

**MINUTES OF A JOINT MEETING OF
THE COUNTY OF JACKSON, TOWN OF DILLSBORO,
TOWN OF SYLVA, TOWN OF WEBSTER AND
VILLAGE OF FOREST HILLS
HELD ON FEBRUARY 01, 2016**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Joint Meeting with the Town of Dillsboro, Town of Sylva, Town of Webster, and Village of Forest Hills on February 01, 2016, 6:00 p.m., at the Department on Aging Center, Heritage Dining Room, 100 County Services Road, Sylva, North Carolina.

<u>County Board of Commissioners</u>	<u>Town of Dillsboro</u>	<u>Town of Sylva</u>	<u>Town of Webster</u>	<u>Village of Forest Hills</u>
Brian McMahan, Chairman	Mike Fitzgerald, Mayor	Lynda Sossamon, Mayor	Tracy Rodes, Mayor	Kolleen Begley, Mayor
Mark Jones, Vice Chair	David Jones	Greg McPherson	Larry Phillips	Clark Corwin
Charles Elders	Tim Parris	Mary Gelbaugh	Billie Jo Bryson	Carl Hooper
Chuck Wooten, County Manager	Beauford Riddle	Barbara Hamilton	Danell Moses	Ron Mau
Heather C. Baker, County Attorney	Debbie Coffey, Clerk	Harold Hensley	Leigh Anne Young	
Angela M. Winchester, Clerk		David Nestler		
Jan Fitzgerald, Executive Assistant		Paige Dowling, Town Manager		
		Amanda Murajda, Clerk		

County Chairman McMahan called the meeting to order. He stated that the joint meetings provided an opportunity for the municipalities to discuss topics of interest that affected them all and how they could partner together to meet the challenges and needs of the communities, as one governmental body, working for the good of all citizens.

(1) CONNECT NC BOND CAMPAIGN: Chairman McMahan stated that Connect NC was an upcoming bond referendum on March 15th, which would be historic and significant. The bond would provide for much needed major infrastructure improvements in the state, including agriculture, education, parks, water and sewer. He encouraged everyone to share information regarding the bond, as it was critically important for the state, county and region.

(a) Western Carolina University Chancellor David Belcher presented the impact to Western Carolina University (WCU): Chancellor Belcher stated that the bond represented an incredible opportunity for institutions of higher education around the state. For Southwestern Community College (SCC) and WCU specifically, it represented an opportunity to increase their capacity to meet the needs of the regions they serve.

Invest in meeting WNC’s regional development needs:

- \$2 billion investment: Funding long-term improvements at universities, community colleges, water and sewer infrastructure, agriculture, parks and public safety.
- \$900 million to university system: Funding high-tech STEM facilities necessary to prepare students for future jobs.
- No new taxes: No tax increases will result because of retirement of older debt and the historically low interest rates.
- Vital to competitiveness: This investment is necessary for North Carolina to compete with other states to attract high-paying jobs.
- No credit impact: Will not jeopardize NC’s strong “AAA” credit rating.
- The case for a new natural sciences building at WCU: Among projects included in the bond package is a \$110 million for WCU to replace its dilapidated Natural Sciences Building. The existing building has out-of-date equipment, lacks necessary lab space and has no capacity for needed growth in STEM training to fuel economic development in the region. The existing Natural Sciences Building was built in the early 1970s, when WCU had only 15 nursing majors and no engineer majors. Today, WCU has roughly 2,300 students majoring in health and human science programs, almost 600 in technology and engineering programs and approximately 500 in biological and physical science programs.

(b) Southwestern Community College President Don Tomas presented the impact to SCC: SCC had been established for more than 50 years and their mission, as a community college, was to meet the needs of local businesses and industries. They work with groups and constituents that will enable them to provide the necessary skills and education for the current job market. The bond would provide a great opportunity for the Balsam Building, which was built approximately 30 years ago. At that time, they had four health science occupation programs, today they have 14. The needs are great and relevant to meeting the growing demand.

They have now completed their master planning session between, Jackson, Macon and Swain with a total cost of \$55 mil. The bond would bring in approximately \$7.1 mil to use for repair, renovation and new construction. Their goal would be to structure a plan to maximize their opportunity. In the State of North Carolina, the county governments are responsible for the facilities and maintenance of their buildings. This would enable the county to experience an opportunity so that they may not have to rely as heavily on local funds, but to help supplement those local funds to enable them to build bigger or better than what they would be able to do with just the bond.

