

**MINUTES OF A  
BUDGET WORK SESSION  
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
HELD ON  
MAY 23, 2022**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Budget Work Session on May 23, 2022, 8:30 a.m., Justice and Administration Building, Room A201, 401 Grindstaff Cove Road, Sylva, North Carolina.

Present: Brian McMahan, Chairman  
Mark Jones, Commissioner  
Tom Stribling, Commissioner  
Gayle Woody, Commissioner  
Absent: Boyce Deitz, Vice Chair

Don Adams, County Manager  
Heather C. Baker, County Attorney  
Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board  
Darlene Fox, Finance Director

Chairman McMahan called the meeting to order.

Mr. Adams stated that this budget work session was part of the normal process to have some of the larger institutions present to the Board. Also, there was one nonprofit that wished to appear before the Board.

(1) **SOUTHWESTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE**: Dr. Don Tomas, SCC President, provided the Board with information regarding the economic value of SCC.

He presented:

(a) Operating Expenses.

- Requested: \$2,534,382
- Proposed: \$2,534,382
- The college had experienced an increase in personnel and supplies costs, which reflected an overall 5.4% increase in expenses for FY2022-23.

(b) Capital Requests:

- Fleet Vehicle Replacements and Truck Maintenance: \$135,458
- Facility Renovations: \$137,855
- Firing Range: \$75,000
- Incidental: \$50,000

(c) Summary of Total Requests:

- 2017-18 \$2,939,525
- 2018-19 \$2,708,023
- 2019-20 \$2,482,202
- 2020-21 \$2,441,415
- 2021-22 \$2,710,953
- 2022-23 \$2,932,695

Commissioner Woody inquired if the upgrades previously discussed had been made to the firing range.

Dr. Tomas stated the last project was the security cameras and the cards, which would be completed with a contractor. It was all completed as of the original conversation of an added lane, raising the berm and they planted additional trees. The request for \$75,000 was to pave the road from the gate to the building.

Commissioner Woody asked if positions were being filled at SCC?

Dr. Tomas stated they did have some workforce issues. They had specialized training positions in some of the instructional areas. They were beginning to see relief on some of their AA positions. They were not having the numbers apply for positions as they once did.

Commissioner Jones inquired if there was any new word on the Aspen Prize?

Dr. Tomas stated no, but he did anticipate to hear more information in a week or so. The Aspen Prize was for Community Colleges of excellency. SCC was a semi-finalist, one of 25 throughout the nation. This was the first time any North Carolina community college had been a part of that group. They would narrow down to the next top ten in June.

*Informational item.*

**(2) PUBLIC SCHOOLS:** Dr. Dana Ayers, Superintendent; Jacob Buchanan, Deputy Superintendent; and Kristie Walker, Finance Officer were present for this item.

Dr. Ayers presented:

**(a) Historical Funding:**

- 2022 \$8,431,468
- 2021 \$7,908,941
- 2020 \$7,908,941
- 2019 \$7,670,646
- 2018 \$6,915,072
- 2017 \$6,779,482
- 2016 \$6,779,482
- 2015 \$6,779,536
- 2014 \$6,779,482

**(b) Twofold Request:** When the State of North Carolina passed a budget in January, for the current year, there was a provision that all noncertified staff needed to receive a minimum of \$13 per hour or a 2.5% increase, whichever was greater. With that, there was a limited pot of money that came to them. In the same legislation, there was a requirement that starting July 1<sup>st</sup>, they pay noncertified staff \$15 per hour or 2.5% increase, whichever was greater, which they deserved. This would be for school nutrition workers, bus drivers, teacher assistants and more who were not considered certified.

They looked at where they could find support:

- They were asking the General Assembly to provide a pot of funds to help LEAs address both concerns related to the new minimum pay level and provide increases in various allotments like TAs and Non-Instructional Support, which would enhance LEAs' ability to raise the pay of veteran employees paid from those allotments.
- They were asking the County Commissioners to:
  - Cover raising the pay of locally paid employees to the newly mandated minimum level mandated for their state-paid co-workers.
  - Supplement what the state was providing to make noncertified employee pay competitive with higher wages now being offered in private jobs in their community, including at fast food restaurants and elsewhere.

