

**MINUTES OF A
WORK SESSION
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
HELD ON
SEPTEMBER 03, 2024**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Work Session on September 03, 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	Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to the Board
Mark Jones, Commissioner	Darlene Fox, Finance Director
John W. Smith, Commissioner	
Tom Stribling, Commissioner	

Chairman Letson called the meeting to order.

(1) CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS: Odell Thompson, Architect, was present for this item.

(a) Canada Volunteer Fire Department: Mr. King stated Mr. Thompson had preliminary plans to share with the Board for the Canada Fire Department project.

Mr. Thompson stated the Canada Fire Department provided a list of requested items, which included handicap accessibility for the public and two new truck bays. He presented a first concept drawing of the existing building to be refurbished and a new construction portion. The community building portion would be remodeled to include a new outdoor pavilion, handicap accessible restrooms and a remodeled kitchen.

The fire department portion would include a training room, break room, with new construction for bunk rooms and two new truck bays. An estimated cost would be \$3.5 million, not including architectural fees, I.T. or equipment. This would include a new roof, new windows, repaving the parking lot, electrical, mechanical and landscaping.

General discussions were held.

(b) Administration Building and Justice Center: Mr. King stated they were tasked with coming up with a process for the Justice Center. They decided it would be best to separate county functions from judicial functions. Mr. Thompson had preliminary plans for a new Administration Building on a county owned site off Skyland Drive.

Mr. Thompson stated they met with all the departments and started with a report from 2013 with the Heery Group as a target. He presented the preliminary plans of the Administration Building to include Tax Collector, Tax Assessor, Register of Deeds, , I.T./GIS, Commissioner Board Room, Administration, Finance, Human Resources and Economic Development. The plan was for 36,000 SF with an estimated cost of \$12 million, which did not include architectural fees, I.T. or furnishings.

Commissioner Bryson asked about the Flood plain at the proposed location.

Mr. Thompson stated the original county map showed the location in the flood plain, but it had been raised at an unknown time. They would need to do geotechnical investigation of the soil to determine if remediation was needed on the site.

Mr. King stated the next phase of the planning process would be to tweak the plan, bring it back to the Board and then look at a funding strategy. Regarding the Justice Center building, they engaged the court folks on the design and discussed what would be needed to come up with a good plan.

Commissioner Bryson stated it was important for the community to understand the need for court space. The new Administration Building was needed so they could provide the courts with more room for expansion.

Commissioner Jones stated he thought this would be the least expensive way to go. When they purchased the proposed location, they had in mind a future Administration Building. It would also put the building closer to other county functions located at Skyland Service Center to be more helpful to citizens.

Mr. King stated they were also engaging the Sheriff and the Clerk of Court during the planning process for the Justice Center. Next steps would include to look at funding, the flood plain and soil borings.

Chairman Letson asked Ms. Fox where the funds would come from?

Ms. Fox stated they would need to put all of the projects together. It could be a combination of Capital Reserve, Fund Balance and bonds.

Mr. King stated they could also look at grants from the state on the judicial side.

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(2) EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT REPORT: Todd Dillard, Emergency Management Director and Michael Forbis, Fire Marshal, were present for this item.

Mr. Dillard presented:

- (a)** Emergency Management: 17 full-time employees and 8 part-time employees
 - 911 Addressing
 - Fire Marshal
 - 911 Call Center
- (b)** What is Emergency Management?
 - Coordination, Planning, Assistance
 - Preparedness, Response, Recovery, Mitigation
- (c)** Respond to calls for service in the entire county. Assisting seven fire departments, two rescue squads, two EMS agencies and two law enforcement agencies.
- (d)** Logistics: equipment and deployable assets.
- (e)** Preparedness:
 - Public schools
 - Private schools
 - Assisted living facilities
 - Community events
 - Churches
- (f)** Comfort Stations:
 - 35 locations throughout the county
 - Churches were primary locations
 - Utilized for temporary shelter until one of ten American Red Cross shelters could be opened
 - CAMET capabilities
 - Used in the event of wildfires, flash flooding, hurricanes, Haz-mat incidents, etc.
- (g)** Keeping Citizens Informed:
 - National Weather Service
 - Onsolve
 - StormReady Community

(h) 911 Center:

- State of the art Emergency Operations Center and 911 Calle Center built in 2014
- 911 Director, 12 Telecommunicators
- 50,719 CAD Calls for 2023

Mr. Forbis presented:

(i) Fire Investigations:

- Respond to structure fires, vehicle fires, wildfires or any other at the request of a fire chief or law enforcement officer in the county
- Fire Investigator Training
- Fire Marshal was a Certified Fire Investigator

(j) Community Risk Reduction: All seven fire departments were Class 5 or Class 9E

(k) Fire and Life Safety Education:

- Made up of members from fire departments, rescue squads, EMS agencies, law enforcement, public health, NC Forest Service and US Forest Service
- Reaches on average 4,000 students annually
- Provides education to public, private and preschools, along with churches, assisted living facilities and civic groups

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(3) RETIREE HEALTH BENEFITS POLICY: Mr. King stated the first Retiree Health Benefits Policy was created on January 18, 2001, with revisions in July 2013 and July 2016. He presented a redline version of a proposed revised policy to be effective November 1, 2024.

(a) One revision to the policy would provide the data needed to project the cost, so in a couple of years they could do an analysis to determine a number. There was no finite number with the current program and there was not a prediction level for the future. By state law, benefits currently offered to employees had to remain intact. The following was a proposed revision of this item:

RETIREE INSURANCE PLAN BENEFITS

*Eligible retirees of Jackson County hired **BEFORE January 1, 2025** will receive these benefits:*

- *County-paid medical and prescription coverage (health insurance)*
- *Dental insurance coverage*
- *Telehealth benefits*

*Eligible retirees of Jackson County hired **AFTER January 1, 2025**, will receive these benefits until the retiree reaches age 65:*

- *County paid medical and prescription coverage (health insurance)*

(b) The Board previously discussed county commissioners across the state being added to policies in retirement planning. The following was a proposed revision of this item:

County Commissioners who have served three terms or 12 years for Jackson County:

1. Eligible Commissioners must be currently fulfilling their term in office at the time of retirement.

2. Prior terms (years) of service as a Jackson County Commissioner will be credited toward the required 12 years of service.

(c) Other modifications were made to define other provisions within the policy.

General discussions were held.

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

(4) OTHER BUSINESS: Johnny Phillips, Mayor of the Town of Sylva, stated he served on the ABC Board, but he was not speaking on behalf of the ABC Board, he was speaking on behalf of the Town of Sylva as the Mayor. The NCDOT 107 Project was devastating to the Town of Sylva. With 42 buildings torn down and the loss of \$300,000 in revenue each year, he had been looking for ways to keep from going up on taxes.

Currently, the town and county split ABC sales proceeds 40% to the town and 60% to the county. He requested consideration of approval to change the formula to 50/50 for a five-year period to get through the NCDOT 107 Project. If the Board of Commissioners was favorable, he would approach the ABC Board for their consideration.

If approved, he would then draft a resolution for the town to consider. If the town approved, he would bring the item to the county for consideration. Changing the formula would provide \$100,000 more for the Town of Sylva per year based on \$1,000,000 sales proceeds.

General discussions were held.

Chairman Letson stated he was comfortable to move forward. They did not want the town to have adverse effects based on the NCDOT 107 Project.

Consensus: *Mayor Phillips to proceed forward with the request to the ABC Board and the Town of Sylva. Add this item to the next regular meeting agenda for consideration.*

There being no further business, Commissioner Bryson moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Jones seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 8:59 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

Mark A. Letson, Chairman