

**MINUTES
TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MAY 11, 2026 – REGULAR MEETING**

The Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County met in a regular meeting on Monday, May 11, 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 Vice-Chair Larry Chapman, Jason Chappell, Jake Dalton, Chair Teresa McCall, and Chase McKelvey. County Manager Jaime Laughter and Clerk to the Board Trisha Hogan were also present. County Attorney Julie Hooten participated remotely.

Media: Jon Rich – *Brevard Beagle*

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 4:00 p.m.

WELCOME

Chairwoman McCall welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the Commissioners and staff in attendance. She also recognized Representative Anna Ferguson in attendance.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The public comments reflect the opinions and points of view of the speakers.

Doug Powell spoke about the National Day of Prayer and the historical role of prayer in early American government. He referenced the First Continental Congress in 1774 and shared historical examples involving Samuel Adams, John Adams, John Jay, and John Rutledge. Mr. Powell stated that prayer and Bible study were part of the first official acts of the Continental Congress and emphasized his belief that faith and prayer have long been part of the nation's history and traditions.

AGENDA MODIFICATIONS

There were no agenda modifications.

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

CONSENT AGENDA

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

The Board approved the following:

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Board approved the minutes of the April 27, 2026, regular meeting.

PROCLAMATION - EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES WEEK

The Board approved a proclamation designating the week of May 17-23, 2026, as Emergency Medical Services Week to honor the dedication of EMS personnel who provide day-to-day critical lifesaving services to the citizens and visitors of Transylvania County.

Proclamation #24-2026**To Designate the Week of May 17-23, 2026, as Emergency Medical Services Week (EMS Week)**

WHEREAS, emergency medical services is a vital public service; and

WHEREAS, the members of emergency medical services teams are ready to provide lifesaving care to those in need 24 hours a day, seven days a week; and

WHEREAS, access to quality emergency care dramatically improves the survival and recovery rate of those who experience sudden illness or injury; and

WHEREAS, emergency medical services fills healthcare gaps by providing important, out-of-hospital care, including preventative medicine, follow-up care, and access to telemedicine; and

WHEREAS, the emergency medical services system consists of first responders, emergency medical technicians, paramedics, emergency medical dispatchers, firefighters, police officers, educators, administrators, pre-hospital nurses, emergency nurses, emergency physicians, trained members of the public, and other out-of-hospital medical care providers; and

WHEREAS, the members of emergency medical services teams, whether career or volunteer, engage in thousands of hours of specialized training and continuing education to enhance their lifesaving skills; and

WHEREAS, it is appropriate to recognize the value and the accomplishments of emergency medical services providers by designating the Emergency Medical Services Week; now

THEREFORE, the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners, in recognition of this event, does hereby proclaim the week of May 17 - 23, 2026, as **EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES WEEK**.

The 52nd anniversary of EMS Week theme is **EMS WEEK: Improving Outcomes, Together**. The Board of Commissioners encourages the community to observe this week with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities in honor of the EMS profession and the essential service it provides.

S://Teresa K. McCall, Chair
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

PROCLAMATION - MEMORIAL DAY 2026

The Board approved a proclamation in observance of Memorial Day as a day of remembrance honoring the members of the United States Armed Forces who died in service to the country. The proclamation recognizes their sacrifice, acknowledges the impact on their families, communities, and the nation, and encourages the residents of Transylvania County to observe the day through remembrance activities, including participation in local ceremonies and the National Moment of Remembrance.

Commissioner Chapman read aloud the proclamation to the public. He invited the public to attend the Memorial Day ceremony at the Courthouse Gazebo on Monday, May 25, at 11:00 a.m.

**PROCLAMATION #25-2026
HONORING MEMORIAL DAY – MAY 25, 2026**

WHEREAS, Memorial Day is a solemn day of remembrance observed across the United States to honor and mourn the men and women of the Armed Forces who gave their lives in service to our nation; and

WHEREAS, from the earliest days of our country to the present, courageous service members have made the ultimate sacrifice to protect the freedoms and liberties we enjoy; and

WHEREAS, these fallen heroes represent the very best of our nation, demonstrating unwavering dedication, selflessness, and love of country; and

WHEREAS, the citizens of Transylvania County recognize the profound loss borne by the families, friends, and communities of those who have died in military service, and we remain forever grateful for their sacrifice; and

WHEREAS, Memorial Day also serves as a reminder to all Americans to reflect on the cost of freedom and to honor the legacy of those who have served with courage and distinction; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners encourages all residents to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies, moments of silence, and acts of remembrance, including the National Moment of Remembrance at 3:00 p.m.;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED that the Transylvania County Board of Commissioners does hereby proclaim May 25, 2026, as **Memorial Day** in Transylvania County, and calls upon all citizens to honor the memory of our fallen service members and to express their gratitude for the sacrifices made in defense of our nation.