(c) Chairman McMahan stated it was easy to see the impact and investment that would be made in the community and how critical it was to promote the bond. He suggested each municipality consider a resolution that the county had put together, in favor of Connect NC. Each governing body in the county would have an opportunity to adopt the resolution collectively to show their support. Commissioners will take this item up at their meeting on Thursday, for adoption, in support of the bond. This would be a significant direct and indirect investment in the county. Also, this is a non-partisan issue as the governor and legislature have endorsed the bond fully.

Commissioner Elders stated that this was a non-partisan issue and he fully supported the bond.

(2) **COUNTY UPDATE:** Chairman McMahan stated that both Commissioners Greene and Deitz were unable to attend. He recognized members in attendance: Commissioner Charles Elders from District One and Commissioner Mark Jones from District Four. Also, county staff in attendance: Tim Thomas, I.T. Director; Jan Fitzgerald, Executive Assistant; Angie Winchester, Clerk; Joe Hamilton, Register of Deeds; Heather Baker, Attorney; Rich Price, Economic Development; and Chuck Wooten, County Manager.

Mr. Wooten has announced his plans to retire and the Board has begun the process of looking for a manager. Also, they have just started the budget process and are working towards a five year capital project plan. The factor this year will be the tax revaluation, which the notices went out in the mail that day. There will be a 30 day informal appeal process, whereby you can contact the Tax Assessor's Office, either in person or in writing.

(3) **TOWN OF SYLVA:** Mayor Lynda Sossamon recognized members in attendance: Commissioner David Nestler, Commissioner Greg McPherson, Commissioner Mary Gelbaugh, Commissioner Barbara Hamilton, Commissioner Harold Hensley, Town Manager Paige Dowling and Clerk to the Board Amanda Murajda.

Mayor Sossamon stated they would be working on the Comprehensive Plan with Southwestern Commission, Division of Commerce and ARC. They also applied for a Clean Water Trust Fund Grant that would be used for a watershed assessment of Scott's Creek. The Greening up the Mountains event will be Saturday, April 23rd. Also, regarding the building that burned downtown, they should be able to take the tunnel down on Main Street in March. Because of the fire, they have a new ordinance about windows and bringing them into compliance. Replacement has begun for the boarded up windows. Sylva will host the Main Street Managers Meeting in August, which will include 75 Main Street Managers from across the state.

(4) **TOWN OF WEBSTER:** Mayor Tracy Rodes recognized members in attendance: Commissioner Larry Phillips, Commissioner Billie Jo Bryson, Commissioner Danell Moses and Commissioner Leigh Anne Young.

Mayor Rodes stated that on their upcoming agenda was land use planning, updating ordinances and continue to foster a strong sense of community.

(5) **TOWN OF DILLSBORO:** Mayor Mike Fitzgerald recognized members in attendance: Alderperson David Jones, Alderperson Tim Parris, Alderperson Beauford Riddle and Clerk to the Board Debbie Coffey.

Mayor Fitzgerald stated that all of their main street buildings would be full and they had several festivals lined up for the upcoming year. They have new restaurants now opened and more coming. They were excited about the train steam service coming in July with some departures from Dillsboro. They were looking forward to a big year.

(6) **VILLAGE OF FOREST HILLS:** Mayor Kolleen Begley recognized members in attendance: Mayor Pro Tempore Clark Corwin, Councilmember Ron Mau and Councilmember Carl Hooper.

Mayor Begley stated they are continuing to make progress on improving their roads and updating their road signage. They were currently in the process of updating their future land use map and expected to adopt those revisions in the next 2-3 months. They hired a professional planner to assist their planning board and council with obtaining their goals to have the proper framework in place for any future development they may be presented with. The Board had ongoing discussions about the potential of Forest Hills to fill a need for nice, affordable housing in the county, as well as discussion of safe walk-ability options in their community.

(7) **TUCKASEEGEE WATER AND SEWER:** Dan Harbaugh, Executive Director, recognized members in attendance: Chairman Mike Fitzgerald, Brenda Oliver, Joe Ward, Mark Jones, Tracy Rodes, Mike Byers, Harold Hensley, David Nestler and Board Secretary Nancy Hoyle.

Mr. Harbaugh stated they were intertwined with the planning that each entity had mentioned, including the Comprehensive Plan update. All of those activities have a large impact on what they do with water and sewer. As part of those discussions, they hope to resolve the long-term ownership of the Cashiers water system with the county, this year. The Whittier sanitary sewer system is another ongoing, long-term discussion. Their big focus project is moving the Cashiers waste water system forward, as there is a lack of capacity in Cashiers. They are working with the county on a grant from the Golden LEAF Foundation to help pay for some of that construction. The balance would be funded through the USDA, as of right now. In the next 60 days, they would be closing out on large grant projects at University Heights and the River Road mobile home park. Also, they had already provided audit information to each of the entities, which came back good.

