approximately \$30 million in grant funding has been secured, not including broadband funding allocated directly to local providers.

Fixing Transylvania County Schools – Step One: Investment in Capital Projects at All Nine Schools

- February 13: The joint committee selected the architect for Brevard High School Scope #1.
- March 4: The joint committee selected the architect for Brevard High School Scope #2, Brevard Area Renovation, and Rosman Area Renovation.
- March 4: Contract signed to begin project plans for the Brevard High School Scope #1.
- March 21: The joint committee conducted interviews for the project manager position.
- April 2: Brevard High School Scope #1 plans submitted to NCDPI; review estimated at 6-8 weeks, potentially affecting the project timeline.
- April 28, approval sought for architect contracts for Brevard High School Scope #2, Brevard Area Renovation, and Rosman Area Renovation. NCDPI review of Scope #1 underway.

The Manager addressed concerns raised on social media regarding the timeline for the Brevard High School Scope #1 project. To ensure transparency, the Manager shared documentation and a timeline of events with *The Transylvania Times*.

- The architectural contract was approved in early March, and the architect began work immediately.
- Design plans were completed by the end of March, which was noted as a very quick turnaround for a project of this size.
- The architect was actively communicating with NCDPI to clarify whether the full scope required state review and what the review timeline would be.
- NCDPI did not confirm the 6–8-week review window until April 9.
- Both Boards were updated after that notification.
- Email documentation shows collaborative efforts between the School System, County staff, and contracted professionals to move the project forward as efficiently as possible.
- The goal remains to complete the work by the start of the school year this fall, though the process is subject to typical public project constraints.

As of April 21, NCDPI shortened its review timeline. Following updated guidance, the architect resubmitted the project plans today. A revised project timeline is expected to be available soon.

Additional School Project Updates

The County and School System have split responsibility for various capital projects. The Manager provided updates on each of these projects, noting that the County staff is leading some while others are under the direction of Transylvania County Schools.

	Status
Projects with County Lead	
BHS Scope #1	DPI review response came in faster than noticed 4/9 and initial comments received 4/21. The architect has submitted responses as of 4/28 and is waiting for approval to revise project timeline.
BHS Scope #2	Joint committee approved architect; contract approval on 4/28. CMAR RFQ to be released
Brevard Area Renovation	Joint committee approved architect; contract approval on 4/28. CMAR RFQ to be released

Rosman Area Renovation	Joint committee approved architect; contract approval on 4/28. CMAR RFQ to be released
Storage Tank assessment, mitigation	Assessment completed. Mitigation recommended for BHS. Proposal for the next steps pending.
Projects with TCS Lead (not an exclusive list of all their projects)	
Rosman Retaining Wall	Funds were allocated in the Education Capital Fund for review of issues. BOE has requested funding. TCS and County staff reviewed with architect to see if it needs to be included in those scopes. Tentatively scheduled to come to BOC in May.
BES Playground	BOE is requesting additional funds for this project. Tentatively scheduled for BOC 5/12.
RES Playground	Project proposal in budget and BOE requesting approval of contracts. Tentatively scheduled for BOC 5/12.
HVAC ESSER/County funded project balance	Additional funds will be needed to meet obligations after TCS financial staff have sorted through expenditures to date against signed POs and contracts. Request going to BOE in May and then to BOC.
Wrestling Facility	TCS requested architect program review of area beside BHS Scope #1. Guidance forthcoming.
RHS/RMS Turf Field	Project underway and within budget.

The Manager shared recent photos of the Brevard High School Scope #1 demolition as part of the ongoing school capital improvements.

Protecting Transylvania Natural Resources: Clean Water, Sanitary Sewer, Solid Waste Disposal, and Streambank Restoration

- The emergency interconnection between the Town of Rosman and the City of Brevard water systems is underway. Boring is complete, and work continues on the Rosman side.
- The landfill cell expansion project was rebid and will require additional funding to complete.
- The County has requested updated infrastructure plans from both Brevard and Rosman. A draft has been received from Brevard; Rosman's is pending.
- Housing-related infrastructure needs are being assessed. Revised preliminary engineering reports are pending to evaluate potential water and sewer projects.
- Design work is underway for the Gallimore Road sewer project. Grant information is expected for the Pisgah Labs extension, both in partnership with Brevard.