ADOPTED this 11th day of May 2026.

S://Teresa K. McCall, Chair
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

HEALTH DEPARTMENT REQUEST TO SUBMIT LETTER OF INTENT FOR DOGWOOD HEALTH TRUST COLLABORATIVE GRANT OPPORTUNITY

The Board approved a request from Transylvania Public Health to submit a letter of intent to Dogwood Health Trust for a regional collaborative grant opportunity. The letter of intent is due May 18, 2026.

If invited to submit a full application later this summer, Transylvania Public Health would apply for a two-year grant totaling up to \$450,000 to support implementation activities identified in the Region 1 Health Department's strategic plan. The grant program supports collaborative efforts across Western North Carolina focused on addressing complex community challenges.

AMENDMENT TO FY 2025 AUDIT CONTRACT WITH MARTIN STARNES & ASSOCIATES

The Board approved an amendment extending the FY 2025 audit submission date to the Local Government Commission (LGC) to June 30, 2026. The Finance Department has made substantial progress on the audit and expects completion in May. Completing the audit by June 30 is important for the County's upcoming

courthouse bond financing process. Completing the FY 2025 audit within eight months would position the County to become current on the audit status by the end of calendar year 2026.

Delayed audits have become common across North Carolina due to increased audit requirements, federal government shutdowns, and the impact of Hurricane Helene across Western North Carolina. As of May 1, audits for 17 counties remained outstanding.

OUT OF STATE TRAVEL REQUEST - REGISTER OF DEEDS

The Board approved an out-of-state travel request for Register of Deeds Beth Landreth to attend the National Property Records Industry Association Conference in Buffalo, NY, on August 25-27, 2026. Funding for the trip is included in the FY 2027 budget request. Board policy requires advanced approval for all out-of-state travel.

As District 1 Chair of the North Carolina Register of Deeds Association, Ms. Landreth will represent Western North Carolina counties at the conference. She has previously presented at the conference on natural disaster preparation and recovery efforts related to Hurricane Helene.

PRESENTATIONS/RECOGNITIONS

FY 2027 BLUE RIDGE COMMUNITY COLLEGE CAPITAL AND OPERATING BUDGET REQUEST

The County Manager introduced Dr. Laura Leatherwood, President of Blue Ridge Community College, to present the College's annual report and FY 2027 operating and capital budget requests.

Dr. Leatherwood provided an overview of the College's programs, workforce development efforts, student enrollment, and partnerships in Transylvania County. She emphasized the College's role in supporting local workforce needs and preparing students for careers in healthcare, skilled trades, public safety, engineering, and other high-demand fields.

Dr. Leatherwood highlighted the success of Shannon Allison, a Transylvania County resident and graduate of the College's nursing program, who will graduate with honors from Duke University in December and plans to return to Transylvania County to work in women's health. Ms. Allison also served as the College's commencement speaker earlier that week.

Transylvania County Campus Overview

Dr. Leatherwood reported that the Transylvania County campus employs 14 full-time and 10 part-time staff members. The campus consists of two buildings on eight acres with approximately 44,000 square feet of classroom, laboratory, office, and student space.

The local campus currently offers 75 classes and nine credential programs and serves 452 degree-seeking students, including 204 high school students participating in the Career & College Promise program. An additional 455 students participate through Workforce Continuing Education programs.

Programs offered at the Transylvania County campus include:

- Associate in Arts
- Associate in Science
- Automotive Technology
- Nursing
- Criminal Justice
- Emergency Medical Services
- Human Services

- Medical Coding and Billing
- Nurse Aide
- Respiratory Therapy
- Welding

2025 Accomplishments

- Recognition as a Top 200 Aspen Prize finalist
- Top 10 Bellwether Award finalist for its apprenticeship program
- Advancement from Silver to Gold designation as a Military Friendly School
- The highest licensure pass rate in the North Carolina Community College System
- Receipt of \$2.5 million in emergency financial aid and grants for students and employees
- Guaranteed admissions agreements with several universities, including North Carolina State University
- The Community College System is essential in North Carolina, being #1 in Business & Workforce Development

Transylvania County Workforce and Community Partnerships

Dr. Leatherwood highlighted several local partnerships and workforce initiatives occurring in Transylvania County. She noted that the College's construction program is currently building homes for workforce housing at Hope Springs Cottages in partnership with Habitat for Humanity. The Respiratory Therapy program recently graduated its first three students and expects to graduate an additional 15 students over the next year and a half. The College also completed laboratory renovations using State funds to support plumbing and HVAC training programs. Additional workforce training initiatives include expanded fire and rescue training opportunities for rural fire departments and specialized search and rescue courses currently being offered in Brevard.