(8) **SOUTHWESTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE:** President Don Tomas recognized staff in attendance: Dr. Thom Brooks, Executive Vice President for Instruction and Student Services; Cliff Stalter, Vice President for Financial and Administrative Services; Scott Baker, Vice President for Information Technology; Board of Trustee Member Mark Jones.

Dr. Tomas presented Points of Pride:

(a) US Department of Education:

- TRiO Student Support Services Grant: This grant provides for enhanced and expanded Student Support Services to improve student success and retention.
- First in the World Grant: A project to implement a model program to provide supportive services for students to increase retention and graduation. Success Coaches (to provide proactive intervention and advising) for the next four years.
- Minority Male Mentoring Program Grant: Supportive services to Native American male students and others to ensure they remain in and complete their degree programs

(b) NASA:

- Science Education cooperative agreement for the Smoky Mountains STEM Collaborative: Bridging the Gaps in the K-12 to Post-Secondary Education Pathway project = \$1,485,950.
- Partnering with the public schools of Jackson, Macon and Swain counties and Cherokee Central Schools, Appalachian State University, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the Pisgah Astronomical Research Institute and NASA's Marshall Space Center with SCC as the lead institution to increase science knowledge among students as well as the public throughout the Smoky Mountains region.

- Initiate astronomy courses; telescopes; funding STEM astronomy instruction & equipment at HSs; and support a public viewing event of the August 2017 solar eclipse at GSMNP.
- (c) Community Foundation of WNC: Food and Farming Grant for SCC's Small Business Center Appalachian Farm School.
- (d) The Cannon Foundation Grant:
 - Renovation of the Health Sciences simulation lab.
 - Create two simulated hospital exam/triage rooms, a nurse's station and waiting area.
- (e) The Golden LEAF Foundation: Community based grantsmaking initiative regional STEM Grant = \$2,002,755.
- (f) Institutional Development Submitted and Planned Grants 2014 – 2016: Total grants and awards = \$3,721,163.
- (g) Connect NC Bond: 2 billion bi-partisan infrastructure bond, benefitting the entire state. If passed:
 - Community Colleges - \$350,000,000
 - Universities - \$980,000,000
 - State-wide water and sewer - \$312,500,000
 - National Guard facilities - \$70,000,000
 - Agriculture - \$179,000,000
 - State parks and attractions - \$100,000,000
 - Public Safety - \$8,500,000
- (h) Connect NC Bond Impact to Region A:
 - Higher Education:
 - Southwestern Community College - \$7,170,597
 - Haywood Community College - \$2,831,380
 - Tri-County Community College - \$4,515,728
 - Western Carolina University - \$110,000,000
 - Region A Service Area Total – 124,517,705
- (i) Connect NC Bond \$7,170,597:
 - SCC Master Plan
 - Repairs/Renovations
 - New Construction
 - PSTC, Health Science Occupations, Library, Workforce Innovation and Economic Development, Campus Maintenance/Shipping and Receiving Building, and Faculty Program Offices.

(9) **WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY**: Dr. Melissa Wargo, Chief of Staff, recognized staff in attendance: Dr. David Belcher, Chancellor; Mike Byers, Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance; Bill Studenc, Director of Communications and Public Relations; Ashley Evans, University Photographer.

Dr. Wargo stated that the mixed use facility was under construction on campus and renovations began in the Brown Building. That facility will be opened back up with a new dining facility on campus and an expanded space for student service programs. They are replacing a boiler at the Steam Plant, which provides hot water and heat for the campus. Also, Margaret Spellings is the new President-elect of UNC Systems. Her tenure will begin in March. She has said that she plans to visit every campus within her first three months. Enrollment for spring was 9,673, which it is typically smaller than the fall. They received 16,000 applications for attendance in the fall.

Recent WCU accomplishments:

- WCU was among 14 higher education institutions in the U.S. selected to participate in a National Center for Engineering Pathways to Innovation program that is designed to help schools fully incorporate innovation and entrepreneurship into undergraduate engineering education.
- WCU renamed the accountancy program in its College of Business as the Dixon Hughes Goodman Accountancy Program in recognition of gifts and pledges totaling \$1 million from several WCU alumni who are partners in one of the top 20 public accounting firms in the U.S.
- The publication Military Times recently listed WCU in its “Best for Vets: Colleges 2016” rankings.