Creating Jobs and a Safe Community: New Space for Growing Businesses and Upgrading Public Safety

- Sylvan Valley Industrial Building – Phase 2 is under construction, with a ribbon-cutting scheduled for May.
- Hart Road Emergency Access & Flood Mitigation is in the permitting stage. NCDOT has ordered a culvert and is coordinating repairs on a failed section of Hart Road.
- Public Safety Complex Courthouse programming decision is on the current agenda.
- The Library Amphitheater Cover project is advancing with the Library Foundation finalizing the budget.

Capital Planning Workshop

- It will be rescheduled for the summer following the annual budget process.

- Updated cost projections for the courthouse and school projects will inform long-term financial modeling.
- The County will use ARPA-funded asset inventories from Brevard and Rosman to support future capital planning.
- A \$10 million state allocation is available to enhance infrastructure resilience countywide.

The Manager concluded the presentation. There were no comments or questions from the Board.

CAPITAL WORKSHOP PREP

The Manager began setting the stage for the upcoming capital workshop, which has been delayed due to the forest fire emergency. Staff are currently evaluating how to modify both the workshop format and the financial modeling session. The Manager will continue offering brief presentations over the next several meetings to provide context on key elements of the County's capital plan, referencing past studies and data that form its foundation.

This presentation focused on Water and Sewer Infrastructure, a critical issue, even though the County is not a direct provider of these services.

Water and Sewer Infrastructure

- In 2014, the Board commissioned a countywide water study projecting a peak demand of 4.8 million gallons per day by 2065.
- The study identified three potential alternatives for expanding water access, each estimated at \$50 million at the time.
- The recommended approach (Alternative 1) included:
 - A new water treatment plant upstream of Rosman.
 - An interconnection between the Rosman and Brevard systems.
 - A new state-approved watershed.
 - Strategic waterline extensions into unserved County areas.
- Since 2014, key foundational steps have been completed:
 - The US 64 water and sewer extension to Gaia Herbs was completed and transferred to the Town.
 - The interconnect project between the Town of Rosman and the City of Brevard is in progress.
 - A study to support a new watershed permit is underway.
- The remaining recommendations include:
 - Construction of a 4 MGD water treatment plant.
 - Development of a long-term governance and management strategy to allow extensions outside current municipal boundaries.
 - Implementation of waterline extensions in targeted growth areas.
- The Manager noted that these projects are large in scale, complex, and require collaboration. All achievable early-phase actions have been completed within the first 10 years of the 50-year plan horizon.
- The County has a \$10 million allocation in the State budget that may be directed toward continuing this work or toward other infrastructure needs of mutual benefit to the County, City, or Town.

Additional Infrastructure-Related Progress

- A partnership with the City of Brevard secured matching funds for an RDA grant to extend water/sewer to Pisgah Labs, a key site identified in the water study.
- The County has a \$10 million allocation from the State, which must be programmed and could support infrastructure or other priorities shared by the County, City, or Town.

- The County also received **grant funds from the Dogwood Health Trust**, which may be used for infrastructure, pending completion of the Town of Rosman's Asset Inventory Assessment (originally intended to be funded with Dogwood money).
- \$10 million granted to the Town of Rosman; \$13 million granted to the City of Brevard, which has so far obligated \$352,000 for a preliminary engineering report on wastewater treatment plant upgrades. Pooling these funds for a broader regional impact is possible but would require intergovernmental coordination.

The Manager concluded the presentation. There were no questions or comments from the Board.

Discussion

Commissioner McCall inquired about the status of creating a regional water authority and whether a portion of the State-allocated funding could be used for this purpose. The Manager noted that while the 2014 study recommended a consolidated management strategy, no formal entity has been established. Discussions have occurred over the years, and options could range from a new single authority to more limited partnerships. Currently, water systems remain managed separately by the City of Brevard and the Town of Rosman. The Manager said using those funds might help facilitate movement on a consolidated strategy, though it would be the Board's decision.

Commissioner Dalton asked about the watershed intake capacity and confirmed it would exceed 7 million gallons per day. The Manager affirmed this, noting the design includes additional capacity beyond the projected 2065 need.

Chairman Chappell commented that legislative changes currently being discussed by the General Assembly could impact the County's planning, including proposed changes to dedicated usage amounts. The Manager agreed.

