

**MINUTES OF A
WORK SESSION
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
HELD ON
MARCH 04, 2025**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Work Session on March 04, 2025, 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)
Jenny Lynn Hooper, Commissioner	Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to the Board
Michael Jennings, Commissioner	Darlene Fox, Finance Director
John W. Smith, Commissioner	

Chairman Letson called the meeting to order.

(1) SHERIFF'S OFFICE: Sheriff Doug Farmer stated his appreciation for his staff for their hard work and sacrifice. He also thanked the Board for their support.

He presented: Stats and Information 2024:

(a) Patrol calls:

- 2022 15,677
- 2023 17,424
- 2024 18,653
- Total increase 2,976

(b) School Resource Officers: SROs were more than a badge in the hallway, they were a trusted presence, a guiding voice and a safety net for students, always ready to listen and support. They attended 280 events in addition to regular operations, which equaled 480 extra hours.

(c) Fraud and Scam Reports:

- 2022 130
- 2023 99
- 2024 101

(d) Assault Investigations:

- 2022 336
- 2023 349
- 2024 455

(e) Major Crimes:

- Forensic Interviews: 89
- ICAC Cases: 20
- Drone Flight Deployments: 5
- Arrests from Drone Deployments: 3

(f) Civil Process Services:

- 2022 1,507
- 2023 1,707
- 2024 1,627

(g) Courthouse Visitors:

- 2022 42,103
- 2023 35,556

- 2024 19,806 (Sheriff Farmer noted the counter was not functioning correctly)
- (h) Community Outreach:**
- Safe Schools Task Force
 - D.A.R.E. Program
 - Senior Center Christmas Box Delivery
 - Special Olympics
 - Back to School Bash
 - Emergency Services Committee
 - DWI Taskforce
 - Shop with a Cop
- (i) Narcotics Enforcement:**
- One narcotics investigator was assigned to the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) as a Task Force Officer.
 - They had an additional narcotics investigator assigned to the Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and a Task Force Officer.
 - 2024 1,176 felony charges
 - 410 total drug arrests
 - Crack Cocaine: 231.090 grams
 - Cocaine: 238.080 grams
 - Fentanyl and Heroin: 790.600 grams
 - Methamphetamine: 2,832.762 grams
- (j) Criminal Suppression Unit:** Compromised of two canines that assisted two narcotics investigators with surveillance and enforcement.
- Canine Deployments:
 - 2023 34
 - 2024 130
 - Canine Arrests:
 - 2023 13
 - 2024 65
- (k) Overdoses:** They would never arrest the way out of the crisis. They must have help from the court system with stiffer consequences, longer mandatory sentences and drug court.
- 2022 189 overdoses, 60 deaths
 - 2023 156 overdoses, 38 deaths
 - 2024 99 overdoses, 5 deaths
- (l) Detention Center Capacity:** The state did not include holding beds
- 72 total beds
 - 59 male beds
 - 8 female beds
 - 5 holding beds
- (m) Detention Center Statistics:**

	<u>2024</u>	<u>2023</u>
Detention Admissions	2,032	2,189
Average Daily Population	69	62
Individuals with a Single Booking	1,666	1,829
Individuals with Multiple Bookings	366	360
Percent of county population booked	4.50%	4.90%
Recidivism Rate	36.11%	33.60%
People with Felony Offense	2,042	1,778
People with Misdemeanor Offense	3,095	2,946
Other Offense types	645	750

General discussions were held.

Commissioner Bryson inquired about the status of the Vivitrol Program.

Sheriff Farmer stated they received quotes from two Peer Support Groups and were waiting for final proposals to move forward. EMS would partner to provide shots at no cost to the county. They received one grant for \$500,000 and another for almost \$1 million. They were only one of 30 agencies in the nation to receive the grant. Between the two grants, they would be able to treat 180 inmates in the Vivitrol Program. He noted the Peer Support Group was crucial to the program.

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(2) PROJECT UPDATE: Mr. King presented project updates:

(a) Center for Domestic Peace: There was an issue with getting subs for the project, so a new projected date would be July 31, 2025. They were working with Clark Nexsen on a resolution.

(b) Cashiers-Glenville Recreation: He provided the Board with a redesign concept to review. The new design removed the splash pad area and added pickleball courts and other amenities.

Commissioner Jennings stated he was not happy with it because of what he heard from everybody. He thought he would get feedback that they did not need another basketball court, no one was playing tennis much, but he thought pickleball would be welcome. Also, there were playgrounds across the road.

Chairman Letson stated he thought they could remove the basketball court and add a skate park. He agreed with Commissioner Jennings, he did not think they needed the basketball court. Also, they could play pickleball on the tennis courts. With the volumes going through the Cashiers facility being higher than in Cullowhee and there not being a pool there - there would be complaining.

Mr. King stated as they went through the design process over the last few years, the reason the pool was taken out was because the facility was not adequate and there was not a lot of utilization of the pool when it was open.

Chairman Letson stated beyond this, he thought the entire Cashiers Recreation facility needed to be looked at.

General discussions were held.

Mr. King stated a pool was not a part of the original scope, but staff would take a look at it. He would ask Michael Hopkins, Parks and Recreation Director, to look at a new scope for the project.

(c) Whittier-Qualla Park: Construction would begin in March.

(d) Department on Aging: The construction drawings were complete. Requests for informal bids from qualified contractors would be in March.

(e) Canada Fire Department and Community Center: The project would go out for a rebid for a design construction bid.

(f) Justice Center and Administration Building: The county was accepting proposals from construction manager at risk firms. The county selected Vannoy Construction as the contractor. A kickoff meeting was held on March 3rd with partners.

(g) Fair Grounds: The building was approximately 90% down. They were looking to do footings in the next few weeks. The building had been ordered and would be delivered in a couple of weeks. They would also be working on the details of the sprinkler system.