(c) Public Schools 2023 Funding Request:

	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023 Proposed</b>	
Salaries	\$5,183,566	\$5,242,052	\$6,611,240	
Operations	\$3,004,221	\$3,369,416	\$3,478,137	
Total	\$8,187,787	\$8,611,468	\$10,089,377	
County Funding	\$7,908,941	\$8,431,468	\$8,600,097	2% Increase
			\$306,852	JCPS Fund Balance
			\$455,300	5.4% Set Aside
			(\$727,128)	Revisit when State Budget signed

(d) Summary of 2021-22 Budget SL2021-180:

- Salary and Personnel:
  - Teachers and Instructional Support:
    - Effective 7/1/2021 step increase for all + 1.3% increase to salary schedule
    - Average increase including the step: 2.5%
    - Range of increase including step: \$650 to \$2,680 or 1.3% to 5.4%
  - Psychologists, SLPs and Audiologists shall receive \$350 monthly supplement
  - School Counselors receive \$100 per month supplement
  - 7A.10 Noncertified:
    - Increase annual salary by greater of percentage increase or amount to get the hourly compensation to \$13 per hour. \$15 per hour in 2022-23.

(e) Employer Benefit Costs:

<b>Fiscal year</b>	<b>Social Security %</b>	<b>Retirement %</b>	<b>Health Insurance</b>
2023	7.65	24.19	\$7,397
2022	7.65	22.89	\$7,019
2021	7.65	21.68	\$6,326
2020	7.65	19.7	\$6,306
2019	7.65	18.86	\$6,104
2018	7.65	17.13	\$5,869
2017	7.65	16.33	\$5,659
2016	7.65	15.32	\$5,471

(f) LEA Funding Shortfall:

- State funds were not provided to cover “locally paid” personnel.
- Additional local money was needed to keep their pay equitable with the higher pay now mandated and covered for their state paid co-workers.
- The moves to the new minimum level each year were compressing salaries among noncertified personnel, causing newly hired and long-time employees to earn the same pay. The morale issue this created without additional funding to bump the pay of veterans above the new minimum level was causing many to leave and further exacerbating shortages in these positions.

(g) The state had not provided enough funds in either year to address this mandated salary increase or needed salary differential to support veteran employees sufficiently.

(h) A better education for the students was only possible through a partnership between the Board of Commissioners and the Board of Education.

Commissioner Woody stated that the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners was fighting very hard, at the state level, to address the partial funded and unfunded mandate. This was one reason why Mr. Adams suggested they wait for some of this because they hoped they were successful.

Also, she did not see the money reflected that they received from Covid. Those were not ongoing funds, but she would like to see the impact it had on what the county contributed.

Dr. Ayers stated that their ESSER funds had been allocated. They worked hard to not pay salaries with ESSER budget because it was not sustainable. They did have several positions in the budget specifically for ESSER, such as social and emotional support as a result of Covid. Those were 29-hour or contracted knowing they would go away after several years. The bulk of their funds had been spent on tangible curriculum resources and supplies. They had a plan to allocate those funds in the next two years.

Mr. Adams stated that there was potential for some of these funds to transplant, which could help with the fund balance conversation. When they started looking at the \$727,128 shortfall, it would become a conversation about how that would get reduced. That could be a fund balance conversation between the Board of Commissioners and the School System at that point. This would be directly impacted by the planned spend down and focusing on where the ESSER funds had gone, along with state revenues and the entire system. This would be part of the August discussions.

Commissioner Jones asked if there was an indication of where the state budget may go?

Dr. Ayers stated no, but there was a proposed budget, which was asking for a substantial salary increase for teachers, which was needed. That was probably the greatest impact she saw.