There were no further comments or questions.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE UPDATE TO HURRICANE/TROPICAL STORM HELENE

The Manager provided an update on the County's ongoing response and recovery efforts related to Hurricane/Tropical Storm Helene.

FEMA Assistance Data Points for Transylvania County (as of April 22, 2025):

- Over \$8 million awarded in Individual Assistance to Transylvania County residents.
- Of the 4,837 valid registrations, 4,185 were referred to Individual Assistance. So far, 3,023 applicants have been found eligible for Housing Assistance or Other Needs Assistance.
- No County households are currently checked into hotels through FEMA's TSA (Transitional Sheltering Assistance) program.
- FEMA is offering eligible occupants of FEMA-provided temporary housing units the option to purchase the unit, subject to specific conditions such as purchasing hazard insurance and forfeiting eligibility for future FEMA housing assistance.

Ongoing Resources and Deadlines:

- The FEMA application for Individual Assistance has passed.
- SBA Disaster Relief remains available for small businesses, nonprofits, homeowners, and renters:
 - Deadline for physical damage loans is April 27
 - Deadline for economic injury loans is June 6
 - More information at sba.gov/disaster
- WNC Economic Recovery Resources at [wncrecovery@nc.gov/resources](mailto:wncrecovery@nc.gov)

- Residents with private road or bridge damage can register for State assistance at ncdps.gov/Helene/prb

Housing Support and Debris Removal:

- All eligible County households seeking long-term housing assistance have received rental support or a FEMA unit.
- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) approved the County for:
 - Public right-of-way debris removal
 - Private property demo and removal
 - Waterway debris removal

Debris Removal Oversight and Communications Issues

- The debris removal contracts are held by USACE, not the County, and the County has no authority over contractors or work scheduling.
- The County submitted 14 waterway sites for consideration; FEMA and USACE opted to use drones for assessment.
- The Manager has contacted multiple agencies to clarify roles, responsibilities, and improve communication. Citizens are raising concerns, but the County lacks sufficient information to respond.
- The County has been asked about right of entry protocols and environmental compliance, but it does not regulate these matters.
- County staff have repeatedly requested contact information for residents to direct questions and concerns to the appropriate agencies and have been advised to refer the public to:
 - FEMA: FEMA-dr4827-NC-debris@FEMA.dhs.gov
 - NC Emergency Management: debris@ncdps.gov

The Manager concluded the update.

Chairman Chappell then called for a 10-minute recess. The Board reconvened at 8:10 p.m.

APPOINTMENTS

AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY BOARD

The terms of Dwight Parker and Harold Paxton expired at the end of April. Both individuals are eligible and willing to serve another term. Staff from the Cooperative Extension Office recommended their reappointment.

Commissioner Chapman moved to reappoint Dwight Parker and Harold Paxton to the Agricultural Advisory Board. Commissioner McCall seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

NEW BUSINESS

ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE-BASED INCENTIVE GRANT FOR PROJECT MOUND

The Manager recommended approval of a performance-based incentive grant and a resolution supporting Project Mound's application for a Building Reuse Program Grant. Transylvania Economic Alliance Executive Director Burton Hodges shared that the grant and resolution enhance the County's competitiveness in securing the project. The application was submitted for a potential state award announcement in June. Commissioners expressed support for the project and appreciated Mr. Hodges' continued efforts in economic development.

The motion to approve the incentive grant and resolution was made by Commissioner Dalton, seconded by Commissioner McCall, and passed unanimously.

Resolution # 15-2025
In Support of Project Mound's Building Reuse Program Grant Application

WHEREAS, the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners desires to assist in economic development efforts within the County; and

WHEREAS, Transylvania County supports Project Mound's application to pursue the Building Reuse Program through the NC Department of Commerce – Rural Economic Development Division; and

WHEREAS, Project Mound is expected to create 28 new full-time jobs with competitive wages and make \$1,490,000 in real and business property investments; and

WHEREAS, Transylvania County is required to contribute matching funds totaling 5% of the grant award; and

WHEREAS, Transylvania County held a public hearing on April 28, 2025, and authorized an incentive grant package for Project Mound based on the adopted Transylvania County Incentive Policy and Scorecard; and

NOW, THEREFORE, the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners resolves that the local funding proposed is deemed sufficient to satisfy the Building Reuse Program grant match requirement of 5% upon award. A copy of this resolution will be forwarded to the NC Department of Commerce – Rural Economic Development Division to be included in the Project Mound application.

