

MINUTES
TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
JANUARY 12, 2026 – REGULAR MEETING

The Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County met in a regular meeting on Monday, January 12, 2026, at 4:00 p.m. in the Multipurpose Chambers at the County Administration Building, located at 101 S. Broad Street, Brevard, North Carolina.

Commissioners present were Jason Chappell, Jake Dalton, Vice-Chairman Larry Chapman, Chairwoman Teresa McCall, and Chase McKelvey. Also present were County Manager Jaime Laughter and Clerk to the Board Trisha Hogan. County Attorney Julie Hooten participated remotely via Zoom.

Media: No media were present.

There were approximately 25 people in the audience.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairwoman Teresa McCall presiding declared a quorum was present and called the meeting to order at 4:02 p.m.

WELCOME

Chairwoman McCall welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the Commissioners and staff in attendance.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The public comments reflect the opinions and viewpoints of the speakers.

George Sutherland: Mr. Sutherland introduced himself as a candidate for County Commissioner. He shared that he and his wife have lived in Transylvania County for 20 years and expressed his desire to give back to the community. He briefly outlined his professional background and noted his volunteer work since retirement, including service at an animal sanctuary near Rosman, coaching football at Brevard High School, substitute teaching exceptional children at Brevard Middle School, and teaching with Job Corps. He thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak and expressed his hope to serve the County if elected.

Hannah Bowers: Ms. Bowers spoke regarding concerns about property taxes and their impact on affordable housing. She described a meeting with County Tax staff where she suggested providing property tax appeal applicants with comparable sales data prior to their appeal hearings to improve transparency and accuracy. She stated that this practice is used in other North Carolina counties and would help homeowners better understand and prepare for appeals. Ms. Bowers expressed disappointment that her suggestion was dismissed and requested that her concerns be entered into the record.

Owen Carson: Mr. Carson introduced himself as a candidate for County Commissioner. He shared that he has lived in Brevard for 21 years and discussed his educational and professional background in ecology and environmental planning. He described his work with Equinox Environmental and his family's ties to the community. Mr. Carson spoke about challenges facing the County, including affordability, wages, and economic opportunity, and stated his belief in the need for collaborative, transparent, and forward-looking

leadership. He announced that he is running as a Democrat and expressed his commitment to serving the community if elected.

AGENDA MODIFICATIONS

There were no agenda modifications from the Commissioners or staff.

Commissioner Dalton moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Commissioners Chapman and Chappell simultaneously, and unanimously approved.

CONSENT AGENDA

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

The Board approved the following:

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Board approved the December 8, 2025, regular meeting minutes as submitted. The Board cancelled the second meeting in December.

REQUEST TO USE THE COMMISSIONERS' CHAMBERS FOR COURT

Due to the primary election, the court system cannot use the Election Center conference room as a second courtroom for several days in February and March. Clerk of Superior Court Kristi Brown requested use of the Commissioners' Chambers on February 10, 12, 17-20, 25, and March 17-20. The Clerk to the Board confirmed availability, and the Board approved the request.

UPDATE TO LIBRARY AMPHITHEATER PROJECT BUDGET

The County is overseeing a project to build a canopy over the Library Amphitheater stage, fully funded by the Library Foundation, with \$710,000 provided. Any unused funds will be returned. Since the original budget approval in June 2025, project costs rose by \$50,000 due to finalized construction costs and site testing. The updated budget covers construction, professional services, and a small contingency. The Board approved the revised budget. Completion date is undetermined.

ADDITIONAL FUNDS FOR COURTHOUSE SURVEYS AND GEOTECHNICAL EXPLORATION

As part of planning for a new courthouse, the County's architect identified the need for additional site-related work, including an environmental site assessment and geotechnical exploration. Staff recommended using the assigned fund balance to cover these costs. The Board approved an additional \$200,000 for required surveys and geotechnical exploration.

PRESENTATIONS/RECOGNITIONS

RECOGNITION OF CITIZEN ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS

The Board of Commissioners recognized residents who volunteered their time and service on County advisory boards and whose terms ended between July 1 and December 31, 2025. This recognition is part of a program established in 2015 to thank citizens for their contributions to County government.

