

**MINUTES OF A  
REGULAR MEETING  
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
HELD ON  
FEBRUARY 07, 2023**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Regular Session on February 07, 2023, 6:00 p.m., Justice and Administration Building, Room A201, 401 Grindstaff Cove Road, Sylva, North Carolina.

Present:	Mark 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 Smith, Commissioner	
	Tom Stribling, Commissioner	

Chairman Letson called the meeting to order.

(1) **AGENDA**: Commissioner Smith moved to approve the agenda. Commissioner Stribling seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

(2) **MINUTES**: Commissioner Stribling moved to approve the minutes of a Work Session of January 10, 2023 and a Regular Meeting of January 17, 2023, as presented. Commissioner Jones seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

(3) **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**: Chairman Letson reported that he had the pleasure of going to Raleigh two weeks ago for a conference. He also met with both of their State Legislators, Mike Clappitt and Kevin Corbin. They had good conversations about what was going on in the county. Also, he attended the Comprehensive Plan for the ULI report in Cashiers and provided a county update.

(4) **COMMISSIONER REPORTS**:

(a) Commissioner Jones stated that in a couple of months, they would have the Greening Up the Mountains. He implored everyone to volunteer to organize in their own community to pick up trash. As they were greening up the mountains, they should also be cleaning up the mountains.

(b) Commissioner Stribling stated that he visited a few departments that past week. There seemed to be good vibes about where they were going. They were looking forward to a good year.

(5) **COUNTY MANAGER REPORT**: Mr. Adams stated that he did not have a formal report, but wanted to provide an update on a few items:

(a) **Construction Projects**:

- Animal Rescue Center/Green Energy Park: The final walk through to create the punch list would be February 8<sup>th</sup>. There had been a pre-inspection by the state. They would have to get final approval locally and from the state for the Animal Rescue portion.
- Aquatics Center: He shared a link to view a live construction feed. Also, they were starting to get steel down for footers.
- Domestic Violence Shelter: They continued to meet with the Center for Domestic Peace and had looked at rough draft schematics. The next step would be to update cost estimates.

(b) **NC City and County Manager Conference:** He attended the conference and made several connections he thought would benefit upcoming conversations, specifically regarding fire services. These would be items he would share at the upcoming budget retreat.

(6) **INFORMAL COMMENTS BY THE PUBLIC:** Rick Gorton of Sylva requested a plaque of appreciation from the county to honor three individuals that worked and volunteered at the Community Table.

(7) **ULI PROJECT:** Stephanie Edwards, Executive Director of the Cashiers Chamber presented:

(a) ULI Panel Recommendations:

- Land conservation – Highlands Cashiers Land Trust
- Attainable housing and mixed-used development – Cashiers Community Development Corp.
- Trails and sidewalks – Vision Cashiers
- Roads and infrastructure – Cashiers Area Chamber
- Protect the character – Cashiers Area Community Planning Council

(b) Core Purpose: to provide extraordinary leadership in the Cashiers Area as an advocate for business, information source for the community and conduit for building destination awareness and responsible growth.

(c) Core Values: Energy and enthusiasm, integrity, leadership, hospitality, preservation of culture and commitment to membership.

(d) Economic Development:

- Contracted agency for the Jackson County Tourism Development Authority for tourism marketing and management support and operation of the Cashiers Visitor Center.
- Local and regional economic and community development leadership on strategic issue priorities:
  - Growth management – ULI Americas 2022 Cashiers Panel
  - Workforce Development – recruitment, retention, housing, training
  - Community engagement – Leadership Cashiers, Cashiers Community Collaborative, Cashiers Area Legacy Fund
  - Transportation and infrastructure
  - Broadband connectivity
  - Pedestrian mobility and safety
  - Health and wellness – Highlands Cashiers Health Foundation

*Informational item.*

(8) **TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY:** Nick Breedlove, Executive Director of the Jackson County Tourism Development Authority (JCTDA) presented: Commissioner Briefing:

(a) JCTDA Mission: To promote the growth of year-round tourism opportunities that benefit the county's economy. Their efforts put people to work, grow jobs, build community and make the towns a vibrant place to live, play and work.

(b) JCTDA Vision: To be the premier mountain destination providing an active lifestyle, spectacular natural assets and a friendly community for citizens and visitors alike.

(c) ABC's of TDAs:

- A tourism development authority (TDA) was the vehicle created by the state of North Carolina to oversee the collection and allocation of occupancy taxes.
- In most places, it was a quasi-governmental body with a board composed mostly of stakeholders from the local visitor economy and ex officio representatives.

