

**MINUTES OF A
WORK SESSION
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
HELD ON
FEBRUARY 14, 2023**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Work Session on February 14, 2023, 1:00 p.m., Justice and Administration Building, Room A201, 401 Grindstaff Cove Road, Sylva, North Carolina.

Present:	Mark A. Letson, Chairman	Don Adams, County Manager
	Todd Bryson, Vice Chair	Heather C. Baker, County Attorney
	Mark Jones, Commissioner	Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to the Board
	John W. Smith, Commissioner	Darlene Fox, Finance Director
	Tom Stribling, Commissioner	

Chairman Letson called the meeting to order.

(1) VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT STATE GRANT MATCH PROGRAM:

(a) Balsam Volunteer Fire Department: Chief Brian McMahan provided a copy of the grant application to the Board. Balsam Fire Department submitted an application for the 2023 NC Volunteer Fire Grant in the amount of \$59,600 to upgrade their emergency radio communication equipment. Of the total grant amount, \$29,800 was the required local match that they were requesting assistance with from the county. The total amount applied for on the county grant would be \$29,800.

(b) Qualla Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department: Captain Trevor Sutton provided a copy of the grant application to the Board. He stated that with the grant funds, Qualla would purchase six SCBA through the NCSFA Grant Fund. The total for these packs quoted from MES would be \$67,268.76. The required local match would be \$30,000. This would leave \$7,268.76 for the department to pay. Qualla was also looking to purchase two more SCEB from their budget for another \$22,422.92 for a total expense of \$59,691.68 to the department. The total amount applied for on the county grant would be \$30,000.

(c) Canada Volunteer Fire Department: Assistant Chief Darren Messer provided a copy of the grant application to the Board. He stated that with the grant funds, Canada would purchase 13 sets of Turnout Gear and PPE. The total amount applied for on the grant would be \$60,977. The total out of pocket for the department would be \$977. The total amount applied for on the county grant would be \$30,000.

(d) Savannah Volunteer Fire Department: Chief Floyd Green provided a copy of the grant application to the Board. He provided a list of various equipment they would purchase with the grant funds for a total of \$59,980.96. The total amount applied for on the county grant would be \$29,980.96.

General discussions were held.

Consensus: *Add this item to the next regular meeting agenda for consideration.*

(2) NCDOT PILOT REGIONAL TRAVEL DEMAND MODELS: Rose Bauguess, Senior Planner, Southwestern Commission Council on Governments, presented: Southwestern RPO Travel Demand Model Socio-Economic Data Projection:

(a) Background: The Transportation Planning Division initiated a pilot study to develop regional travel demand models (TDM). Two regions (Southwestern RPO and Albemarle RPO County) have been selected to partner in its development and assist and support rural communities and local interests.

The TDM was a long-range process that aimed to study current travel behavior to predict travel patterns in the future and assist decision makers in making informed transportation planning decisions. The strength of TDM was the ability to ask “what if” questions about proposed plans and policies and their effect on travel behavior.

(b) Population: For this study, they selected 2021 as the base year. Based on the historical trends in the Jackson County Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM recommended a 0.3% growth rate for the 2020-2050 period, which put the county population at 46,517. The OSBM also recommended a 1.1% average growth rate (AGR) for the state of North Carolina for the same period.

Considering the unique characteristics of the mountain region, TPD recommended a 1% growth rate for the SWRPO pilot study. Based on the TPD recommended growth rate, 14,995 people would be added to the Jackson County population and population would reach 58,104 by April, 2050.

(c) Employment: Employment information for Jackson County was retrieved from the Data Axle (InfoUSA) database. According to Data Axle, 19,603 employees worked in the county in 2021. Countywide 2050 employment totals were based on maintaining the same population-employment ratios as present in 2021. Based on this projection, 6,818 employees would be added and the county employment would reach 26,421 by April, 2050.

(d) Request for approval: NCDOT and the Southwestern RPO respectfully requested official approval of the projected socio-economic data used to determine future deficiencies.

Consensus: *Add this item to the next regular meeting agenda for consideration.*

(3) NCDOT TRAIL CARBON REDUCTION GRANT: Michael Poston, Planning Director, stated NCDOT opened a grant (submitted through the Southwestern RPO) for projects that reduce carbon in transportation systems. One of the eligible types of projects would be the construction of shared paths/greenways.

Throughout the planning processes (Cullowhee Small Area Plan, Jackson County Walks) they had identified a shared use path/greenway segment along NC Hwy 107 connecting the Cullowhee Recreation Center, Cullowhee Valley School, the Village of Forest Hills and Western Carolina University. The project was rated as one of the top ten projects in the Jackson County Walks Plan. They were currently working with Transportation Planning Design, transportation-engineering firm out of Asheville on a feasibility study for this project.

The grant would require a local match of 20%. The total cost of the project must include a 10% administration fee for NCDOT to manage all aspects of the project. He provided a proposed construction budget based on the draft feasibility study. The figures included construction costs, as well as a 25% contingency. In addition to the costs shown on the attachment, there was an estimated \$400,000 for engineering, surveying and permitting. Also, there was \$105,000 in project costs to move utility poles within the project boundary.