Chairwoman McCall presented certificates of appreciation and County-branded mugs to those in attendance. Certificates were mailed to members who were unable to attend a meeting.

- ❖ Heather Stewart – Nursing and Adult Care Home Advisory Committee (mailed)

- ❖ Stephanie Adams – Transylvania Natural Resources Council (December 8)
- ❖ Owen Carson – Transylvania Natural Resources Council (January 12)
- ❖ Michael Fulton – Transylvania Natural Resources Council (mailed)
- ❖ Cynthiana Cain – Agricultural Advisory Board (December 8)
- ❖ Kenneth Kinard – Transylvania Natural Resources Council (mailed)
- ❖ John Schommer – Brevard Planning & Zoning Board (December 8)
- ❖ Stephen Matadobra – Transylvania Natural Resources Council (January 26)
- ❖ Chadwick Young – Transylvania Natural Resources Council (mailed)
- ❖ Jill Chapman – Abandoned Cemeteries Board (December 8)
- ❖ Dee Dee Perkins – Transylvania County Tourism Development Authority (January 26)
- ❖ Ben Lamm – Board of Health (January 12)
- ❖ PJ Boatwright – Board of Health (mailed)

Chairwoman McCall thanked all volunteers for their service and encouraged residents interested in serving on a County board or committee to watch for openings, which are advertised on the County website and in the local newspaper.

UPDATE ON EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO HURRICANE/TROPICAL STORM HELENE
 The Manager provided an update on recovery efforts related to Hurricane/Tropical Storm Helene.

Available Recovery Resources

- Renew NC Single-Family Housing Program
 - Deadline extended to January 31, 2026, for western North Carolina homeowners to apply for assistance.
 - Apply at RenewNC.org, email HeleneRecovery@renewnc.org, or 1-888-791-0207.
- Renew NC Small Rental Rehabilitation Program
 - Targets owners of one to four rental units per property to make improvements.
 - Property owners must agree to provide affordable rent rates for a 10-year period following the program construction to be considered for assistance.
 - Potential applicants seeking more information can visit RenewNC.org or call 1-888-791-0207.

FEMA Individual Assistance – Transylvania County

- More than \$10.2 million has been awarded to Transylvania County residents as of January 8, 2026.
- 4,837 valid FEMA registrations were received.
- 4,193 applications were referred for Individual Assistance.
- 3,063 applicants have been determined eligible for Housing Assistance and/or Other Needs Assistance to date.
- Ongoing information related to FEMA efforts can be found at 4827Fema.gov.

Private Property Debris Removal

- 430 Right of Entry forms have been processed.
 - 29 pending eligibility review, and one is scheduled for debris removal.
 - 24 received 100% eligibility determination and were approved to move forward with debris removal operations.
 - Debris removal operations began in September.
 - 195 received an ineligible FEMA determination.
 - FEMA notified NCEM that all ineligible applications must be resubmitted.

- FEMA will not be conducting an automatic desk review of ineligible applications as reported in October.
- FEMA gave no timeline on turnaround time for review, and FEMA continues to change the process, so there remains no resolution.
- Of the original 177 properties that received a determination of Eligible With Conditions, one is in Work Authorization drafting, 33 have been assigned to the hauler, and 141 have been closed.
 - Previously reported that NCEM is working with FEMA on the review process, but FEMA continues to change the process, so there remains no resolution.
- 165 have been closed out by the program.

Call Center Metrics

- 297 inbound calls with 94% answered within the target time (20 seconds)
- 544 outgoing calls
- Average call duration of 10 minutes.

Waterway

- 346 additional waterway sites were assessed.
- Debris was identified at 77 of those sites.
- County staff are identifying ingress and egress points and submitting them to FEMA for required EHP review.