- TDAs could only be created by an act of the legislature granting approval to a local governing body, such as county commissioners, to appoint members and to authorize an occupancy tax.
- (d) Occupancy Tax:
- Jackson County levied a 4% tax on the gross receipts derived from the rental of any room, lodging or accommodation furnished by a hotel, motel, inn, tourist camp or similar place within the county that was subject to sales tax imposed by the State.
  - This tax was in addition to any state or local sales tax. This tax did not apply to accommodations furnished by nonprofit charitable, educational or religious organizations when furnished in furtherance of their nonprofit purpose.
  - Any accommodation that collected sales tax must also collect occupancy tax. This included short-term rentals.
  - Airbnb, VRBO, and Vacasa all collect tax at time of checkout eliminating the need for the owner to self-report/remit.
  - By authority granted to it by the Legislature in 2011, the Jackson County Board of Commissioners sets the occupancy tax rate (House Bill 96).
  - In Jackson County, the Commissioners could authorize a tax of up to 6% without having to change the state legislation. The county set the tax rate at 4% in 2012 (local legislation: R12-34).
  - Occupancy tax rates in North Carolina destinations range from 1% to 6%. The only exception was Mecklenburg County, which levied 8%.
- (e) Occupancy Tax Guidelines: In Jackson County (and most NC destinations), occupancy taxes could be allocated in two different ways as defined by the legislation:
- Up to 1/3 to tourism-related expenditures, which included tourism-related capital expenditures.
  - At least 2/3 for the promotion of tourism: To advertise or market an area or activity, publish and distribute pamphlets and other materials, conduct market research, or engage in similar promotional activities that attract tourists or business travelers to the area. The term includes administrative expenses incurred in engaging in the listed activities.
- (f) Meet the JCTDA:
- Staff:
    - Nick Breedlove, Executive Director
    - Vacancy, Social Media Manager
    - Tiffany Collins, Social Media and Digital Content Specialist
  - Board:
    - Daniel Fletcher, Chair
    - Megan Orr, Vice Chair
    - Ashlie Mitchell, Secretary
    - Craig Smith, Board Member
    - Dale Collins, Board Member
    - Robert Jumper, Board Member
    - Mandi Cantrell, Board Member
    - Vacancy
    - Vacancy
  - Ex Officio Board Members:
    - Mark Jones, Commissioner
    - Julie Spiro, Jackson County Chamber of Commerce
    - Stephanie Edwards, Cashiers Area Chamber of Commerce
    - Darlene Fox, Finance Officer

(g) Tourism builds community: Jackson County #2 in Visitor Spending in WNC: \$437 million

(h) People visiting the county:

- Put 2,343 people to work
- \$110.4 million in paychecks generated
- \$437 million spent at local businesses by visitors
- \$144.7 million increase in visitor spending in one year
- \$1,198,383 per day visitors deposit into local cash registers
- \$15.6 million in local county tax revenues generated by visitors
- \$723.41 tax savings annually per resident
- 1,093,283 visitors per year

(i) Public relations: Media and Social Media Influencers

(j) Accommodation Sales: 2021-22: \$65,932,701

(k) Funding: That fiscal year, they allocated \$750,000 for capital projects. Future FY allocations would depend on forecasted occupancy tax receipts. The funds were available for projects that were publicly owned/operated or owned/operated by nonprofits and required a 1:1 match. Commissioners would review/approve applications.

General discussions were held.

*Informational item.*

**(9) SHERIFF'S OFFICE CANINE RETIREMENT:** Sheriff Doug Farmer stated that Axe, one of the canines was retiring do to being unable to perform duties and the age of the canine. He requested Axe to be officially retired on January 17, 2023.

Previous discussions were made regarding his retirement and what to do with Axe, since he would no longer be working. He requested control of the canine to be placed with the handler, Detective Ridge Parris, as he had been an excellent handler and had cared for Axe day in and day out during Axe's career.

In previous instances of retired law enforcement canines with the Sheriff's Office, all of those canines were transferred to their handlers at no cost. He found this to be an excellent solution to not burden Detective Parris financially and show their respect for the dedication the canine officer had given.

***Motion:*** *Commissioner Stribling moved to accept the request by Sheriff Farmer to place Axe with his handler, Detective Ridge Parris, at no cost, as presented. Commissioner Smith seconded the motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.*

**(10) NCIC CORRECTIONAL COMMUNICATION AGREEMENT:** Sheriff Farmer was present for this item.

Ms. Baker stated that if a contract term was one year or less, the Board had given the County Manager the ability to sign. Any contract with a term of one year or more would be presented to the Board.

She presented a three-year contract for the NCIC Correctional Communication Service Subscriber. This was the service that provided the communications for the inmates and allowed them to communicate by phone, video and text message. The contract had been reviewed and she presented the final version for the Board's approval.

General discussions were held.

***Motion:*** *Commissioner Bryson moved to approve the NCIC Correctional Communication Agreement, as presented. Commissioner Stribling seconded the motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.*

**(11) CEMETERY BOARD:**

***Motion:*** *Commissioner Smith moved to appoint Jeffrey Gunter to serve four-year term on the Cemetery Board. Commissioner Stribling seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.*

**(12) PLANNING BOARD:** A recommendation for Chairperson was submitted by Michael Poston, Planning Director.

***Motion:*** *Commissioner Jones moved to appoint Thomas Taulbee to serve as the Chairperson of the Planning Board. Commissioner Bryson seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.*

**(13) PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD:** Recommendations for appointments were submitted by Tracy Fitzmaurice, Librarian.

***Motion:*** *Commissioner Jones moved to reappoint Dennis Cox to serve an additional three-year term and to appoint Lauren Baxley and Frederick Buskey to serve three-year terms on the Public Library Board. Commissioner Stribling seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.*

**(14) ROAD NAMING BOARD (911):** Recommendations for appointments were submitted by Zeb Holland, Emergency Management.

***Motion:*** *Commissioner Bryson moved to reappoint Todd Dillard to serve an additional two-year term and to appoint Fred Grasty and Angelina Murray to serve two-year terms on the Road Naming Board (911). Commissioner Smith seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.*

**(15) PRESS CONFERENCE:** None.

There being no further business, Commissioner Bryson moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Stribling seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 6:47 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

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Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

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Mark A. Letson, Chairman