This the 28th day of April 2025.

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

NEW COURTHOUSE PROGRAMMING

Overview

The Board previously authorized a contract with Sizemore to provide architectural services for a new courthouse. Sizemore completed the program verification phase, including stakeholder engagement and revised project scope and budget estimates. On March 24, 2025, four options were presented, ranging from 45,000 to 60,000 sq. ft. in the initial build, with phasing options to eventually reach the full 90,000 sq. ft. program. The Board must select a preferred program size and budget to advance to the design and financial planning phase.

Financing

The County is no longer pursuing USDA loan funding due to process complexity and uncertainty. Staff recommended the use of limited obligation or general obligation bonds, with limited obligation bonds capped at 20 years and requiring construction bids before issuance. Since 2021, the Board has budgeted annual fund balance contributions toward the courthouse project, totaling \$3.6 million by FY 2024. Those funds are currently committed to the architectural contract. Based on recent school bond experience, a \$50 million project could result in an estimated \$6.5 million annual payment over 20 years, subject to adjustment.

Site Plan Options

The Manager reviewed the four courthouse programming options presented by Sizemore Architects, which vary by initial square footage and phasing approach:

- Option 1A – 60,000 sq. ft. fully upfitted courthouse over two stories with a partial basement, plus 30,000 sq. ft. of shell space on a third floor.

- Option 1B – 60,000 sq. ft. fully upfitted courthouse with a two-story design and partial basement; future expansion would allow for a 30,000 sq. ft. two-story addition (15,000 sq. ft. per floor).
- Option 2A – 45,000 sq. ft. fully upfitted courthouse with a partial basement, plus 45,000 sq. ft. of shell space split between floors one, two, and three.
- Option 2B – 45,000 sq. ft. fully upfitted courthouse with two stories and a partial basement; future expansion would allow for a two-story, 45,000 sq. ft. addition (22,500 sq. ft. per floor).

All options provide the same core space types. Site and circulation plans are similar across options, with differences in parking placement depending on phasing.

Construction Methodology

The architectural team evaluated alternative construction methods and recommended proceeding with a traditional construction approach as the most cost-effective option at this time.

Project Cost Estimates

The Manager presented updated cost projections for each of the four courthouse programming options:

- Option 1A – 60,000 sq. ft. upfit with 30,000 sq. ft. shell space: \$61.1 million
- Option 1B – 60,000 sq. ft. upfit with 30,000 sq. ft. future addition: \$47.5 million
- Option 2A – 45,000 sq. ft. upfit with 45,000 sq. ft. shell space: \$52.3 million
- Option 2B – 45,000 sq. ft. upfit with future expansion (not priced): \$38.2 million

The Manager turned the discussion over to the Board and invited questions regarding the proposed options.

Discussion and Action

Commissioner McCall inquired about the design timeline following the Board's decision. The Manager indicated that the original estimate of 12–18 months had been shortened to approximately one year. Construction is anticipated to take around 18 months, with a revised timeline forthcoming once the design begins. Commissioner McCall also asked whether visual materials such as 3D renderings would be provided during the design phase; the Manager confirmed and noted that the Board would be involved in determining the building's aesthetic design.

Commissioner Chapman expressed concern about constructing shell space that would require upfitting while the court is in session, citing past disruptions during repairs at the existing courthouse. He questioned the feasibility of using shell space without major disruption to court operations.

Commissioner McCall responded that phased construction is common and has been managed successfully in other counties, including Henderson County. She emphasized that disruption would be minimal and carefully planned. She also noted that a 45,000 sq. ft. courthouse more than doubles the usable space of the current facility and is the most cost-effective approach that still meets the County's needs. Many constituents have expressed reluctance about the cost and have questioned the need for a larger facility.

Chairman Chappell stated that while he had originally supported including shell space for a future third floor, his position had changed based on fiscal considerations and input from architects. He reiterated the importance of selecting an option that allows for future expansion.

Commissioner Chapman moved to approve Option 2B—a 45,000 sq. ft. fully functional courthouse, two stories with a partial basement, designed to accommodate a future 45,000 sq. ft. addition, and a phased parking plan consistent with previous options. Commissioner McCall seconded the motion.