(10) TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY: Nick Breedlove, Director, presented:

Update for 2016 Activities:

(a) Background:

- TDA established in 2012 to oversee occupancy tax funds collected by area lodging facilities. 15-member board, Chairman: Robert Jumper
- Occupancy tax rate set at 4-percent
- FY 15-16 TDA budget \$828,000
- Funds are used to market Jackson County and bring visitors and tourists to the area for overnight stays.

(b) Partnership with Chambers:

- Jackson County Chamber of Commerce & Cashiers Area Chamber
- The TDA funds both chambers to support their operations
- Difference between the TDA and chambers:
 - TDA: Promote the growth of tourism and travel in Jackson County, oversee marketing and product development and enhance the quality of life for the county’s citizens.
 - Chambers: Provide leadership as an advocate for business, an information source for the community and conduit for building destination awareness and responsible growth. In partnership with TDA recruitment, Chambers help create a positive tourism experience - before, during and after the visit - to ensure maximum visitor spend, stay and return.

(c) Agencies:

- The Brandon Agency (creative, media strategy and ad buying)
- Pineapple PR (publicity, editorial and earned media)
- INNights (social media management)

(d) Current Activities:

- New TDA office in Dillsboro, adjacent to Town Hall – 20 Depot St.
- The 2016-grant cycle is under way. TDA grants are used to assist with programs and projects that generate overnight visits and increase tourism along with enhancing visitor experiences to Jackson County. Copies of the grant application are available at both Chambers and online and notice went out to all area media.
- Aligning marketing efforts among all agencies to ensure we’re reaching visitors and tourists in the most efficient, cost-effective way possible.
- Will begin analyzing lodging data across the county to look at seasonal trends, occupancy rates, and opportunities.
- Analyzing both social media and website metrics to better refine key demographic to market to.
- Working with the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area to finalize April 4 customer service training at SCC for tourism and hospitality businesses. Training will have 25-30 in class, feature Biltmore Hospitality Course.
- Will conduct aerial filming and photography of Greening up the Mountains and Mountain Heritage Day for promotion.
- Working with area photographers to create a toolbox of Jackson County images.

- (e) Networking:
 - Held introductory meetings with surrounding county counterparts: Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians' Director of Commerce; Swain, Haywood, Macon & Transylvania TDA officials.
 - Maintaining an ongoing dialogue with Jackson County's Economic Development Director Rich Price
 - Attending VisitNC Governor's Tourism Conference (Cherokee), Tennessee State Tourism Conference and Southeastern Tourism Society's Marketing College.
- (f) 2016-17 Visitor Guide:
 - Working on the 2016-17 Jackson County Visitor Guide
 - Distributed to tens of thousands of visitors through local Chambers, direct mail fulfillment and state welcome centers
 - Includes accommodation information, restaurant and dining guide and more.
 - Includes a fold-out map of waterfalls and hikes in the area.
 - Should be available May-June timeframe
- (g) Website:
 - Advertising an RFP for redesign of website
 - Should be launched mid-summer
 - New website will feature:
 - An immersive media experience of Jackson County, including photos, videos
 - A content management system for fresh content and updates.
 - Streamlined navigation and an easier-to-use interface
- (h) Social Media:
 - Instagram: @nc_mountains
 - Twitter: @nc_mountains
 - Facebook: fb.com/MountainLoversNC
- (i) FAM (familiarization) trips:
 - Bring media to Jackson County to showcase best it has to offer – lodging, dining, recreation.
 - 2-3 media attendees per trip
 - April – NC Beer month FAM
 - June – Fitness FAM
 - October – Leaf looking FAM
 - Coverage of FAM trips appears in magazines, newspaper and online. Takes up to a year for placement.
- (j) Anglers & Appetites:
 - Jackson County will participate in a third season of Anglers & Appetites
 - Television show focuses on fishing and dining.
 - Estimated reach of 25 million viewers for last season
 - Begin filming around April

(11) **OTHER BUSINESS:** Mr. Wooten announced that Michael Poston was the new Director of Planning. Mr. Poston came from Yadkin County and was a WCU graduate. His expertise is in rural planning. He will be getting out to meet with each of the municipalities over the next few weeks.

There being no further business, Chairman McMahan adjourned the meeting at 7:17 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

 Angela M. Winchester, Clerk
 Jackson County Board of Commissioners

 Brian Thomas McMahan, Chairman
 Jackson County Board of Commissioners