Chairman McMahan stated that counties were mandated by the state to have a certain amount of fund balance on hand at all times. The county also had their own fund balance policy they established several years ago that stated they would not spend the fund balance down to a certain point. It was good to have fund balance for many reasons. Were there mandates from the state that required the schools' fund balance to be a certain amount?

Mr. Buchanan stated there was no statutory mandate for fund balance. There was a best practice from the Local Government Association, which was 5% of the overall operating costs. Their total operating budget was \$44 million.

Commissioner Woody stated that the county funded the additional counselors in every school. She was at a state meeting where they were suggesting counties do this and she was so pleased that they had already decided to do that. Mr. Buchanan was an advocate for that. She had heard from many teachers just how much that had meant to the students. They were committed to continuing that.

Dr. Ayers stated that they were fortunate to have a collaborative relationship with the Board of Commissioners and she was grateful for that.

Commissioner Stribling asked if they were taking inflation into consideration in the budget?

Dr. Ayers stated yes, that was why the operations budget had increased approximately 5%.

Mr. Adams stated that the issue of pay was just recently known by the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners. They had been asked to provide them with dollar amounts of how the mandate impacted the schools. There had been state monies budgeted to help with state funded positions regarding the minimum wages.

From the state level, they may view this as being funded because they put money in for the current budget and next year to help offset the costs. They were dealing with the local paid employees. The Association would start putting together talking points specifically for this unfunded mandate.

Also, there had been a change in the recommendation in the proposed county budget. The Capital Outlay line item of \$235,000 would be proposed to be changed to \$335,000. This would be for the School System to enter into contracts for architectural services. The Board of Education was in support of this as well.

*Informational item.*

**(3) LIBRARY:** Tracy Fitzmaurice, Librarian, thanked the Commissioners for approving an increase of 7.4% in the budget for the libraries in the county. This increase would be used to increase staff wages, bringing many staff closer to a living wage and easing the difficulty of the current rise in inflation that people in the community and across the nation were experiencing. Together with funding from the Friends of the Library groups, the Town of Sylva and grant monies, the libraries would not only maintain but improve the services they offered.

She shared some highlights from the past year and made the Board aware of some upcoming projects in the libraries:

**(a)** Over the past year, they had seen a continued demand for internet access and assistance with technology. To meet these needs, library leadership applied for and received grant money to supply patrons with internet access using Verizon hotspots. The Digital Seniors Grant supported people by furnishing them with Chromebooks and hotspots along with individual training (in-house or at the library) in digital literacy. The library added mobile printing for patrons to use in the library or from home. They also received grants for the latest web conferencing equipment to improve hybrid in-person/virtual meetings, as well as a Launchpad Learning Grant. This grant was used to purchase approximately 100 Launchpad digital tablets, pre-loaded with curriculum-aligned literacy learning software. These devices provide the advantage of digital learning without the need for Internet access, fostering equitable access to digital tools.

In addition to these new digital offerings, the library was still the place people came to check out books. This year they had carried out an inventory (using grant-funded RFID inventory wands) of their collections and were carrying out diversity audits. They strived to have a collection that supported the educational, informational and recreational needs of the community.

**(b)** In 2021 Fontana Regional Library received a Long Range Planning grant. This grant was used to hire two consultants, Ed Sheary (retire director of Buncombe County Libraries) and Dr. Dan Barron (retired director of Avery Mitchell Yancey Regional Library), to assist with the development of the 2022-2027 Long Range Plan. A survey was conducted to see what the general public, elected officials, library partners, boards, Friends of the Library and staff saw as important factors for the libraries to concentrate on in the next five years. The results were very similar across all of the groups surveyed.

The five areas of focus for 2022-2027 would be: Reliable Internet Access, Education, Work and Economy, Health and Wellness and Affordable Living (food insecurity, housing etc.). In a recent survey conducted by Fontana Regional Library, they discovered that affordable housing was a top concern in their communities. When the cost to live in the county rises, as with past downturns in the economy, library services would become more important to those in need. These households would seek affordable or free recreational activities like books, movies, music or craft classes. They depended on the library to always be there to provide essential services and by being an information hub, they served as a guide to help people get the help they needed.