General Notes

- Progress on remaining private property debris removal (PPDR) and waterway cleanup is delayed due to ongoing FEMA review processes, which continue to change and now include additional eligibility determinations. County staff remain in regular contact with NC Emergency Management (NCEM), the SMART Program, and contractors through weekly calls and reports.
- County staff plan to meet soon with FEMA Community Liaison Traci Metz. While communication with FEMA staff has been constructive, delays continue due to FEMA's internal review and approval processes.
- Staff from Senator Budd's office met with County staff to discuss challenges local governments are facing related to post-Helene funding and federal policies.
- The North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) has been coordinating discussions among county managers statewide regarding ongoing recovery issues. Transylvania County avoided many problems experienced by other counties by using the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for debris removal rather than contracting directly with private debris companies. In some counties, FEMA has denied reimbursement for debris removal costs where direct contracts were used, and staff are aware that legal action may result in those cases.

Private Roads and Bridges update 01/12/2026

- As of January 12, 2026, 2 of the 52 private road and bridge projects have been completed.
- The design has been completed on another project, which should allow it to move forward in the process.

Hazard Mitigation Grant Program Applications

- The application period closed on October 31, 2025.
- Applications submitted include:
 - Transylvania County
 - Acquisition: 7 parcels
 - Elevation: 4 parcels (reduction of 2 since the last report)

- Land stabilization: 3 parcels
- City of Brevard
 - Acquisition: 2 parcels
 - Elevation: 7 parcels
 - Land stabilization: 0 parcels
- Town of Rosman
 - Acquisition: 3 parcels
 - Elevation: 0 parcels
 - Land stabilization: 0 parcels
- Eleven acquisition applications (5 from Transylvania County, 3 from the City of Brevard, and 3 from the Town of Rosman) were grouped by NC Emergency Management and moved into the formal review phase.
 - One City of Brevard applicant later requested to change their project from acquisition to elevation. Required paperwork was submitted to the State, and the totals above reflect that change.
- A second group of elevation projects was formed, consisting of:
 - 4 applications from the City of Brevard
 - 2 applications from Transylvania County
 - These projects have been assigned to a contractor for site assessments and cost estimates.
 - Updated Right of Entry forms were required.
 - All applicants have completed the updated forms.

Commissioner Chapman shared concerns about the lack of communication regarding eligibility for waterway debris removal at his property. The Manager explained that delays are due to FEMA not responding to the State and that no determination has yet been made. County and State officials continue to wait on FEMA for further guidance and decisions.

APPOINTMENTS

COUNTY COMMISSIONER APPOINTMENTS

The Board conducted its annual review of Commissioner appointments to local, regional, and statewide boards and committees. Chairwoman McCall reviewed the current assignments, and no changes were requested. All Commissioners will continue serving in their existing appointed roles.

NEW BUSINESS

BREVARD FIRE DEPARTMENT FIRE ENGINE - CONTRACT TO BUILD AND PRICE INCREASE

The Board considered a request related to the City of Brevard's planned purchase of a new fire engine. During the FY 2026 budget process, the Board had previously reviewed joint debt service for a new engine at an estimated cost of \$1 million, with debt payments scheduled to begin in 2029 after existing fire apparatus debt is paid off.

Because the City had not signed a contract earlier in 2025, the fire truck manufacturer issued a new price of \$1,155,901. City officials explained that approving and signing the new build contract would lock in this price and help avoid a further increase, which could reach \$1.2 million if delayed.

Staff confirmed that the County is not a party to the contract, but the City of Brevard receives County funding for fire protection services in Sylvan Valley II. The new engine will replace an existing engine that has already been taken out of service. Staff also confirmed that existing debt scheduled to roll off in 2029 would be sufficient to cover the future payments.

Following discussion, **Commissioner Dalton moved to acknowledge the City of Brevard's build contract with Atlantic Coast Fire Trucks in order to lock in the price and prevent any further price increases, seconded by Commissioner McKelvey, and unanimously approved.**

FIRE DISTRICT RESERVE FUND DISBURSEMENTS

The Board discussed requests from several fire departments to use reserve funds that were collected under the previous fire tax system. A new countywide fire tax took effect on July 1, 2025, which means individual fire districts will no longer collect excess fire taxes to hold in separate reserve accounts. Only delinquent fire taxes from prior years will continue to be collected and distributed by district.