He also included a 10% escalation cost over a two-year period. The total construction cost (\$1,132,566 + \$105,000 + 10% escalation over two-year period) was \$1,497,455. The total cost for the project (\$1,497,455 + \$400,000 + \$189,745) was proposed to be \$2,087,200. The county’s 20% would be \$417,440.

The grant provided a three-year period to construct the project. Grant applications were due from the Southwestern RPO by March 17, 2023. In general, there would be a few months to sign the contract with NCDOT and then another 9-12 months to develop construction documents and prepare for bid. After awarding the contract, it could take an additional 9-12 months for construction. In total, time from award to final construction could be 24-36 months in duration.

General discussions were held.

Consensus: *Discuss this item further at the budget retreat.*

The Board took at ten-minute break.

Chairman Letson called the meeting back to order.

(4) OPIOID SETTLEMENT: Ms. Baker stated that a couple of years ago, the State Attorney's Office entered into a national settlement with pharmaceutical companies for the opioid settlement. \$22 billion was shared across states that entered into the settlement. North Carolina entered into a memorandum that all 100 counties and larger municipalities signed that allowed 85% of the money to be distributed to local governments. They were also getting smaller opioid settlement funds coming to them as part of that settlement.

There was another large settlement of \$21 billion that was in the process of being entered. Commissioners would be receiving an email from the Attorney General's Office making them aware of this. There would be a supplement to the original memorandum the county signed to allow for the same distribution to take place for this settlement. She would bring a resolution back to the Board at a later date, which must be signed by April 18th by all counties to be able to participate.

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(5) MEDICATED ASSISTED TREATMENT PROGRAM GRANT: Sheriff Doug Farmer was present for this item.

Mr. Adams stated there was a potential grant through the Department of Justice for a Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Program in the jail setting. The Sheriff's Office worked with Sharon Pope to write the grant. He provided Ms. Pope's PowerPoint and the announcement of the grant. Also, he provided an expense information sheet for the grant. This grant was only available to sheriffs in North Carolina. When personnel or matching dollars were involved in grants, it required Board approval.

(a) Vivitrol: The only medication that could be utilized in the program was Vivitrol. Key points about Vivitrol:

- It was an opioid antagonist.
- Non-addictive and non-narcotic
- Completely blocked the subjective effects of exogenous opioids
- Worked for those who abused alcohol as well
- Once a month injection given by a health care provider

(b) Funding:

- The first round of funding awarded five grants in the state.
- There was \$1,481,364 available
- With the cost of medication, this would likely result in one additional site receiving funds
- There may be future funds to maintain the existing MAT programs
- The grant would be awarded in an upfront payment
- Sheriff may charge up to 15% of the entire grant as an administrative fee, the money could go back to the Sheriff's Office budget

(c) Staff:

- The drug had to be administered in the jail setting
- There were requirements to follow the inmate once they were released from incarceration to provide transition services
- This would require additional staff for the Sheriff

He presented a sample budget and noted the deadline was February 28th.

Sheriff Farmer stated this was a one-year grant. He thought anything they could do to help someone, non-narcotic wise, would be beneficial. This would be a voluntary program and the shots would follow them outside the walls of the detention center to an entity that would provide peer support. The program would require personnel, which would be a new employee inside the jail system to monitor the program.

Commissioner Jones requested more information on how this could help with sentencing on the court side for the inmates that participated in the program.

General discussions were held.

Consensus: *Add this item to the next regular meeting agenda for consideration.*

(6) DOGWOOD HEALTH TRUST GRANT: Mr. Adams stated Dogwood Health encouraged the county to apply for a funding opportunity for opioid planning. Each opioid planning grant would provide up to \$300,000 per year for up to two years. The funds would be to support collaborative planning projects between counties, municipalities or tribal nations and 501(c)(3) organizations and other community partners. The projects would align with the strategies listed in the North Carolina Memorandum Agreement executed by the NC Department of Justice and the NC Association of County Commissioners.

(a) The purpose was to plan and prepare for use of funding to be distributed to counties and municipalities in Western North Carolina as a result of the national opioid settlement.

(b) Funding available: They would consider grants of up to \$300,000 per year for up to two years. Opioid planning proposals may include requests to support:

- Facilitation and/or coordination of collaborative planning
- Needs assessment, data collection and/or analysis
- Partnership building
- Development of workforce, implementation and/or sustainability plans
- Capacity building
- Technical assistance
- Administration/reporting

Dogwood understood that counties needed staff and people to come in and help with the organization and building out peer support. He requested permission to move forward to put together a grant application that would involve personnel.

General discussions were held.

Mr. Adams requested to bring this item back to the first meeting in March to provide more details.

Consensus: *Add this item to the March 7th meeting agenda for further discussion.*

(7) COUNTY ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE: Mr. Adams stated this item was discussed previously at a work session where he went over the current organizational structure. The Board requested further discussions on the organizational structure of the Department of Social Services and the Health Department.

He presented the following information:

(a) NCGS 153A-76. He noted the Board may not abolish an office position, department, board, commission or agency established or required by law. The County Commissioners did have the ability to reorganize these types of operations.

