

**MINUTES OF A
WORK SESSION
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
HELD ON
OCTOBER 08, 2024**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Work Session on October 08, 2024, 6:30 p.m., Justice and Administration Building, Room A201, 401 Grindstaff Cove Road, Sylva, North Carolina.

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

Chairman Letson called the meeting to order.

(1) TAILORED PLAN VAYA TOTAL CARE: Shelly Foreman, MPA Community Relations Regional Director, Vaya, presented: Tailored Plan Vaya Total Care:

(a) North Carolina must move NC Medicaid to managed care. The launch of Standard Plans was the first step. Tailored Plans began July 1, 2024. Tailored Plans covered the same services as NC Medicaid Direct.

(b) Tailored Plans were a new kind of NC Medicaid Managed Care health plan. They covered mental health, severe substance use, I/DD, TBI and prescriptions in one plan. If NC Members had Medicaid Direct services for these needs, NC Medicaid plan may be moved to a Tailored Plan. The name would change, but the services would not.

(c) Tailored Plans were managed by LME/MCO:

- Alliance Health
- Partners Health Management
- Trillium Health Resources
- Vaya Health

(d) There was only one Tailored Plan per county. A letter was mailed in mid-April informing Members which Tailored Plan they were in. The Plan was assigned based on the county where one would get their Medicaid benefits. The assigned Tailored Plan was based on the county that managed the Medicaid benefits for the Member. They could not choose a different a Tailored Plan.

(e) What was new:

- Providers must be in-network
- Members must choose a new PCP if not in-network
- More covered services
- Supports for Members

(f) What was staying the same:

- Each plan covered the same services as before
- Waitlist members keep their spots
- Same Tailored Care Manager as the one they had

(g) Services offered by Tailored Plans: If a Member opts out of Tailored Plans, these services were not paid for by other NC Medicaid Managed Care health plans:

- Child and adolescent day treatment services
- Intensive in-home services

- Multi-systemic therapy services
- Psychosocial rehabilitation
- Residential treatment facility services
- Community living and supports
- Supported employment
- Respite
- State-funded behavioral health, I/DD and TBI services

(h) Healthy Opportunities Pilot: The federal government authorized up to \$650 million for five years in state and federal Medicaid funding to test evidence-based, non-medical interventions designed to improve health outcomes and reduce health care costs for a subset of Medicaid enrollees.

(i) She provided a brief update on Hurricane Helene efforts.

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(2) OCCUPANCY TAX: Nick Breedlove, TDA Executive Director, provided a brief update on Hurricane Helene.

He presented the Jackson County Tourism Development Authority's (JCTDA) request for an increase in the county's occupancy tax rate from 4% to 6%. Also, he proposed a change to the board structure to fill seats that had remained vacant for nearly two years, following the consolidation of hotel ownership groups.

(a) Occupancy Tax Background and Current Context: The county's tourism sector had seen significant growth over the past decade. The county levied a 4% occupancy tax on overnight accommodations. This revenue was vital for funding tourism promotion, local grants and development projects. However, as they strived to enhance visitor experiences and support sustainable tourism, it became clear the current tax rate did not fully meet the increasing needs of the industry.

(b) Why the increase was needed:

- Increased Visitor Expectations
- Marketing and Promotion
- Environmental Preservation and Sustainability
- Regional Comparisons and Economic Impact

(c) The current 4% occupancy tax generated approximately \$2.5 million annually. Increasing the rate to 6% could raise this to \$3.75 million. Currently, the JCTDA relied on surplus COVID-era reserves to fund capital projects. A 6% tax could sustainably finance these projects without needing to draw from reserves, once those COVID-era funds were depleted. An increase in the occupancy tax did not impose any financial burden on residents, as it was a visitor-driven revenue source.

The additional revenue generated by the increase would allow for direct invest in projects to benefit the local economy and community, ensuring the growth of tourism continued to bring positive outcomes for all.

(d) Local Authority to raise occupancy tax: In 2012, following the approval of HB96, County Commissioners were granted legislative authority to raise the tax rate from 3% to 4%. Additionally, they were provided with the ability to increase the rate to 6% at the local level without the need to seek further legislative approval from Raleigh.