Because of this change, some fire departments asked to use their existing reserve funds for current needs. Proposed uses include firefighter physical exams, exercise equipment, building and parking lot repairs, equipment purchases, improvements to wildfire response capabilities, and upgrades to sleeping quarters.

Formal requests were received from the Connestee, Lake Toxaway, Little River, and North Transylvania Fire Departments. Additional small disbursements may occur as delinquent taxes from prior years are collected. The Fire Marshal noted that all departments have some level of reserve funds, and that the Balsam Grove Fire Department's balance will be adjusted due to previously approved use of funds for architectural services. Any remaining Balsam Grove funds may be used for building improvements.

Board members asked clarifying questions about which departments had submitted requests and how the funds would be processed. Staff explained that once approved, a budget amendment would be prepared to distribute the funds, which are tracked separately from the County's general fund.

Commissioner Chappell moved to approve the requests as submitted, seconded by Commissioner Dalton. The motion was unanimously approved.

BOARD INPUT ON STATE APPLICATION FOR NOMINATION OF ELIZUR AND ANN PATTON HOUSE FOR NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

The County Manager explained that the Elizur and Ann Patton House, located on Old Hendersonville Highway, has been nominated for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. The State's National Register Advisory Committee will review the nomination on February 12, 2026. As a Certified Local Government, Transylvania County has a 60-day window to submit comments. If no response is submitted by February 11, 2026, the County will be presumed to support the nomination without comment.

Under state and federal requirements, the Joint Historic Preservation Commission (JHPC) must hold a public hearing on the nomination. That hearing is scheduled for January 13, 2026, during the JHPC's regular meeting. Any public comments from that hearing, along with proof of public notice, will be forwarded to the State. The Board of Commissioners may also submit separate comments if it chooses.

Board members discussed the process and the potential benefits of the designation, including tax incentives or grants that could help support restoration of the property. There was also discussion about whether the designation could offer some protection to the historic structure, given upcoming transportation improvements in the area.

Commissioner Chapman plans to attend the JHPC meeting and share a summary with the Board afterward. The Board chose not to submit formal comments at this time.

ACCEPT MANAGEMENT OF GRANT-FUNDED SCHOOL CAPITAL PROJECT AND AUTHORIZE COUNTY MANAGER TO NEGOTIATE CONTRACTS

The Board of Commissioners entered into an interlocal agreement with the Board of Education in February 2025 that granted Transylvania County government authority to manage an initial list of bond-funded capital projects. The agreement included a provision that the School System could request the management of additional projects.

Earlier projects that have already transitioned to County management include a retaining wall at Rosman High and Middle Schools and a new softball lighting project at Brevard High School. In late 2025, both the Board of Commissioners and the Board of Education accepted a Needs-Based Public School Capital Fund grant that will provide \$62 million for a new construction project at Brevard High School, along with a required local match from the County. The Board of Education formally requested that the County manage this grant-funded project under the existing agreement.

To keep timelines on track and coordinate the new construction with ongoing bond-funded projects, the County Manager and Superintendent agreed that the most efficient approach would be to amend the current architectural and construction management contracts. The grant requires the project to move forward within two years of the award.

Commissioners expressed appreciation for the strong collaboration between the County Manager and the Superintendent. The Manager noted that with this project included, the County is now managing more than \$100 million in capital grant-funded projects as part of an overall \$200 million capital program, an unprecedented level of capital activity for the County.

Commissioner Chapman moved to accept management of the grant-funded school capital project and authorized the County Manager to negotiate the contracts as referenced, seconded by Commissioner Dalton. The motion was approved unanimously.