(h) Greenway: They were finishing up on the properties and working on a plan for the budget process.

Informational item.

(3) TOBACCO TRUST GRANT FOR DREXEL: Mr. King stated for the Fair Grounds open air 48,000 SF open air pavilion, the county would request the 2025 NC Tobacco Trust for funding in the amount of \$764,901 to be applied toward the construction. He presented a letter of support and requested approval from the Board for the Fair Grounds and sequence of events.

Consensus: *The Board approved the Letter of Support to the 2025 NC Tobacco Trust for the Fair Grounds project, as requested.*

(4) OPIOID PLANNING: Meagan Cagle, Health Education Supervisor and Jodie Rodewald, Substance Use Prevention Coordinator, were present for this item.

Ms. Cagle and Ms. Rodewald presented: Opioid Settlement Report:

(a) National Opioid Settlements:

- Historic \$50+ billion in agreements
- Designed to help communities harmed by the opioid overdose epidemic
- All 100 counties and 17 municipalities with populations over 30,000 in North Carolina joined the agreements
- 85% of settlement funds would go directly to local governments

(b) North Carolina Region A Opioid Settlement Strategic Plan:

- Strengths to build on: There were existing treatment and recovery efforts to build upon. Collaborative efforts were strong. Efforts to reduce and prevent overdose deaths were underway.
- Opportunities for growth: Build on treatment and efforts to prevent misuse and reduce harm. Improve connections to care and increased treatment access. Reduce stigma across the region for people seeking treatment and in recovery.

(c) Opioid Settlements for Jackson County:

- \$6,130,782 over 18 years (2022 to 2038)
- \$1,820,000 so far
- \$340,043.44 annual average
- Front loaded funding. Exact amounts vary by year.
- No funding had been spent at this point

(d) Collaborative Strategic Plan Process:

- Complete: July 2023 – August 2024: Region A Strategic Planning Process
- Session 1: December 2024 Building shared vision and understanding
- Session 2: January 2025 Shaping strategy options
- Session 3: February 2025 Making decisions and clarifying details
- Plan development with steering committee March-April 2025
- Presentation April-June

(e) Strategies:

- Collaborative Strategic Planning
- Recovery Support Services
- Early Intervention
- Evidence Based Addiction Treatment
- Post Overdose Response
- Naloxone Distribution

(f) Council Representation list

(g) Planning Workgroup Members list

(h) Shared vision for a positive change: “*To foster a healthier, stronger community by investing opioid settlement funds in initiatives that promote recovery, prevention and support for individuals and families affected by opioid use. We aim to empower individuals and strengthen support systems through collaboration, transparency and compassion, driving positive changes that uplifts our community and creates a future where everyone can thrive in a safe, resilient and opportunity filled environment.*”

(i) Key Indicators:

- Overdose deaths
- Overdose ED visits
- Illicit drug overdoses
- Prescription opioids

(j) Prioritization:

1. Recovery Support Services
2. Evidence Based Addiction Treatment
3. Post Overdose Response Team
4. Early Intervention
5. Naloxone Distribution
6. Collaborative Strategic Planning

(k) Request for Proposals would be open until March 20th

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(5) VOLUNTEERS FOR BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS: Mr. King stated the Board had discussed this item previously. Did the Board want to move forward with realigning the boards and commissions appointments to two times per year? Also, it had been mentioned to add a process for individuals who wanted to volunteer to appear before the Board for an interview process.

Commissioner Smith stated he would at least like to see applicants come before the Board to tell them why they wanted to serve on a particular board or commission and what their qualifications were.

Commissioner Bryson stated he agreed. He thought there should be a process.

Chairman Letson stated he would want volunteers to prioritize which boards or commissions they wanted to serve on.

Commissioner Smith stated this would make the process more transparent.

General discussions were held.

Mr. King stated staff would draft a policy and procedures for review at a future work session.

Informational item.

(6) LIBRARY SECURITY: Commissioner Smith stated he requested to add this item. There was an incident at the Library where someone thought they found a gun in the restroom. The Sheriff’s Office responded and it was an inoperable Airsoft gun. There was also an issue with people hiding in the Library after hours, which presented a danger to staff. They needed to come up with a plan to make sure the building was secure.

General discussions were held.

Mr. King stated he would reach out to Fontana Regional Library and work with Mr. Kubis on the issue.

Informational item.

(7) **CHARLES R. ELDERS HIGHWAY RESOLUTION**: Mr. King stated there had been a movement to name a portion of Highway 74 the “Charles R. Elders Highway”. It was not up to the Board of Commissioners to name a road, but they could offer their support to the NCDOT Road Naming Board.

Commissioner Bryson stated he requested to add this item to the agenda. There were some people present in board room that had been working on this.

David Pruitt stated he had been working to get a portion of Highway 74 named for Charles Elders. The paperwork had been sent in to the state, but they needed the local government to draft a resolution and provide a copy of the approved minutes. They had already taken care of the letters of recommendation and a letter from the family. There was a \$2,000 fee for the signs. This would be a great way to honor Mr. Elders, who was a three-time Commissioner and a role model for a lot of men in Qualla.

General discussions were held.

Commissioner Bryson stated it had been discussed to designate the area from Mr. Elders house to the fire substation. He requested the item be added to the next regular agenda for consideration and for the county to take care of the \$2,000 fee. Mr. Elders had done a lot for the county and served.

Commissioner Smith stated Mr. Elders had done a lot for the county and surrounding areas. He was the definition of a public servant.

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

(8) **OTHER BUSINESS**: Chairman Letson stated there was a need for Closed Session.

Motion: *Commissioner Hooper 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 Smith 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 Bryson moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Hooper seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

Mark A. Letson, Chairman