Dr. Leatherwood also discussed a new outdoor leadership initiative being developed in partnership with several local outdoor recreation businesses and organizations, including Davidson River Outfitters, the North Carolina Outdoor Economy Office, Nantahala Outdoor Center, Headwaters Outfitters, Hunter Banks Fly Fishing, and Brookings Anglers. The program is intended to prepare participants for careers in the outdoor recreation industry while emphasizing safety, leadership, environmental stewardship, and industry certifications.

Dr. Leatherwood also introduced Jessica Edney as the new Transylvania County Campus Director.

Career & College Promise and Student Support

Dr. Leatherwood reported that Career & College Promise enrollment declined during the COVID-19 pandemic and again following Hurricane Helene but has since rebounded to 204 high school students enrolled for spring 2026.

The College is continuing discussions with Transylvania County Schools regarding expansion of the Career & College Promise program and the potential implementation of the Blue Ridge Scholars initiative. The program's goal is for students to graduate from high school with college credits, certifications, or an associate degree.

The College is also working with Transylvania County Schools on expanded career and technical education opportunities connected to the school system's new career and technical education facility.

Additional efforts include summer Career & College Promise courses, career coaching services at each high school, financial aid assistance, and expanded access to workforce training programs such as construction, HVAC, EMT, nurse aide, and cosmetology-related programs.

Workforce Development Strategy

Dr. Leatherwood discussed the College's long-term workforce development strategy, which focuses on serving a wide range of populations, including traditional students, adult learners, veterans, retirees returning to the workforce, small business owners, and underemployed individuals seeking additional training.

She emphasized the importance of supporting industries critical to the regional economy, including:

- Healthcare
- Advanced Manufacturing
- Engineering
- Skilled Trades
- Teacher Preparation
- Information Technology and Cybersecurity

She also noted that the College is the only community college west of Charlotte offering associate-level engineering pathways in civil, mechanical, environmental, and electrical engineering.

FY 2027 Budget Requests

Dr. Leatherwood stated that the College worked to keep its operating request within the County's recommended 2% increase guideline, although she noted that overall needs exceed that amount.

The FY 2027 operating request totals approximately \$746,559 and includes funding for plant operations, property insurance, and campus security.

The FY 2027 capital request totals approximately \$76,500 and would fund the replacement of the automotive program's epoxy flooring.

Future Campus Needs

Dr. Leatherwood emphasized the need for a future replacement campus in Transylvania County, noting that the current campus is approximately 75 years old and operates in a former elementary school facility.

She presented a long-term planning timeline showing that even under an accelerated schedule, a replacement campus could still take approximately 10 years to complete. She expressed concern about the increasing risk of major infrastructure failures as the existing building continues to age.

Commissioner Chapman stated that he and Commissioner Dalton recently discussed the College's facility needs with Senator Corbin in Raleigh and emphasized the importance of securing State funding assistance because the County cannot independently support a project estimated to exceed \$50 million.

Dr. Leatherwood stated that identifying potential property for a future campus would strengthen the College's ability to seek State support and advance planning discussions.

Chairwoman McCall noted that a future Blue Ridge Community College campus has consistently remained on the County's list of legislative and capital priorities. She stated that identifying suitable property in Transylvania County has been a continuing challenge and noted that the County is not currently in a financial position to purchase land for the project.

Commissioner Chapman suggested that the future closure of Davidson River School could potentially provide temporary space options for the College. Dr. Leatherwood responded that while she was unfamiliar with the facility, the College would want to avoid relocating into another aging building without significant renovations.

The Manager reminded the Board that agencies requesting County funding increases above 2% were asked earlier in the year to provide documentation supporting the request, including acknowledgement of any potential tax implications. Dr. Leatherwood responded that the College received the County's request but noted that the College's Board does not have the authority to advocate for local tax increases.

Chairwoman McCall thanked Dr. Leatherwood for her presentation.

SOLID WASTE DISPOSAL AND FUNDING OPTIONS

The County Manager reported that the Board previously hired a consultant to evaluate long-term solid waste disposal options and conduct a rate study for the County's solid waste system. She introduced representatives from Smith Gardner Engineers, John Barnard and Mike Brincheck, to present their findings.

The consultants explained that the study evaluated the County's current landfill operations, future disposal options, and potential funding methods needed to sustain the system over the next 20 years.

Existing System and Current Challenges

The County currently operates the municipal solid waste landfill at the Woodruff Road site. Construction of Cell 7, the final permitted disposal cell at the site, is underway and is expected to provide six to seven years of remaining landfill capacity. The County also operates four convenience centers for residential waste and recycling collection.