(e) Timeline for implementation: In consultation with the County Finance Director, who served as the JCTDA Finance Director, they recommended a July 1, 2025 implementation date for ample time to inform all lodging partners and third parties who collected and remit taxes.

General discussions were held.

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

(3) JCTDA BOARD STRUCTURE: Mr. Breedlove presented:

(a) Rationale for the Proposed Changes: The JCTDA faced challenges in maintaining a diverse and representative board due to changes in ownership of local lodging properties. The consolidation of several hotel properties under the same ownership limited the available pool of independent property owners who could serve on the board, making it difficult to fulfill the previous board membership requirements. This led to concerns about achieving quorum, which affected the board's ability to conduct business effectively.

The proposed new structure aimed to resolve these challenges by streamlining board categories and expanding eligibility criteria, while maintaining a board composed of knowledgeable, experienced members from the hospitality and tourism sectors.

(b) Summary of Proposed Changes to Board:

- Board Size would remain the same under the proposed changes with nine board members.
- The previous structure grouped board members into five groups with various lodging specific subcategories. The new structure consolidated this into:
 - Group One: 3 North Jackson County Hospitality and Tourism sector representatives.
 - Group Two: 3 South Jackson County Hospitality and Tourism sector representatives.
 - Group Three: 1 county-wide Hospitality and Tourism sector representative.
 - Group Four: 1 non-lodging representative from the Cashiers Chamber of Commerce.
 - Group Five: 1 non-lodging representative from the Jackson County Chamber of Commerce.
- Expanded Hospitality and Tourism Category
- Flexibility Clause

(c) Benefits of the Proposed Structure:

- Improved Board Functionality
- Broader Representation
- Flexibility and Continuity
- Stronger Community and Business Ties

(d) Proposed timeline for board structural changes/implementation: November 1, 2024.

(e) They collaborated with the attorney, who also served as the County Attorney, to draft a comprehensive version of R12-34 to incorporate the proposed tax rate changes and revisions to board member eligibility into a single document.

General discussions were held.

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

(4) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REPORT: Tiffany Henry, Economic Development, Director presented:

(a) Mission Statement: Economic Development activities in the county were focused on the improvement of economic condition, increased opportunities for improving wealth and a betterment of the overall quality of life of the people of the county.

(b) Department Priorities:

- **Broadband:** Substantial work on broadband had been underway including work with digital equity and full connectivity planning for all of the county.
- **Outdoor Economy:** Led stakeholders through two different programs, Creating Outdoor Recreation Economies and Building Outdoor Communities to develop strategic plans for the county, as well as Greenway Expansion efforts.
- **Retention and Expansion:** Supporting existing businesses to help them retain workforce, expand or relocate their business. In addition, creation of a Business Retention and Expansion Program to support businesses.

- Housing: Over the past year some work included Webster Village, Housing Needs Assessment, Site Identification with Development Finance Initiative.
 - Childcare: Core team of providers and resources have been working to support one another. Community Listening Sessions.
 - Industrial Development: Awarded a grant through Golden Leaf Site Program to identify potential sites and work with existing industry to provide support.
- (c) Broadband:
- Goal: countywide high-speed broadband availability.
 - Update:
 - RDOF Charter: 18% 1,952 activated
 - GREAT Charter: 64% 742 activated
 - GREAT Balsam West: 5% 742 activated
 - Grant Breakdown:
 - RDOF:
 - 11,128 locations
 - Federal grant awarded to charter/spectrum
 - GREAT Grant #1:
 - 1,156 locations
 - State grant awarded to Charter/Spectrum
 - County match \$300,000
 - GREAT Grant #2:
 - 636 locations
 - State Grant awarded to Balsam West
 - County match \$182,000
 - Unfunded: 4,675 currently unserved locations
- (d) Business Support:
- Goal: Commit to becoming an entrepreneurial/small business capital
 - R5600 Impact update:
 - 8: Due to impact have been offered benefits from NCDOT but do not have to relocate if they choose to stay in their current location.
 - 5: Closed businesses and do not have plans to reopen.
 - 33: Impacted businesses that have relocated in the county
 - 3: Future site identified and secured
 - 3: Closed but plan to reopen in Sylva
- (e) Business retention and expansion:
- Survey to get a good baseline of support needed
 - Creation of BRE Program
 - Review and update Incentive Policy
 - Update Revolving Loan Fund Program
 - Host a Business Appreciation Event in Spring 2025
- (f) Grant Applications: Based on the mission, they were able to secure the following funding to further various initiatives, including housing, childcare, industrial, business expansion and broadband.
- (g) She gave a brief update on Hurricane Helene and ways the county could help support businesses impacted through Bridge Loans.

