

**MINUTES OF A
WORK SESSION
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
HELD ON
MARCH 12, 2024**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Work Session on March 12, 2024, 1:00 p.m., Justice and Administration Building, Room A201, 401 Grindstaff Cove Road, Sylva, North Carolina.

Present: Mark A. Letson, Chairman	Darlene Fox, Interim County Manager
Todd Bryson, Vice Chair	John Kubis, Interim County Attorney (Via Zoom)
Mark Jones, Commissioner	Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to the Board
John W. Smith, Commissioner	
Tom Stribling, Commissioner	

Chairman Letson called the meeting to order.

(1) SOCIAL SERVICES BOARD ANNUAL REPORT: Cris Weatherford, DSS Director, presented the Social Services Annual Report:

(a) The Department of Social Services (DSS) was a client-oriented agency that served all age groups from infancy to elder. They were responsive and sensitive to the needs of the citizens of the community and careful to meet their responsibilities to taxpayers by serving through cost-effective methods. They were dedicated to a team approach offering services in the most efficient and effective way possible, ensuring all citizens received professional and courteous service.

The annual report summarized the county activities and trends for the fiscal year 2022-2023 and showed the broad range of services provided by the agency and the number of clients served. It was a voluntary effort to be transparent with the public funds entrusted to the department.

(b) The Annual Report was dedicated to the service and memory of Joan “Polly” Buchanan.

(c) Children Services:

- Child Protective Services: Reports of suspected child abuse, neglect and/or dependency were investigated. Services were provided 24 hours, seven days a week. Assistance was provided to other counties to ensure safety of children.
 - 665 responses to reports of abuse, neglect and/or dependency
 - 94 out of county assists and home studies
 - 80 nights spent by agency staff at the agency providing 9 foster children with a safe place to live
- Child Support Services: Assured children receive adequate parental support by locating non-custodial parents, establish paternity, establish medical and financial support and modify and enforce court ordered support obligations.
 - 883 active cases
 - \$1,793,815.01 total collections
- In-home Services: Protected children in families where abuse and/or neglect were found. Social Workers engage families in activities designed to reduce risk, promote stability and bring about permanence for children.
 - 28 families served
 - 56 children served

- Work First Family Assistance Program: Employment program for families with children living in the home. Child only benefits were available to eligible non-parent relatives caring for minor children.
 - 55 applications received
 - 121 average monthly cases
 - Foster Care Services: Children were placed in the responsibility of the agency through court ordered custody, voluntary placement agreements or release for adoption. Permanency planning for children provided time limited and goal-oriented care for children to achieve permanent families as soon as possible.
 - 67 children in agency custody (as of 7/1/2022)
 - 16 children left custody
 - 88 remained in agency custody (as of 6/30/2023)
 - Adoptions: Provided children with legal permanency in safe, loving homes. Adoptions included agency adoptive placements, stepparent and relative adoptions and independent adoptions arranged between birth parents and unrelated individuals.
 - 2 adoptions finalized
 - 11 agency children cleared for adoptions
 - 35 families received adoption assistance for 54 children
 - 4 children and 1 family received guardianship assistance
- (d) Adult Services:**
- Adult Protective Service Evaluations: Reports of suspected abuse, neglect and/or exploitation were evaluated and assessments were completed regarding the need of disabled individuals 18 and older. Services were provided 24 hours, seven days a week.
 - 236 responses to reports
 - Guardianship Services: The Court appointed Social Services as guardian for elderly or disabled adults who were mutually incompetent and could not make responsible decisions concerning their personal care or finances.
 - 38 guardianship clients served
 - Protective Payee Services: Social Services was appointed by the Court, Social Security or the Veterans Administration to receive and assure the appropriate use of benefit funds when individuals were unable to do so.
 - 24 payee clients served
- (e) General:**
- Shelter/Utility Assistance: The Crisis Intervention Program, Low Income Energy Assistance, Work First Emergency Assistance, Duke Energy, Energy Neighbor, Emergency Food and Shelter Program and Helping Each Member Cope were programs to assist people in an energy/shelter crisis. Together, these seven programs accomplished:
 - 1,971 households served
 - \$331,260.40 total payments
 - \$380.75 average payment
 - Program Integrity/Fraud Investigations: Public assistance cases were routinely investigated to assure accuracy and to address discrepancies. Repayment of benefits was pursued in cases of fraud and overpayment:
 - 40 cases investigated
 - \$350.00 Medicaid repayments
 - \$1,615.42 Food and Nutrition Services repayments
 - General Assistance: Assistance for families in a crisis situation:
 - 354 households served
 - \$47,842.11 total

(f) Health Related:

- Medicaid/Special Assistance: Medicaid provided assistance with medical expenses for low income families with children, disabled adults, the elderly and other special populations.
- Special Assistance provided a monthly payment to help pay the cost of facility placement or in-home care.
 - 1,749 applications received
 - 4,396 reviews completed
- Food and Nutrition Services: Designed to raise the nutritional levels in low income households by providing food assistance to supplement a household's food dollars.
 - 2,357 applications received
 - 1,373 reviews
- Health Choice for Children: North Carolina Health Choice provided medical assistance to uninsured children when the family income was at or below 200% of federal poverty level.
 - 346 active cases
- Medical Transportation: Transportation to medical appointments was provided, arranged or reimbursed for individuals eligible for the service.
 - 1,072 clients transported
 - 4,078 number of trips provided
- Services for the Blind: Assistance was provided to blind/visually impaired clients through Independent Living Services. The Medical Eye Care Assistance Program assisted with exams, glasses, vision related surgery and referrals to other programs when funding was available.
 - 20 clients received