The consultants reported that the solid waste system is currently operating at an annual deficit of approximately \$500,000 and that the deficit is expected to increase over time if no changes are made. They noted that the County manages roughly 33,000 tons of waste annually, with waste volumes continuing to grow each year.

They emphasized that the County must soon determine a long-term disposal strategy because of the limited remaining landfill capacity and the lengthy permitting timelines associated with any future disposal option.

Disposal Options Reviewed

The consultants evaluated both alternative and traditional disposal methods. Alternative technologies reviewed included waste-to-energy incineration and other waste conversion systems. Traditional methods included landfill expansion and the development of a transfer station.

The consultants explained that alternative technologies are not feasible for a county the size of Transylvania because they require significantly larger waste volumes and substantial capital investment. They noted that waste-to-energy facilities typically require 3,000 to 4,000 tons of waste per day to operate economically, while Transylvania County generates only about 110 tons per day. They also noted that these facilities still require landfill space for ash disposal and backup operations.

Chairwoman McCall asked whether those technologies could become viable on a regional basis in the future. The consultants responded that regional systems may eventually become more practical as landfill capacity across the state becomes more limited, but they believed those technologies were likely still many years away for this region.

Landfill Expansion Possibilities

The consultants reviewed the possibility of expanding the existing Woodruff landfill site. While they stated that additional landfill development may technically be possible, they explained that the site presents significant challenges due to steep terrain, stream and wetland impacts, soil limitations, and extensive environmental permitting requirements. They estimated that obtaining permits for a new landfill expansion could take between six and ten years and cautioned that permitting approval is not guaranteed.

The consultants also briefly reviewed the possibility of developing a new landfill site elsewhere in the county but concluded that the timeframe and site challenges make that option impractical.

Transfer Station Option

The consultants stated that the most practical option identified was the construction of a transfer station. Under this approach, waste collected in the county would be consolidated at a transfer facility and hauled to a regional landfill outside the county for disposal.

They evaluated two possible transfer station locations, including the existing Woodruff landfill site and County-owned property near the closed Calvert landfill. The consultants recommended the Calvert site because it already has access to utilities and major roads and would require fewer infrastructure improvements than the Woodruff site.

The consultants explained that regional landfills in neighboring states and counties currently have sufficient capacity to accept Transylvania County's waste long term. They noted that Haywood County's White Oak landfill appeared to be the most favorable option among the sites reviewed.

The consultants recommended construction of a transfer station at the Calvert site sized to handle approximately 100 tons of waste per day while the County continues evaluating long-term disposal technologies and landfill possibilities.

20-Year Cost Comparison of Options

The consultants presented 20-year cost estimates comparing landfill expansion, a transfer station, and a hybrid approach. Estimated total costs ranged from \$107 million to \$111 million over 20 years, depending on the option selected.

While the total projected costs were relatively similar, the consultants stated that the transfer station option carried less permitting risk and could be implemented more quickly than landfill expansion.

They explained that the transfer station option also provides flexibility while allowing the County additional time to evaluate future technologies and disposal methods.

Funding and Rate Study

The consultants then reviewed the rate study portion of the project, which examined how the County could sustainably fund future solid waste operations.

They explained that the current system relies on landfill tipping fees, convenience site bag fees, recycling revenue, and property tax support. Based on FY 2024 actual figures, the solid waste system operated at an annual deficit of approximately \$580,000.

The consultants modeled several funding approaches, including higher bag fees, increased tipping fees, and an "availability fee" assessed on improved parcels. They explained that availability fees are commonly used in North Carolina and are designed to spread costs across all households and properties using the system.

Under the consultant's recommendation, the County would transition away from per-bag sticker fees and instead use a combination of tipping fees and an availability fee to fund the system. The consultants noted that this approach could eliminate cash handling at convenience sites and simplify operations.

Chairwoman McCall clarified that no decisions were being made at the meeting and that the Board was only receiving information and asking questions at this stage.

The Manager added that any future funding model would need to account not only for current operating costs but also for major future capital needs that have not previously been fully funded within the system.

Commissioners discussed concerns related to future costs, enforcement of out-of-county waste restrictions, effects on residents with different household sizes, and how any future availability fee might impact property owners and renters.

The consultants recommended that the County hold community meetings later in the year to educate residents about the challenges facing the solid waste system and gather public input before any decisions are made.

The consultants also emphasized that many counties across North Carolina are facing similar long-term landfill and disposal challenges and stated that Transylvania County is beginning the planning process earlier than many local governments.