General discussions were held.
Informational item.

(5) COOPERATIVE EXTENSION REPORT: Rob Hawk, Cooperative Extension Director and Kayla Thomas, Extension Agent, were present for this item.

Mr. Hawk presented 2024 Extension Report:

(a) Mission: We grow Jackson County through Education and Research in Agriculture and Food; Health and Nutrition and 4-H Youth Development.

(b) Animal Agriculture:

- 42 producers increased working knowledge in livestock health and pasture management
- 18 youth increased their working knowledge in animal husbandry

(c) Horticulture Consumer and Commercial:

- 160 youth increased knowledge in growing plants
- 75 increased working knowledge in vegetable and plant production
- 210 in commercial operation plant production efficiency and economic gain
- 35 State Certified in State Pesticide Applicators Training

(d) 4-H and Youth Development:

- 259 increased educational knowledge of environmental conversation
- 25 increased knowledge in civic engagement leadership development
- 37 in 4-H Clubs
- 6 went to state 4-H residential camp

(e) Natural Resources:

- 127 citizens increased knowledge in wildlife nuisance best practices
- 227 increased knowledge of their natural environment
- 100 Elderberry seedlings were given out for conservation and edible landscape purposes for Arbor Day in May and 100 Norway Spruce seedlings to nearly 50 citizens

(f) Family and Consumer Science:

- Extension and Community Association Club continued to meet at the Extension Center providing craft programs with about 12 active participants
- 12 participants in the Ski Walking program

(g) Fiscal Resources:

- \$2,680 acquired to support 4-H Shooting Sports Club the Gritty Triggers
- \$5,982 to support the Youth Livestock Club
- \$250 donated to help with 4-H Summer Camp

(h) 36 volunteers donated \$5,721 worth of in-kind services

(i) He provided program highlights and success stories.

(j) Ms. Thomas provided an update on the Gritty Triggers and the needs of the group in the next year, which included expansion of the program and a permanent range location.

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(6) PUBLIC WORKS REPORT: Chad Parker, Public Works Director, presented:

(a) Garage:

- Responsible for repairs and maintains 257 vehicles, 46 trailers and approximately 102 pieces of equipment.
- 650 work orders annually
- Welding and fabricating as needed, air condition certified, tire changing, brake repairs, minor body repairs and state vehicle inspections
- 3 full-time employees, 1 part-time employee
- Budget \$316,425

- (b) Green Energy:**
 - Glass blowing
 - Blacksmithing
 - Pottery
 - 3 full-time employees and 1 part-time employee
 - Budget \$347,133
- (c) Grounds:**
 - Responsible for mowing and maintaining around 730 acres which include recreation parks, athletic fields, all county buildings/facilities and public school campuses
 - 1400 work orders annually
 - Landscaping and beautification of all county facilities
 - Snow and ice removal at county facilities
 - Assist Emergency Management during disasters
 - Lead and assist with Maintenance projects (carpentry, masonry, roofing and concrete)
 - 17 full-time and 2 part-time employees
 - Budget \$1,584,086
- (d) Housekeeping:**
 - Responsible for satisfactory cleaning practices to provide clean, safe and pleasing environment for both public and county staff members
 - Provides cleaning and sanitization of County Facilities (excluding Recreation Parks and River Access areas)
 - 23 County Facilities
 - 21 total staff – 21 full-time and three 50% time
 - Hours 6:00 a.m. until 1:00 a.m. Monday through Friday as well as some hours on Saturday and Sunday
 - Budget \$1,678,962
- (e) Maintenance:**
 - Repair and maintain all County facilities and equipment located within all buildings.
 - 47 Buildings – 1,200 work orders annually
 - HVAC, plumbing, electrical, painting, carpentry, masonry, roofing and concrete work.
 - State Road Signs
 - Cashiers Water Works
 - Sidewalk maintenance
 - Assist contractors
 - Assist Emergency Management during disasters
 - Special projects – EM storage building, License Plate Agency, Mark Watson Monument, Lifejacket holders, wash bay, Mark Watson remodeling bathrooms for accessibility, remodel exterior and painting of DOA in Cashiers, sidewalks and shelters for recreation
 - 12 full-time employees and one permanent part-time employee
 - Budget \$3,789,990 (includes utilities and property insurance)
- (f) Solid Waste:**
 - 8 staffed recycling centers (SRC)
 - 1 unstaffed site (Soco Mountain)
 - 1 transfer station
 - 1 closed landfill
 - Contract management – waste disposal, recycling, hauling to landfill and hauling from SRCs to transfer station, tires, white goods and brush grinding.
 - Environmental enforcement and education