(g) Revenues and Expenditures:

- FY2022-23 funded by:
 - 4% county \$ 4,173,659.16
 - 22% state \$ 23,026,348.56
 - 74% federal \$ 76,499,590.43
 - Total \$103,699,598.15
- Expenditures:
 - Medicaid payments \$ 80,755,455.00
 - Food and Nutrition \$ 14,016,294.00
 - Public Assistance Admin \$ 2,897,413.37
 - Social Work Services \$ 2,478,036.48
 - Work First \$ 1,470,265.08
 - Emergency Crisis Assistance \$ 258,124.44
 - Foster Care \$ 1,037,855.63
 - Child Support Services \$ 486,493.20
 - Special Assistance \$ 280,778.00
 - In-Home Services \$ 7,026.78
 - Adult Guardianship \$ 12,136.17
 - Total \$103,699,878.15

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(2) **FOSTER CARE**: Mr. Weatherford stated there were 88 children currently in foster care, which included five young adults in the 18-21 program. The 18-21 program was available for young adults who aged out of foster care. The young adults could sign a voluntary agreement to stay and DSS could help them through funding provided by state and federal government. Over 40 of the 88 children had been placed outside of the community.

Last calendar year, DSS spent 189 nights in their building with foster children who did not have a place to stay. He recognized and praised social workers and staff that were able to stay with the children and keep them safe. In January, DSS had 25 nights stayed with three different children. In February, they had seven different children and 21 days. At that time in March, they only had two nights, so they had seen some improvements since February. They also worked tirelessly with Vaya to find placements. He thanked the Board for their support of the Stipend Policy.

Chairman Letson urged everyone to do what they could to help by being a foster parent, providing a financial contribution or ideas of how to move forward. It was important to have this information to show the need. He appreciated the hard work of DSS and thanked them.

Commissioner Bryson stated he appreciated all the hard work of DSS and thanked them for the tribute to Polly Buchanan.

Informational item.

(3) **OLD ANIMAL SHELTER BUILDING**: Chad Parker, Public Works Director, stated Ms. Fox requested an update to the Board on the status of the old animal shelter site. The property was located at 463 Airport Road and contained 5.08 acres. The facility was built in 1983 and contained 2,184 square feet with the dimensions of 42'X53'. He provided a septic repair permit, photos and basic information.

In general, he stated the building was in poor condition and would need to be gutted or torn down since the sole purpose of the building was for an animal shelter. He also noted there was a large power line cut with transmission lines over a portion of the property. Going forward, they would want to look at the existing septic system and perform testing for possible additional septic possibilities on the property.

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(4) **CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS**: Dr. Don Tomas, Southwestern Community College President, stated there was an opportunity to complete the Capital Improvement Plan approved by the Board of Commissioners in 2016. The Board provided funding for Southwestern Community College (SCC) to go through a Strategic Capital Initiative to upgrade and modernize the Jackson Campus with the anticipation of new programs. At that time, they prioritized the programs and capital needs and decided on the Health Sciences Building to meet the most immediate need and have the largest impact.

He continued to work with Senator Corbin and with the State General Assembly for funding possibilities. Three years ago, the state provided a \$400 million State Capital Improvement Fund for all 58 community colleges. SCC's share over a four-year period was approximately \$5 million. As a result of further discussions with Senator Corbin, he requested an additional \$12 million and received \$10 million.

(a) Holt Library and Small Business Center: Currently, they did not have an isolated location for the Small Business Center/Workforce Continuing Education facility. Holt Library was located at the top of campus and somewhat isolated. He proposed to relocate Holt Library to the middle of campus as an extension of Oaks Hall. This project would also rework mechanical, address the ADA for the building and create office space.

After moving Holt Library, they could turn the old library space into the Small Business Center with four classrooms and office spaces. This would create a professional environment and a one-stop shop for Workforce, Continuing Education and the Small Business Center.

(b) Dental Assisting/Hygiene Renovations: Renovations would need to be started at Founders Hall for the Dental Assisting/Hygiene Program. He moved \$1.5 million of the \$5 million received in order to get the project moving. He made an additional request to Senator Corbin for \$2 million to help with the renovations and the program. Having the need to move quickly on this program, he submitted the construction document to the state and it had been approved.

(c) Cost Estimates:

- Library/Small Business Center: \$19,607,532
- Dental Assisting/Hygiene Program: \$1,514,335
- Total: \$21,121,867

(d) Funds:

- \$10,000,000 received
- \$5,000,000 received
- \$6,121,867 requested

He requested the support of both construction documents and the funding of \$6,121,867 to complete the Capital Improvement Master Plan. He noted the SCC Board of Trustees supported both projects.

General discussions were held.

Commissioner Jones recommended to move this item to the next regular meeting agenda for consideration.

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

(5) CLOSED SESSION:

Motion: *Commissioner Jones moved that the Board go into closed session pursuant to G.S.143-318.11(a)(3) Legal and G.S.143-318.11(a)(5) Real Property Commissioner Bryson seconded the Motion. Motion carried.*

Chairman Letson called the regular meeting back to order and stated no action was taken in closed session.

There being no further business, Commissioner Smith moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Stribling seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 2:36 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

Mark A. Letson, Chairman