The Manager stated that staff anticipates bringing additional recommendations and planning items to the Board over the coming year to remain on schedule for future permitting and facility development needs.

The Board recessed briefly at 5:49 p.m. and reconvened at 5:58 p.m.

FY 2027 BUDGET PROCESS UPDATE

The Manager reported that staff have provided eight or nine presentations related to the FY 2027 budget to help ensure the Board and the public understand the County's financial challenges, revenue projections, and major budget issues before the recommended budget is presented. The goal is to avoid surprises and provide transparency throughout the budget process. This presentation focused on balancing the budget through cost-reduction strategies and long-term capital planning.

Budget Development Process

The Manager explained that outside agency requests are under review by staff and Commissioners. The Board has already received presentations from County departments, Transylvania County Schools, and Blue Ridge Community College. Fire department and nonprofit budget reviews are also nearing completion. Revenue projections continue to be updated based on current economic trends and recent collections data.

The public can review prior budget presentations on the County website and participate in an online budget survey regarding service priorities, mandated services, and budget reduction strategies. The Manager noted the recommended FY 2027 budget is scheduled for presentation at the May 26 meeting.

Cost Reduction Strategies

The Manager outlined several ways the County works to control costs and improve efficiency as part of daily operations. These efforts include purchasing controls, contract negotiations, internal audits, data analysis, and risk management practices. She noted that many of these efforts occur behind the scenes but play an important role in reducing long-term expenses and limiting operational budget increases.

Examples included:

- Purchasing vehicles and equipment through state or cooperative contracts to reduce costs
- Centralizing computer and software purchasing through the IT Department to improve cybersecurity and reduce expenses
- Conducting utility billing reviews that identified approximately \$150,000 in annual savings
- Negotiating lower telecommunications and copier contract costs
- Monitoring service costs, such as inmate medical expenses, to compare against industry averages and identify savings opportunities

The Manager also discussed the County's use of data analysis when evaluating major decisions. As an example, staff analyzed whether relocating County Administration and Tax Administration/Register of Deeds operations into the existing courthouse after construction of the new courthouse would save money. After reviewing maintenance costs, utilities, property values, and relocation expenses, the analysis showed that retaining the current buildings and selling the old courthouse would be more cost-effective over a 10-year period.

Long-Term Capital Planning

The Manager reviewed the County's long-term capital planning efforts that began in 2016. She explained that the Board began setting aside annual funds and conducting public capital planning workshops to avoid large fluctuations in the property tax rate and to better prepare for major capital projects over time.

The County worked with First Tryon Advisors to develop financial models showing how various projects and financing options would affect the tax rate. Projects discussed over the years have included school improvements, the courthouse, EMS facilities, Blue Ridge Community College, parks and recreation, and economic development infrastructure.

The Manager noted that Commissioners prioritized the following major projects over the last several years:

- Public school improvements
- A new courthouse
- A new EMS station
- Blue Ridge Community College needs

She explained that earlier financial modeling showed the County would likely need a tax increase if all major projects were financed simultaneously. In response, the Board pursued several strategies to reduce costs and limit future tax impacts, including:

- Securing approximately \$120 million in grant funding for capital projects and infrastructure
- Conducting the Axias facilities study for school improvements to better prioritize maintenance and renovation needs.
- Reducing and value engineering the courthouse project to lower overall square footage and project costs
- Building a long-term debt repayment plan within existing revenue projections

The Manager reported that current financial planning shows the County can fund debt service for the courthouse, school bonds, and EMS projects over a 10-year period using existing capital allocations and assigned fund balance without requiring an additional tax increase for those specific projects. However, this plan does not include future solid waste capital projects, additional state mandates, or major new projects such as a new Blue Ridge Community College campus.

Capital Fund Balances and Debt Planning

The Manager reviewed how capital reserve funds have been collected and used since FY 2017. She explained that unused capital funds were placed into the assigned fund balance and later allocated by Board action toward approved projects.

Current assigned fund balance amounts include:

- Approximately \$1.2 million for Parks and Recreation
- Approximately \$2.7 million is reserved for courthouse-related expenses.

- Approximately \$3.8 million unassigned
- Approximately \$5 million is reserved for future debt service payments.

She noted that the County's long-term debt strategy depends on maintaining approximately \$7.8 million annually in combined sales and property tax revenue dedicated to capital debt service.

Future Challenges

The Manager emphasized that significant future capital challenges remain unresolved. She noted that solid waste infrastructure decisions must be made within the next six months to stay on schedule for future disposal capacity planning. She also stated that the estimated cost of a future Blue Ridge Community College campus project has increased significantly from earlier estimates and could require new revenue sources or future tax increases.