**(c)** When the LRP was finalized, she would like to come back and present the plan to the Board. The plan was based on the Triple Bottom Line methodology of people, performance, planet environmental sustainability.

**(d)** Key components of the upcoming year were:

- Continuing the many partnerships throughout the community (JCPS, WCU, SCC, Department on Aging, Vaya, Boys & Girls club of the Plateau, JCHD).
- Continued support of the workforce (NC Works and SCC).
- Working with the newly formed taskforce for Digital Inclusion.
- Working with WCU to have a social worker intern in-house at the library.
- Outreach to daycares and assisted living homes.
- Continued programming for children, teens and adults.
- Developing a compensation plan that was sustainable.
- Continue to support staff training so they could do their jobs confidently while offering the best customer service they could.

Many of these activities would fall under their Operational Excellence goals, which were guided by the new and revised North Carolina Public Library Standards (released in November 2021).

(e) JCPL and ACCCL employees worked hard to meet the mission "To provide the public of Jackson, Macon and Swain counties with excellent service and convenient access to resources for their educational, informational and recreational needs".

Vision Statement - "The Heart of the Community, Enriching Lives and Inspiring the Future" was more important than ever and the community benefits from having Commissioners that support that vision.

Commissioner Woody stated that Ms. Fitzmaurice had just celebrated 30 years of working for the Fontana Regional Library. She was a wonderful asset to the community.

Chairman McMahan thanked Ms. Fitzmaurice for all that she did. He appreciated the public library system and what it provided to the community. It was an invaluable resource.

*Informational item.*

The Board took at ten-minute break.

Chairman McMahan called the meeting back to order.

(4) **SHERIFF'S OFFICE**: Sheriff Chip Hall; Chief Deputy Matt Wike; Major Shannon Queen; and Captain Patrick McCoy were present for this item.

Sheriff Hall thanked the Board for the opportunity to discuss their budget for fiscal year 2022-23. They had tried to be mindful on the personnel requests. Their personnel issues had leveled out with the new pay plan that was implemented. He thanked the Board for that. It had helped them retain quality candidates and it had also helped morale.

Budget Request Highlights:

(a) Compensation:

- Hazard Duty Pay: This office requested that during any declared state of emergency that affected the county, that fair and just compensation for hazard duty be included for staff that was required to work in times where increased danger was present.
- Holiday Pay: In lieu of taking time off on holidays, many deputies and detention officers work through the holidays to provide the necessary coverage of shifts. Deputies and detention officers were given their holiday time to take off elsewhere throughout the year. However, providing this time off created shift shortages on different occasions. Coupled with other leaves such as vacations, compensatory time and sick days, many shifts were often not fully staffed due to time off. Many public safety agencies have addressed this by paying for holiday time in lieu of time off. They proposed holiday pay to the crucial employees of the Sheriff's Office. The proposal would only cover patrols deputies assigned to shifts, detention officers assigned to shifts and investigators under the rank of Lieutenant. This would benefit shift coverages, which inherently created a safer working environment and better response times for calls.
- Paid Educational/Training Incentive: This office recommended a paid retention incentive that would encompass education and training. Currently, there was no incentive for higher education or training included in the salary plan. An incentive based around the North Carolina Sheriff Training and Standards Professional Certificate program was proposed.

(b) Personnel Request: This request would be to address community concerns as it related to the investigations into the sale and distribution of illegal controlled substances throughout the county. The request was for two Narcotics Investigators.

(c) Professional Standards Assistant/Admin III: The role of this position was to help alleviate an increased administrative workload associated with new legislation SB300 the Criminal Justice Reform Bill. The bill had widespread implications as it related to internal office reporting and increased documentation for the conduct of justice officers.

(d) Reclassification of Deputy to Sergeant: Deputy Grade 22 to Sergeant Grade 24.

(e) Contracted Services: Increase in this line item was requested to cover cost associated with the yearly maintenance fees with the newly implemented digital policy manual for the Sheriff's Office employees. The program Power DMS was designed to track employees' acknowledgement of current policy, as well as track previous policy versions. The request was an increase of \$13,000.