Commissioner McCall emphasized that phased projects are common, and that this decision represents the most responsible and practical option for the County. Commissioner Chapman encouraged the architect to

begin producing visual materials as soon as possible to share with the public. Chairman Chappell thanked staff, citizens, and stakeholders for their input and patience throughout the planning process and expressed appreciation that the County now has a viable plan for a cost-effective facility with future expansion potential. Commissioner McCall added that the Board must also begin planning for the future use of the existing courthouse. **The motion passed unanimously.**

FY 2025 3RD QUARTER FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Finance Director Meagan O’Neal presented the unaudited financial report for the third quarter of FY 2025, covering activity through March 30, 2025, as required by fiscal controls. The report included a summary overview and a year-to-date budget report from the Enterprise ERP system.

General Fund Overview

- Total Revenues: \$62,975,652
 - Property Tax: \$40,550,810 (97.7% of budget)
 - Sales Tax: \$6,258,294
 - Investment Earnings: \$1,751,885
 - Permits, Fines, Sales & Services: \$3,977,000
- Total Expenditures: \$50,985,808
 - Personnel: \$25,408,306 (75.2% of budget)
 - Operating Expenses: \$1,460,952
 - Contracted Services: \$1,721,257

Enterprise Fund (Solid Waste)

- Revenues: \$2,690,086
 - Woodruff Fees: \$1,704,942 (81%)
 - Sticker Sales: \$476,546 (73%)
 - Misc. Fees: \$82,747
 - Investment Earnings: \$381,279
- Expenditures: \$2,422,726
 - Personnel: \$1,223,812 (85%)
 - Operating & Contracted Services: \$503,344
 - Capital Outlay: \$581,746 (primarily for a new dozer); \$500,000 encumbered for a tanker truck
- Net Income: \$267,360

Cash Balances

- First Citizens Bank (Operating): Maintains ~\$2.5 million, fluctuates daily
- NCCMT (Investments): \$38,761,102
- NCIP (Investments): \$34,791,368 (holds assigned/committed fund balances)
- NCCMT (School GO Bonds): \$51,607,516; earned ~\$890,000 interest since November closing
- NCIP (Education Capital Fund): \$23,314,121; earning \$70,000–\$80,000/month in interest since 2018

Ms. O’Neal concluded the report and invited questions or comments from the Board.

Commissioner Chapman asked how long the County had banked with First Citizens and whether staff had explored better rates with other banks. Finance Director Meagan O’Neal responded that staff routinely review services with First Citizens to ensure the County receives the best available rates. A key consideration is the convenience of location, as County departments make daily deposits, and traveling farther would impact staff time. She added that while First Citizens remains the most practical option currently, staff regularly negotiate services and fees.

Ms. O'Neal also noted recent conversations with other county finance departments revealed shared concerns. These discussions have prompted staff to relay feedback to the local branch manager, and she believes that collective concerns from multiple counties are more likely to prompt improvements.

Commissioner McCall moved to receive the FY 2025 3rd Quarter Financial Summary report. Commissioner Dalton seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

FY 2025 3RD QUARTER BUDGET AMENDMENTS

Budget and Management Analyst Jennifer Wright presented the third quarter budget amendments for FY 2025. These amendments were required to recognize new revenues, appropriate fund balances, transfer funds, and establish or adjust capital and special revenue funds, in accordance with local policy and state law.

Ms. Wright recommended that the Board approve amendments 38, 40, 43, 44, 46, 47, 50, 51, 52, and 53, noting that the remaining amendments had been previously approved.

This table summarizes the amendments that were discussed and approved by the Board, with key details on each allocation, adjustment, or transfer.