The Manager noted that a previously proposed local sales tax referendum could potentially be reconsidered in the future as a way to help fund major capital projects without relying solely on property taxes.

Board Discussion

Commissioner Chapman asked whether legal service contracts were included in the County's 2% budget increase guidance to departments. The Manager explained that the County's legal services contract has only had one increase since being established approximately eight years ago.

Commissioner Chappell stated that local governments have limited revenue sources and said a future sales tax referendum could provide an alternative funding source for capital projects while shifting some of the burden to visitors rather than solely relying on property taxes.

Chairwoman McCall thanked the Manager for providing detailed information showing the County's ongoing efforts to reduce costs and responsibly manage taxpayer funds. She said the presentation addressed many public concerns and criticisms regarding County spending and demonstrated the amount of planning and savings efforts already taking place.

The Manager stated she would meet individually with Commissioners over the next several days to review her recommended FY 2027 budget.

Commissioner Chapman asked whether delays in adopting the state budget could significantly affect the County's budget planning. The Manager said two major concerns include potential state changes to teacher pay and benefits and shifts in SNAP program costs from the federal government to counties. She noted these issues could significantly impact future County budgets.

Commissioner Chappell commented that local governments are required to adopt balanced budgets by statutory deadlines and expressed frustration that the state is not held to the same standard.

The Manager added that counties face greater financial risk than municipalities because counties are responsible for many more state-mandated services.

UPDATE ON EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO HURRICANE/TROPICAL STORM HELENE

The Manager provided an update on the emergency response to Hurricane/Tropical Storm Helene.

Agriculture Support Programs

- New USDA Disaster Block Grant available for farmers and producers impacted by Hurricane Helene
- Assistance available for:
 - Farm infrastructure damage

- Market losses
- Future economic losses
- Timber losses
- Open to producers with FSA Farm Tract Numbers in designated disaster counties.
- Cooperative Extension is assisting local applicants with applications and support.
- NCDA disaster assistance hotline available for producers

Commercial District Revitalization Program

- \$40 million in federal funding available to restore damaged commercial districts in Western North Carolina
- Funding available through Renew NC's Commercial District Revitalization Program
- Eligible applicants include local governments and nonprofit organizations.
- Application window: April 6 – August 4, 2026

Renew NC Small Rental Rehabilitation Program

- Assistance available to repair, reconstruct, or replace small rental properties (1–4 units) damaged by Hurricane Helene
- Focused on restoring affordable housing for low- to moderate-income families
- Applications accepted online, by phone, or through the app
- Program staff available to assist property owners with eligibility and applications

Hazard Mitigation Grant or Bridge & Road Repair Programs

- No new updates

Debris Removal

- No new updates
- Requires FEMA review
- Many requests for private property and waterway debris removal have been rejected.

APPOINTMENTS

AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY BOARD

The terms of Dr. John Buford, Steve Tabor, and Zachary West expired at the end of April. Dr. Buford and Mr. Tabor had each served two full terms and were no longer eligible for reappointment under the Board's policy. Mr. West had completed one term and was eligible and willing to serve again.

Because there were no applications on file, Cooperative Extension staff requested that the Board waive Mr. Tabor's term limits and allow him to serve a third term. Dr. Buford did not wish to seek another term, and staff will continue recruitment efforts to fill that vacancy.

Commissioner Dalton moved to reappoint Zachary West to another term and to waive the term limits and reappoint Steve Tabor to a third term on the Agricultural Advisory Board, seconded by Commissioner Chapman, and the motion was unanimously approved.

COUNCIL ON AGING (COUNTY)

Shannon Roberts resigned from the County Council on Aging effective March 17. Council on Aging Chair Kathe Harris recruited an applicant, Mary Shore, and the membership and staff recommended her appointment to fill the vacancy. No other applications were on file.

Commissioner Chappell moved to appoint Mary Shore to fill a vacancy on the Transylvania County Council on Aging, seconded by Commissioner Dalton, and unanimously approved.

PERSONNEL BOARD

The terms of James Bailey (Member-at-Large), Chase McKelvey (County Commissioner representative), and Amanda Vanderoef (Department Head representative) expired at the end of February.

Mr. Bailey had served multiple terms and was not eligible for reappointment. Earlier in the year, the Board reviewed its County Commissioner appointments and made no changes, resulting in Commissioner McKelvey's automatic reappointment through the end of his term on the Board of Commissioners in December 2026. Human Resources Director Sheila Cozart recommended the reappointment of DSS Director Amanda Vanderoef to continue serving in the Department Head position.

Staff also noted that Jo Ann McCall's appointment as Soil and Water District Director moved her into a Department Head role, making her no longer eligible to serve in the Employee representative position on the Personnel Board. The remaining Department Head seat was already filled. Staff will continue working to fill the remaining vacancies.