FY 2025 AUDIT AMENDMENTS & FY 2026 2ND QUARTER BUDGET AMENDMENTS

Based on policies approved by the Board of Commissioners through the annual budget ordinance and the Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act, it is necessary for the Board of Commissioners to approve certain amendments to the budget ordinance. Primarily, these are the types of budget amendments that by their nature require review and approval by a governing board: recognition of new revenues and appropriations for related expenditures; appropriations of fund balance; and establishment of new special revenue funds, capital project funds, or fiduciary funds. Budget and Management Analyst Jennifer Wright presented the following budget amendments for approval:

FY 2025 End of Year/Audit Amendments

- Budget Amendment 82: This amendment is necessary to remove the FY 2025 budget for the recurring Emergency Management Supplement (\$18,016) out of Fund 10. The grant has already been set up in Fund 57, the Multi-Year Grant Fund. Effective 6/30/25.
- Budget Amendment 83: This amendment is necessary to establish the FY 2025 bond payments for the school bonds. Funds for this purpose are held in reserve in the Education Capital Fund; then, as required by County auditors, these funds must be transferred to the appropriate lines in Fund 10 and paid from that fund. The FY 2025 school bond payment is \$2,330,000 in principal and \$879,953.65 in interest. Effective 6/30/25.
- Budget Amendment 84: This amendment is necessary to consolidate and configure all Hurricane Helene-related revenues and expenses in Fund 33, the Disaster Response Fund, and remove those revenues and expenses from the General Fund (10). The Board of Commissioners appropriated from Fund Balance \$200,000 on 11/12/24 and \$860,000 on 1/27/25 to provide cash revenue until

all FEMA reimbursements are received. To date, the County has received only \$79,393 in FEMA reimbursements. Effective 6/30/25.

- Budget Amendment 86: This amendment is necessary to reconfigure the \$200,000 in Opioid Settlement Funds to support salary, benefits, expenses, and equipment for the Substance Use Systems Coordinator from 1/31/2025 to 6/30/2028, as approved by the Board of Commissioners via Amended Resolution #33-2024 on 2/10/25. The State is requiring all Opioid projects related to this settlement be reflected in a single fund, and this amendment reconfigures the budget setup to meet these criteria.
- Budget Amendment 85, 87, 88, & 80: These amendments complete the following actions: Allocates pay increase and contingency funds where needed and recognizes revenue to balance expenditures in certain departments at the conclusion of FY 2025 and as part of the FY 2025 audit process; establishes the bond payments for the new EMS Base in Fund 10 (\$367,000 principal, \$182,770.40 interest); and completes planned transfers to the Assigned & Committed Fund Balance, the Education Capital Fund (\$2,350,110.88), the Self-Insured Health Fund (\$1,580,000), Sylvan Valley II Project appropriation (\$817,588), and the Solid Waste Enterprise Fund (\$592,962.50). Effective 6/30/25.

FY 2026 2nd Quarter Budget Amendments

- Budget Amendment 19: This amendment is necessary to set up \$239,272 in grant funds for a four-year Public Health project from the Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for the CARE Coalition's STOP Project. Effective 10/2/25.
- Budget Amendment 20: This amendment is necessary to process an additional \$13,000 carryforward from FY 2025 to assist EMS with the cost of replacing an ambulance transmission that failed near the end of FY 2025. Effective 10/15/25.
- Budget Amendment 21: New audit guidance says no more than 5% of a project budget should be held in contingency. This amendment is necessary to update project contingency lines to reflect the current guidance. Effective 10/30/25.
- Budget Amendment 22: This amendment is necessary to implement the following actions as approved by the Board of Commissioners on 11/10/25: \$220,000 from Fund Balance to Transportation Administration Contract Services for a Transportation Fixed Route Study; \$23,424 from Planning Salaries to Planning Contract Services for Interim Planning/Transportation Director Jacob Compher; and \$2,828 from contingency funds for additional Axon software licenses for the Sheriff's Office. The amendment also reflects a \$5,000 transfer within the EMS budget, as requested by the EMS Director; \$45,000 in new funding in the Environmental Health budget; and \$10,000 in new Children's Essentials Services funding in DSS. Effective 11/17/25.
- Budget Amendment 23 & 28: These amendments transferred funds within the Register of Deeds budget, at the request of the Register of Deeds. Effective 12/2/2025 and 12/29/2025.
- Budget Amendment 24: This budget amendment is necessary to reallocate funds within the Dogwood Health Trust Grant, at the request of the Public Health Department. Effective 12/4/2025.
- Budget Amendment 25: This amendment is necessary to set up \$469,363 in grant funds for a two-year regional project from the Dogwood Health Trust Grant. Funding will support administrative and programmatic efforts focused on formalizing a collaborative initiative to improve health outcomes across eight rural counties in Western North Carolina, with Transylvania serving as the formal "hub" county. Effective 12/10/25.
- Budget Amendment 26: This amendment is necessary to reallocate \$5,000 in existing funds and appropriate \$10,000 in fund balance within the TDA budget for Tourism Program Grants, as approved by the TDA Board and requested by the Director. Effective 12/17/25.