FY 2025 3rd Quarter Budget Amendments Summary

Amendment No.	Description	Effective Date
35	\$70,000 grant from NC Department of Commerce for CW Williams & Co. project (Building Reuse Program)	1/3/25
36	\$10,572 project change order for Brevard High School glulam beam repair	1/28/25
37	\$270,000 for purchase of transit vehicles (including \$27,000 Board match)	2/3/25
38	\$452,251 Public Health Agreement Addendum for Hurricane Helene disaster recovery	2/4/25
39	\$1,563,708 adjustment for Rosman Water/Sewer Extension Project in Water & Sewer Fund	3/18/25
40	\$85,000 transfer from Parks & Grounds Maintenance to Facilities Maintenance	2/6/25
41	\$200,000 Opioid Settlement Funds for Substance Use Systems Coordinator (Jan 2025 - Jun 2028)	2/10/25
42	\$150,000 for Deferred Maintenance and Capital Reserve Study for County Buildings & Blue Ridge Community College	2/10/25
43	\$75,000 from Disaster Energy Assistance Program for Dept. of Social Services	2/19/25
44	\$10,000 reallocation within the Public Health budget for contract employee on Preparedness projects	2/20/25
45	\$65,000 NCOSBM Directed Grant for Sheriff's Office vehicle purchase	2/27/25
46	\$2,750 reallocation within Library budget	2/27/25
47	\$3,600 reallocation within the EMS budget	3/3/25
48	\$999,944 for second COSSUP Grant awarded to Public Health (supporting BREATH-C project)	3/14/25
50	\$2,800 in Delta Dental Grant funds for Hurricane Helene impacts	3/14/25

Amendment No.	Description	Effective Date
51	\$3,000 reallocation within the EMS budget	3/24/25
52	\$1,349 reallocation within Library budget	3/26/25
53	\$4,000 reallocation within the Planning budget	3/26/25

Chairman Chappell thanked Ms. Wright for her clear presentation and for identifying which items had already been acted upon.

Commissioner McCall moved to receive the report and approve the recommended amendments as presented. Commissioner Dalton seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

MANAGER'S REPORT

The Manager reported the following:

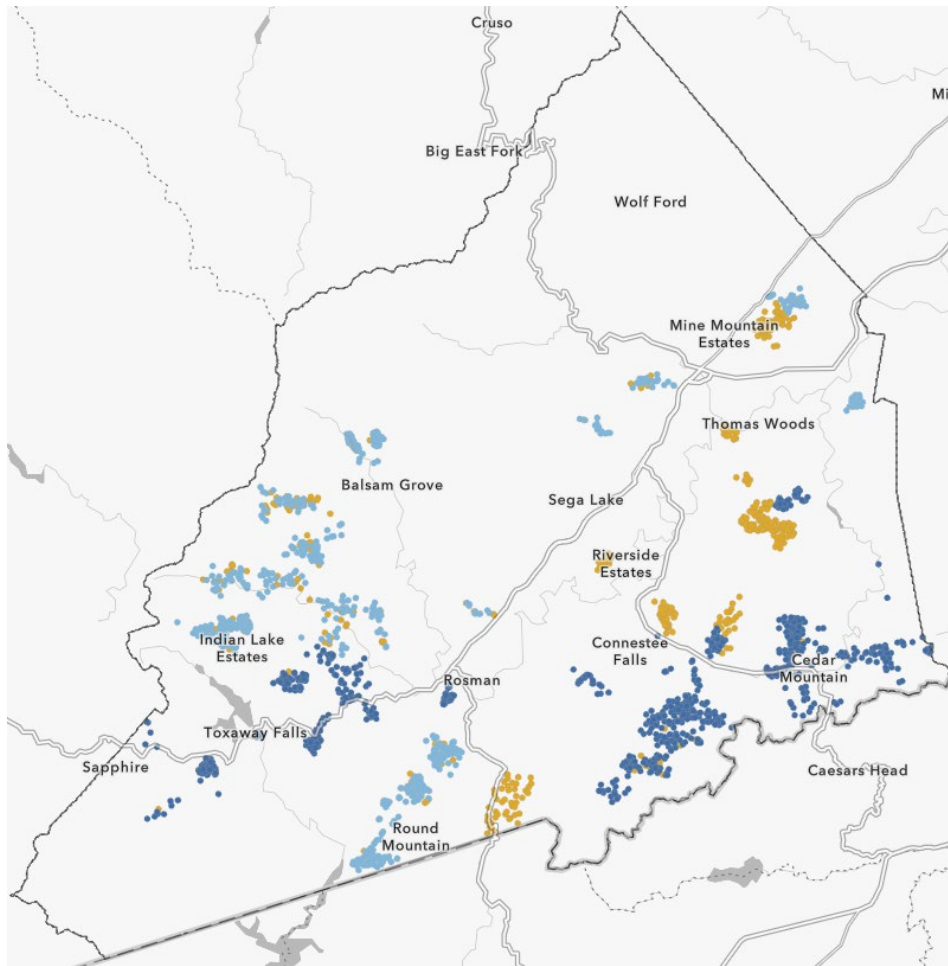
- Congratulations to Cameron Sexton, Transylvania County Communications Director, for being honored as the District 16 Hometown Hero by the NC Association of County Commissioners. He was presented with a Heroic Hands Challenge Coin during a regional event recognizing his outstanding service during Hurricane Helene and recent forest fires.
- Transylvania County Emergency Management will host the 2025 Statewide Communications Exercise, May 15–18, in collaboration with NCEM's Communications Branch. The full-scale event will involve ~100 communications professionals from across NC and nearby states and feature austere conditions, 24/7 operations, and a wide range of communication technologies.
- Mike Owen, Building Inspector, received praise from Connestee Falls resident Beth Hegseth for his professionalism and assistance. She described him as "professional and personable."