Commissioner Chappell moved to reappoint Commissioner Chase McKelvey and Amanda Vanderoef to the Personnel Board, seconded by Commissioner Chapman, and unanimously approved.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

William Smith's term on the Workforce Development Board was set to expire at the end of May. Mr. Smith serves in the Private Sector Business representative seat. Nathan Ramsey, Director of the Land of Sky Regional Council and the Mountain Area Workforce Development Board, recommended his reappointment.

Commissioner Chappell moved to reappoint William Smith to another term on the Workforce Development Board, seconded by Commissioner McKelvey and unanimously approved.

OLD BUSINESS

DISPOSAL OF UNSOLD FORECLOSED REAL PROPERTY

The County currently owns three undeveloped lots in the Connestee Falls community that were acquired through the foreclosure process and remained unsold following the courthouse auction. Staff utilized GovDeals to market the properties through an electronic auction process in accordance with property disposal statutes. The Board previously approved the required resolution and notice of advertisement authorizing the sale by electronic auction.

The auction closed on April 22, 2026, and staff presented the highest bids received for the Board's consideration. The bids for each property were below the amount the County had invested in the properties through back taxes and legal fees, resulting in projected losses if sold. Staff advised the Board that they could either accept the bids and proceed with the sales or reject the bids and reopen the auction with higher minimum bid requirements.

The properties and highest bids were as follows:

- Lot 23, Unit 19, Usdasdi Drive – highest bid of \$3,950
- Lot 109, Unit 29, Ugugu Drive – highest bid of \$3,825
- Lot 74, Unit 5, Tsisqua Circle – highest bid of \$3,750

Commissioners noted that the likelihood of receiving significantly higher bids through a future auction appeared remote. Commissioner Chappell stated he was willing to accept the bids because he did not believe the bid amounts would increase if the properties were re-advertised.

Commissioner Chappell moved to accept the bids and direct staff to proceed with finalizing the sales of the properties, seconded by Commissioner Dalton. The motion was unanimously approved.

NEW BUSINESS

MANAGER'S REPORT

The County Manager provided the following updates and announcements:

- May 3-9 was recognized as Hurricane Preparedness Week. With hurricane season approaching on June 1 and continuing through November 30, Transylvania County Emergency Management encouraged residents to review emergency plans and update supply kits. Residents were directed to ReadyNC.gov for preparedness resources and tools.
- The next meeting of the Board of Commissioners will be held on Tuesday, May 26, at 6:00 p.m. County offices will be closed on Monday, May 25, in observance of Memorial Day.
- The County Manager will present the FY 2027 Recommended Budget at the May 26 meeting. She noted the Board has devoted approximately 11 hours to budget-related agenda items and presentations during the current budget process. Budget presentations, meeting videos, and slide presentations are available on the County's website for public review.
- The Manager congratulated Tax Administrator Jessica McCall on her upcoming appointment as President of the North Carolina Tax Collectors' Association. She commended Ms. McCall's leadership, professionalism, and dedication to public service and stated that she would represent both the Association and Transylvania County well in the role.
- The Transylvania County Library will celebrate the 20th anniversary of its current facility on May 13. The Manager noted the facility was made possible through strong community support, including a grassroots fundraising campaign led by the Library Foundation that raised \$2.5 million toward construction costs. Staff invited the public to participate in celebrating the milestone anniversary.
- The Manager also highlighted upcoming events associated with the nation's America 250 celebration commemorating 250 years of freedom. An upcoming event, "The Three Sisters – Jefferson's Delightful Culture: A Revolutionary Era Garden," will be held on May 16 from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The public comments reflect the opinions or points of view of the speakers.

Mike Hawkins thanked the Commissioners for their service and commented that most citizens do not fully realize the range and complexity of issues the Board must address. He spoke regarding the earlier discussion about Blue Ridge Community College and suggested a coordinated advocacy approach between the County and the College in seeking state and federal funding support for a future campus project. He emphasized that the expectation was not for the County alone to fund such a project and stated that a unified strategy between the County and the College would strengthen efforts to seek outside funding assistance. Mr. Hawkins also addressed the issue of identifying a future project site, encouraging the County and College to work collaboratively in exploring options, even if the County did not consider land acquisition solely its responsibility. He further commented on the County's request that agencies limit budget increases to approximately 2%. As a member of the Blue Ridge Community College Board of Trustees, he explained that the Trustees felt uncomfortable adopting a resolution because they did not have detailed knowledge of the County's overall budget situation or whether meeting the College's request would require a tax increase. He

stated that the Trustees believed making such a determination was outside their role and wanted the Commissioners to understand the reasoning behind their response.