- 7 full-time employees and 2 part time employees
 - Budget \$5,471,020
 - Revenue:
 - Solid Waste Availability Fees - \$80/\$125/\$140 & \$160
 - Tipping Fees, White Goods Tax, Scrap Tire Tax, Electronics Tax, NC Solid Waste Disposal Tax, Sale of Recyclables: Metal/Paper
 - Recycling: plastics, glass, metal, paper, oil, antifreeze, fluorescent bulbs, batteries, mercury thermostats, electronics
- (g) Outreach Events:
- Cleaning up the Mountains spring and fall
 - Free Household Hazardous Waste Collection Event in April
 - Free Shred Event once per year in Fall
 - Residential Compost bins
 - School outreach 5th grade classes Soil and Water Field Days and 2nd and/or 3rd grade classes Recycling and Litter
- (h) Dillsboro Landfill:
- Opened in 1970's and closed in 1996
 - Originally belonged to the Town of Sylva
 - Required monitoring ground water and methane for 30 years after closed
 - Currently methane was flared or used at the Green Energy Park
- (i) He gave a brief overview of ways several departments helped in various ways throughout the event. They were blessed to have so many skilled people willing to help during state of emergency.

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(7) COUNTY POLICY - NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL STATUTE 143-805:

Mr. Kubis stated the General Assembly passed a new law that went into effect on October 1st. The law further defined what was acceptable use of government networks and devices among all agencies, including local governments. A new section of Statute 143-805 was added to not allow pornography on any county public devices and networks. There were certain exceptions for law enforcement. The county would be required to monitor and report any incidences to the State Chief Information Officer. Counties would also need a policy in place by January 1, 2025. Some language would overlap with county policies already in place. He would provide a resolution to the Board for consideration at a future meeting.

General discussions were held.

Consensus: *Add this item to a future regular meeting agenda for consideration.*

(8) CANADA FIRE DEPARTMENT/COMMUNITY BUILDING: Mr. King stated with the recent events, he noted how heavily the Canada Fire Department was relied on. Ms. Fox had been working on a CIP plan and projections, which they would provide to the Board in November. He requested to move forward with the construction documents to facilitate the bid process for the Canada Fire Department/Community Building.

General discussions were held.

Consensus: *Mr. King to move forward with the construction documents for the Canada Fire Department/Community Building.*

(9) OTHER BUSINESS:

(a) Mr. King stated the county had rented the former Western Builders building. He recognized the need for a regionalized approach for emergencies. Currently, there was no central depository for supplies in the region. He reached out to Southwestern Commission and other counties about direct grants to facilitate a building in the county to utilize specifically for an emergency event. Jackson County could be a conduit for the county and the region.

Informational item.

(b) Mr. King stated he had a conversation with the school system about lighting for the baseball and softball fields for the high school. The school system received a quote of \$371,720 and requested to utilize the funds gained through the Highway 107 Project right-of-way acquisition from DOT for the two lighting projects.

General discussions were held.

Mr. King stated he would present a Budget Ordinance Amendment at a future meeting for further discussions and consideration.

Informational item.

(c) Mr. King stated the Board previously discussed revising the ABC Agreement to split revenues 50/50 with the Town of Sylva for a five-year period. His recommendation to the Board would be to provide an Economic Stimulus to the Town of Sylva of \$100,000, one year at a time and tie it to an economic initiative by the town.

General discussions were held.

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

There being no further business, Commissioner Smith moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Jones seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 8:52 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

Mark A. Letson, Chairman