Broadband Expansion Update

- GREAT Grant Program Awards:
 - 2021: \$2.8 million to Comporium to provide 800 homes/businesses with fiber internet
 - 2023: \$4 million to Comporium to provide 698 homes/businesses with fiber internet
 - 2024: \$4 million to Comporium to provide another 946 homes/businesses with fiber internet (originally awarded to Zitel)
 - GREAT Grant Program has awarded \$10.8 million in grants to provide fiber internet to 2,444 homes/businesses.
- CAB Program Award:
 - 2025: \$3.3 million to Comporium to provide 473 homes/businesses with fiber internet.
 - NCDIT covered 10% County match from the Stop Gap Program.
 - Counties had limited funds to provide matches.
- Total Broadband Impact:
 - \$14.1 million in total broadband grant funding
 - 2,917 homes and businesses to receive fiber internet
 - County cost match: \$3
- Remaining Eligible Locations by County:
 - Transylvania: 1,008
 - Buncombe: 2,100
 - Henderson: 4,700
 - Haywood: 1,300
 - Jackson: 4,500

Goal: Achieve 100% fiber broadband access countywide by continuing to work with providers and pursuing funding opportunities.

Location Map of Active Broadband Grant Programs



The Manager concluded her report and invited questions and comments from the Board.

Chairman Chappell thanked County staff for their ongoing commitment to providing timely, accurate information to elected officials. He also expressed appreciation to Senator Corbin for his advocacy on broadband expansion in Western North Carolina.

Commissioner McCall commented on the recent NCACC District 16 meeting, saying it was rewarding to see Cameron Sexton receive the Hometown Hero award. She said staff and the public are proud of his service.

Chairman Chappell agreed, noting that Mr. Sexton's remarks during the event made quite an impression on everyone attending.

Commissioner Chapman added that the District 16 meeting was a success, with strong turnout from counties across the region. He expressed thanks to the staff for their assistance in coordinating invitations and dinner.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Kristi Brown: Ms. Brown, Clerk of Superior Court, thanked the Board for voting to move forward with the courthouse project. She expressed appreciation for the recognition that a new facility is needed.

COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

Commissioner Chapman reported that he and Chairman Chappell attended a public input session regarding a proposed roundabout at Cascade Lake Road and Highway 276 in Cedar Mountain. He clarified that social media posts about the project were inaccurate. The roundabout is funded through an environmental program that supports carbon reduction projects, and no property acquisition is required because it lies within the NCDOT right-of-way. The idea originated from local business owners seeking traffic safety improvements. Public comments are still being accepted. Commissioner Chapman also noted he would be traveling to Raleigh on Thursday.

Commissioner McCall addressed earlier public comments, questioning whether the County has underused space. She noted that in her experience, County facilities are well-utilized and there are no surplus buildings for sale. She asked the Manager to confirm who stated that there are no buildings with unused space. Commissioner McCall emphasized that the County's need for more space is validated by its investment in constructing a new courthouse.

Commissioner Dalton expressed appreciation for the structure of recent budget presentations, particularly those from the Sheriff's Office and School System. He found them clear and well-organized, which made them easier to understand. Commissioner McCall agreed, saying they were among the best presentations the Board has received.

Chairman Chappell reminded the public that Thursday is the National Day of Prayer. A gathering will be held at the Courthouse Gazebo at 6:00 p.m., hosted by First Baptist Church. He thanked the public for attending this meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, **Commissioner Chapman moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:51 p.m., seconded by Commissioner Dalton and unanimously approved.**

Jason R. Chappell, Chairman
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

Trisha M. Hogan, Clerk to the Board