Marlu Guest commented on the proposed changes to solid waste collection and disposal practices. She explained that she resides in an area inaccessible to garbage trucks and does not have a garage to store trash, requiring her to keep garbage inside her home to prevent bears from accessing it. She asked the Board to consider the challenges residents in similar situations could face if changes were made to the current system.

Representative Anna Ferguson attended the meeting and expressed appreciation for the Board's extensive work on the County budget and efforts to reduce costs. She stated that, in her view, Transylvania County's budget process set a strong example compared to other counties. Representative Ferguson also addressed several state-level issues discussed during the meeting, including Hurricane Helene recovery funding and proposed property tax cap discussions occurring at the state level. She shared that she serves on the Hurricane Helene recovery funds committee and noted ongoing work to recover and redirect unused funds from programs that had not fully utilized prior allocations. Regarding property tax cap proposals, she stated that discussions were still preliminary and that, based on her current understanding, the proposals should not significantly affect Transylvania County, although she still had questions and concerns about the concept. Representative Ferguson also commented on the delay in the adoption of the state budget but stated that she remained optimistic about the process moving forward. Chairwoman McCall thanked Representative Ferguson for attending the meeting.

COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

Commissioner Chapman congratulated and recognized Transylvania County employees and staff for their leadership and service at the state level. He noted that, despite being a smaller county, Transylvania County staff hold significant leadership roles across North Carolina. He recognized the Clerk to the Board for recently completing her term as president of the North Carolina Association of County Clerks and congratulated Tax Administrator Jessica McCall on her upcoming service as president of the North Carolina Tax Collectors' Association. He also noted that several Commissioners serve on influential statewide committees and commended the County Manager for being highly respected across the state.

Commissioner Chapman shared that he would be traveling to Raleigh for the Chamber of Commerce legislative trip, where he hoped to meet with legislators, and would later attend the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners Board of Directors meeting in Cherokee.

Commissioner Chappell addressed recent social media discussions regarding the County budget and stated that some inaccurate information had been circulating publicly. He said he felt it was important to correct what he described as false narratives surrounding the courthouse project and school funding. Commissioner Chappell emphasized that the County had been directed by the judicial system to address courthouse deficiencies and that construction of a new courthouse was not simply a discretionary project or "wish list" item. He referenced correspondence from judges and state officials indicating that failure to address the issues could result in additional operational and transportation costs similar to those experienced in other counties. He stated that the Board, staff, and project professionals had worked diligently to ensure the project remained practical, safe, and cost-conscious without unnecessary excess.

Commissioner Chappell also addressed comments suggesting that little progress had been made on school infrastructure projects since the passage of the school bond referendum. He stated that substantial progress had been made in addressing school facility needs and noted that some previously funded projects had not been completed under prior administrations. He expressed appreciation for the working relationship between the County, the Board of Education, and the school administration and stated that the County continues to make significant investments in public education. Commissioner Chappell added that he found some public

comments discouraging and demeaning to County staff and administrators who continue working to improve the community.

Commissioner Dalton commented on a recent trip to Raleigh with Commissioner Chapman. He stated that they met with Senator Corbin for several hours to discuss issues affecting Transylvania County in detail and that Senator Corbin was highly engaged and attentive to the County's concerns. He expressed hope that the discussions would prove beneficial moving forward.

Chairwoman McCall stated that she appreciated Commissioner Chappell's remarks and shared concerns about misinformation and rumors circulating publicly despite the availability of factual information through County meetings and materials posted online. She said the County has consistently provided information through public meetings and the County website and expressed disappointment over what she described as gossip and disparaging comments directed toward County staff and officials.

Chairwoman McCall also addressed comments made earlier during public comment regarding her statements about a potential future Blue Ridge Community College campus. She clarified that her position was that it is not the County's responsibility to independently locate property for the College or other entities, but that the County would be willing to assist and work collaboratively if requested. She stated that she stood by her comments and wanted to ensure they were represented accurately.

Commissioner Chappell announced that a senior basketball team composed of state and national champions would be playing a team from the Netherlands at Rosman High School later in the week as a fundraiser for Dale Griffith. He encouraged the public to attend and also noted that the annual Tiger Tussle event would be held that weekend.

Commissioner Chapman thanked Representative Anna Ferguson for attending the meeting and remarked that he wished more legislators spent time in the counties they represent to better understand county government operations and responsibilities.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, **Commissioner Chapman moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:09 p.m., seconded by Commissioner Chappell, and unanimously approved.**

Teresa K. McCall, Chair
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

Trisha M. Hogan, Clerk to the Board