- Budget Amendment 27: This amendment is necessary to recognize and allocate a \$2,500 Public Health grant from St. Philip's to purchase school emergency response bags. Effective 12/29/25.
- Budget Amendment 29: This amendment is necessary to recognize the \$140,862.84 in compensation from the interlocal agreement between the Transylvania County Sheriff's Office and the City of Brevard to provide law enforcement coverage, ending December 2025. Effective 12/30/25.

Commissioner McKelvey moved to receive the budget changes report through December 31, 2025, and to approve the budget amendments as presented, seconded by Commissioner Dalton, and unanimously approved.

MANAGER'S REPORT

The County Manager shared several updates and announcements with the Board and the public:

- Shared important dates for the upcoming 2026 Primary Election, and printed copies were made available in the foyer for the public.
- County offices will be closed on Monday, January 19, in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day.
- Commissioner Chapman shared positive feedback from a local business owner and builder praising the Building Inspections staff for their professionalism, helpfulness, timeliness, and willingness to offer guidance when issues arise.
- The County has begun its annual budget season. Mid-year and end-of-calendar-year reports will be presented in February. The Manager noted that some changes will be made to the budget process this year to improve transparency and help the public better understand both County procedures and ongoing financial challenges.
- Residents who turned 65 in 2025 or who are totally and permanently disabled, with a total income of \$38,800 or less, may qualify for property tax relief under state law. Eligible homeowners must apply by June 1, 2026. The program excludes \$25,000 or 50% of the home's appraised value, whichever is greater. Additional requirements and application details are available on the County website or through the Tax Office. Homeowners already receiving the exclusion do not need to reapply unless their income, marital status, or property use has changed.

Commissioner Chapman referred to the public comments made earlier in the meeting regarding the information that is provided to the review board. He was unsure what the Tax Office could do legally regarding Ms. Bowers' request, but he was confident the County was in compliance with current legal requirements.

The County Manager confirmed that the Tax Office follows state law and explained that property values are based on the adopted Schedule of Values, which is developed using comparable sales. This schedule is approved by the Board after a public hearing and is available on the County's website.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no comments from the public.

COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

Commissioner Chapman shared an update from the County Council on Aging meeting, where the lack of adult daycare services continues to be a major concern. Adult daycare previously provided important daytime support and relief for caregivers, and its absence remains a significant need in the community.

The Council on Aging is exploring options to reestablish these services, and a local business owner is considering opening a facility. Key issues still being evaluated include eligibility requirements and whether services could be covered by Medicare, Medicaid, or private payment. This remains a priority, and more information will be shared as it becomes available.

Commissioner Chapman asked about the status of the County audit. The Manager reported that the FY 2024 audit is complete, and auditors began work on the FY 2025 audit this week. She noted that only a small number of counties statewide have submitted audits so far, and Transylvania County may be among the first to do so if progress continues.

Commissioner Chapman also noted that a House Select Committee will meet tomorrow to discuss property tax issues. The committee will be gathering information and listening to proposals from counties, municipalities, and other jurisdictions, but does not plan to take any action at this time. A link to the meeting is available for Board members and the public who wish to listen.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, **Commissioner Dalton moved to adjourn the meeting at 5:04 p.m., seconded by Commissioner McKelvey and unanimously approved.**

Teresa K. McCall, Chair
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

Trisha M. Hogan, Clerk to the Board