(b) NCGS 153A-77. He noted the statute specifically identified the Department of Social Services and the Health Department.

(c) Options for the Board:

- Remain in the current status. This would keep the Department of Social Services Board and the Health Board. These boards provided oversight for the Department of Social Services and the Health Department.
- The Board of Commissioners to become the Department of Social Services and/or the Health Department.
 - Departments not consolidated
 - BOCC assumes powers and duties of board(s) after public hearing with a minimum 30-day notice

- BOCC appoints department directors
- If public health affected, must appoint health advisory committee
- Employees subject SHRA
- The Board of Commissioners create a consolidated Human Services Board and then a Consolidated Human Services Agency.
 - BOCC creates CHSA and appoints CHS board
 - Manager appoints CHS director with advice and consent of CHS board
 - CHS director appoints person with health director qualifications
 - SHRA option
- The Board of Commissioners becomes the Consolidated Human Services Board and then has a Consolidated Human Services Agency.
 - BOCC creates CHSA and assumes powers and duties of CHS board after public hearing
 - Manager appoints CHS director with advice and consent of BOCC acting as CHS board
 - CHS director appoints person with health director qualifications
 - SHRA option
 - If agency includes PH, must appoint health advisory committee

Commissioner Jones stated, as he had mentioned before, he was personally for keeping it the way it was. Over the years, he had zero people ask him for this to be done with DSS and the Health Department. He had two phone calls from citizens that did not want to modify anything. He stood by those comments - don't fix it if it was not broken. If there had been a citizen contact any Commissioner, he would enjoy talking to that citizen because he was not aware of a situation that required oversight. There could be, but he had zero requests.

Commissioner Bryson stated that he had people contact him as well, not wanting to do this. He did not see the benefit. He had asked if it would financially benefit the county and it was his understanding that making changes would not financially benefit the county. Was that correct?

Mr. Adams stated that in all the research done before, if they consolidated in the same facility, there could potentially be some administrative collapse, but it would be very minimal. But, there was not really an avenue to do this. The justification would be whether or not the Board felt these operations should be in a direct vertical chain of command that could potentially make them more accountable to the elected board.

Commissioner Smith stated that was what he had heard from a few people close to those or either inside the health department or inside DSS. They would like to see more accountability to county management.

Commissioner Bryson stated that republicans would have control of the Board for four years. But, in four years the democrats could take control. If they politicize the boards, it would an ongoing thing from then on. He did not think it was in the best interest of the county for the Commissioners to be involved. He had thought about it and listened. He had problems with certain things the health department was doing, but he thought they could work on that in other ways going forward. That was where he stood.

Chairman Letson asked if they made a change, would they be able to reallocate some opioid settlement funds to DSS to identify people and move them to the health department more quickly? He thought about if reorganizing would serve the citizens better, not necessarily looking at it from a political standpoint, but would it be a better option for the citizens in the long-term. If they watched what other counties were doing, they were moving more in that kind of line of operations, which was more standardized.

Mr. Adams stated they did not gain efficiency with the ability to share client information because of HIPAA violations. The question would be about if there was a good communication of allowable information to allow a person to transition from the health department and DSS. This would be more of a referral system versus an internal knowledge of an individual.

Commissioner Smith stated that if certain information was disclosed to the health department, they were under obligation by law to make a report to social services, depending on what the disclosure was, such as child abuse.

Mr. Adams stated that it was difficult for him to identify where efficiency and effectiveness would be found. For him, he thought it was if the Board felt there needed to be more accountability through this process.

Commissioner Smith stated that was his whole reason and everyone he had talked to on that side was about accountability.

Commissioner Jones stated that it sounded like, from Commissioner Smith's comment, that there was a mechanism for legal referrals from one entity to the other.

Chairman Letson stated that he thought it was still up for discussion. He thought they should get more information from their constituents to see if this was the direction of the people. He did not believe they had a consensus to call for a public hearing at that time.

Commissioner Bryson requested the DSS and Health Department Directors talk with the Board about this issue and provide more information. If the Commissioners acted as the DSS or Health Board, he did not have that knowledge. The folks on those boards had degrees and knowledge of those fields and he thought that was where they should leave it.

Commissioner Stribling stated that he agreed with Commissioner Bryson. He did not have knowledge of social services or the health department.

Chairman Letson stated, at that time, he thought they should postpone moving this forward. In the future, they could determine if this would be worthwhile or not.

Mr. Adams stated that he sat down with both DSS and the Health Department Directors. The directors were not pushing for this change. At this time, he was hearing three of the five Commissioners stating they did not wish to proceed.

Chairman Letson stated that he did not think they would see a change in the vote at this time, so he did not think they should proceed with asking the directors to appear before the Board.

Commissioner Jones stated that he spent ten years of monthly meetings at the Board of Health. He watched the operation and how they did their jobs over the years and how they interacted with state and federal programs. He suggested they table the item until one of the Commissioners brought the item back up.

Chairman Letson stated they would table the item until another time in the future, if needed.

Informational item.

There being no further business, Commissioner Jones moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Stribling seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 3:08 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

Mark A. Letson, Chairman