(f) Capital Outlay - Motor Vehicles: Request to release funding on July 1<sup>st</sup> for replacement vehicles instead of October so they could move forward with purchasing the vehicles. The request was for \$336,000.

(g) Capital Outlay - Jail: Body Scanner: Request to purchase a full inmate body scanner for all incoming inmates. The body scanner would fulfill the need to further search incoming inmates for contraband that could be concealed within their body. The scanner had successfully detected contraband such as knives, guns and drugs hidden in body cavities. All of which created a harmful setting for both inmates and detention staff. The request was for \$159,000.

Mr. Adams stated that it was being proposed to move forward to release the vehicle funds on July 1<sup>st</sup>. He would also change the recommendation to release funds for the body scanner on July 1<sup>st</sup>, because it was a safety issue.

General discussions were held.

(h) Capital Outlay – Jail: Accurate Controls Computer: The detention center utilized a contracted provider for the door lock controls, intercom and camera system, Accurate Controls. Their system utilized a proprietary hardware and software system and one of the computers used for this system was in need of maintenance replacement. The request was for \$30,464.

(i) Detention Facility Maintenance Requests:

- General Painting: \$22,000
- Main Control Renovation: \$35,000
- Search Room Renovation: \$20,000
- Booking, Kitchen and Second Control Cabinets: \$25,000

Sheriff Hall stated that this was his last budget presentation. He thanked the Board for years of working with them and the opportunity to serve the citizens and make things better. He hoped the next Sheriff had the same working relationship that he did with everyone.

Mr. Adams stated that specific to the budget, he wanted to thank the Sheriff on his and staff's behalf for his professionalism. The Sheriff and his Office provided detailed information every year, worked with County Staff and the Finance Office extremely well. He appreciated the Sheriff's professionalism and appreciated how he had worked with his office and the Finance Office.

*Informational item.*

(5) **HERE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION**: Dr. Marilyn Chamberlin, Board President; Gretta Worley, Incoming Executive Director; and Tom Baker, Board Member, were present for this item.

Mr. Adams stated that Robert Cochran, HERE Executive Director was unable to attend the meeting. HERE was the nonprofit organization that provided services for the homeless population. In the proposed budget, he recommended that HERE receive a 7.4% increase, which was the only nonprofit increase recommended. The recommended budget was \$165,225 and the requested amount was \$313,944.

Dr. Chamberlin stated that Ms. Worley would begin on July 1<sup>st</sup>. She thanked the Board for their continued support of HERE. In 2019 HERE applied to the RFP and was awarded the funding. Since that time, they had added staff and had been able to serve more people.

In 2021 they served 113 households and 168 individuals. They not only sheltered, but they also housed them, which did take time. This was a long process because these were individuals that had several different types of service needs. Affordable housing in this area was extremely challenging, which made it more difficult for them to house quickly.

In the last few years they received the benefit of Covid funding to help fund the programs, which was ending. They had to make up that funding in order to continue to maintain the level of services they had provided in the past. They had done the best they could with funding the projects with sources other than county funds. They worked hard to look at the budget and looked to not offer housing for individuals during the non-winter months.

Ms. Worley stated that some of the programs focused on families with children, the elderly and disabled. Not having that program interfered with children's sense of self. The program gave the parents time to work with her while they found a job and she helped them find housing. Finding housing had gotten much more difficult and she was struggling to find housing for clients.

Dr. Chamberlin stated that eliminating that program would save \$66,000. They also made other adjustments to cut the budget by approximately \$80,000. There still remained a gap of \$80,000. They could probably generate those funds in grants, but those grants were folding up. A lot of the money available would be more challenging to get because they would be more competitive. Minimally, they would request \$205,000.

Chairman McMahan thanked them for what they did.

*Informational item.*

There being no further business, Commissioner Woody moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Stribling seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 10:28 a.m.

Attest:

Approved:

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Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

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Brian Thomas McMahan, Chairman