

**MINUTES OF A
SPECIAL JOINT MEETING
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS AND
THE TOWN OF DILLSBORO BOARD OF ALDERMEN
HELD ON
MARCH 05, 2018**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners and the Town of Dillsboro Board of Aldermen met in a Special Joint Session on March 05, 2018, 5:30 p.m., Justice & Administration Building, Room A227, 401 Grindstaff Cove Road, Sylva, North Carolina.

Present:

Jackson County Board of Commissioners

Brian McMahan, Chairman
Charles Elders, Vice Chair
Boyce Deitz, Commissioner
Mickey Luker, Commissioner
Ron Mau, Commissioner
Don Adams, County Manager
Heather C. Baker, County Attorney
Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

Town of Dillsboro Board of Aldermen

Mike Fitzgerald, Mayor
Jim Cabe, Alderman
David Gates, Alderman
David Jones, Alderman
Tim Parris, Alderman
Beauford Riddle, Alderman
Jay Coward, Town Attorney
Debbie Coffey, Clerk to Board

Chairman McMahan called the meeting to order for the Jackson County Board of Commissioners.

Mayor Mike Fitzgerald called the meeting to order for the Town of Dillsboro Board of Aldermen.

(1) BACKGROUND INFORMATION: Mr. Adams stated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss a potential partnership between Jackson County and Western Carolina University (WCU) regarding what was known as The Green Energy Park, SRC and closed landfill area (Campus Area). Previously, the county partnered with WCU to conduct a study of the Campus Area to look at potential uses for the site.

Together, the county and WCU contracted with Yue Cai Hillon, PhD, Associate Professor of Management, College of Business, WCU and Wendy Cagle, MBA, Assistant Professor, College of Business, WCU, to conduct the study. After the study, they continued to have conversations about concepts of where the joint partnership could be. Arthur Salido, PhD, MBA, Executive Director, Community and Economic Engagement and Innovation, WCU, would provide them with an overview of WCU and Jackson County Living Laboratory and Design Center.

(2) GREEN ENERGY PARK AND WCU STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP PLAN: Ms. Cagle presented: Green Energy Park – a collaboration with WCU:

(a) Report background:

- Analyzed 9 Past Planning Documents (2005 to present).
- Secondary Research on other similar projects (trends and opportunities).
- Personal Interviews:
 - What were the perceptions of the GEP?
 - What value does it provide for the county and WCU?
 - What challenges were associated with the GEP?
 - What future role should it have for WCU and the county?

(b) Who did they interview: 25 individuals from Jackson County and WCU.

- (c) Strategy process:
- Current reality:
 - Current perceived value
 - What was working?
 - What was not working?
 - What was needed?
 - Future vision:
 - Proposed value for WCU and economic development.
 - Best use of facility and property for community.
 - Core value proposition: Hub for education, innovation and creative expression serving WCU and Jackson County communities.
 - Strategic objections: Opportunities.
 - Recommendations:
 - Actions
 - Resources

Dr. Hillon presented: Strategic objectives:

- (d) Objective one: Provide off campus living laboratory:
- Enhance academic experiences.
 - Collaborative projects.
 - Public demonstrations and classes.
- (e) Objective two: Develop landfill open space:
- Utilize methane gas.
 - Community use facility.
 - Compliment Green Energy Park.
- (f) Objective three: Create a multi-use facility:
- Animal Rescue Center.
 - Community Use Facility.
 - Complement WCU's curriculum and research needs.
- (g) Common resource needs:
- Collaborative partnership
 - Infrastructure:
 - Determine the amount of lifespan of the methane gas.
 - Repairs to the physical space.
 - Driveway
 - Parking
 - Signage
 - Facility accommodations:
 - Refreshments
 - Adequate restrooms
- (h) Strategic action plan template:
- Facility planning
 - Human resource planning
 - Promotion planning
 - Action planning
 - Resource needs
 - Leadership
 - Outcomes
 - Measurement for success

(i) Recommendations:

- Infrastructure. Develop a formal partnership between WCU and Jackson County to serve as a hub for artisan/craft, cultural and environmental education. It was important that the collaboration be seen as a joint project with both entities sharing a role at the facility. Perhaps WCU taking on management of programming while the county continues to provide operation management for the multi-use facility.
- Focus on immediate projects. Begin with the current facility and expand programs that were ready to go. WCU Arts Department would like to increase their ability to offer heat art courses such as pottery, glass blowing and metal sculpture. This would allow them the opportunity to grow their programs in numbers of students and increase faculty eventually.
- Conceptualize the long-term opportunities. Begin exploring the concept of establishing a collaborative program that involves the WCU Engineering and Business Schools to create an innovation center or maker space in conjunction with the county. It was noted that this long-term opportunity could be at JCGEP or a different location but it should be included as part of the collaboration agreement between WCU and the county. There was interest from the Dean of Engineering, the Dean of Fine and Performing Art and the Dean of Business to develop an innovation and design center, a type of maker space specializing and attracting projects for outdoor gear companies and manufacturers. Engineering and business students need real world engagement projects and an off-campus facility where students and faculty were allowed to interact with companies to provide business and market research support and solve engineering design and material issues faced by these outdoor gear companies. This type of interaction would give engineering and business students internship opportunities allowing them to stay on campus through the summer to complete various engineering and technology research projects.
- Focus on landfill open space development and usage of methane gas and other sources of renewable energy: (short-term). Utilize the open space on the closed landfill cap that would complement the multi-use facility and activities developed at the JCGEP and was not invasive to the landfill cap. The area might include an attraction to stimulate foot traffic to the site, host an alternative source of energy, provide an educational and/or historical trail, or combination of all three. Some immediate next steps before any development can happen includes:
 - Research and examine the landfill cap restrictions.
 - Verify the amount of methane gas available and the life expectancy.
 - Identify any existing zoning regulations for property.
 - Create a secure fenced area around the flare station.
- Walking trail development plan. Develop a plan for a “unique and cool” walking trail, different from other greenways in the county that would attract community members, tourists, and students.
- Driving range plan. Develop a business plan for the driving range concept-Work with Region A, JC Economic Development and WCU Corporation for Entrepreneurship and Innovation to develop a business plan complete with financial feasibility and economic development impact for the county. Potential Benefits to the county include recreation facility for community, alternative attraction for visitors and practice facility option for WCU Golf team that currently had to travel to Haywood County to practice.
- Solar panel farm plan. Develop a business plan for placing solar panels on the closed landfill to complement the renewable energy theme of JCGEP and extend the life of JCGEP beyond methane.
- Animal rescue center included in the multi-use facility- (short-term). Revise the plan already developed to build a Jackson County Animal Rescue Center on the property and include appropriate opportunities to link animal rescue activities to existing WCU curriculum.

Possible suggestions were psychology, healthcare for the elderly, biology, forensics and business to create research opportunities and develop an ongoing volunteer staffing process to include WCU students, faculty & staff. Make the facility “unique and cool” by benchmarking and learning from Brother Wolf’s model. This was the highly successful animal rescue facility in Asheville currently expanding to three times the size of the current location at a new site in Leicester. They welcome consulting opportunities in the region to assist in program development.

Informational item.

(3) WCU/JACKSON COUNTY LIVING LABORATORY AND DESIGN CENTER:

Dr. Salido presented WCU/Jackson County Living Laboratory and Design Center at the Green Energy Park.

(a) Exploring the intersection of art and design with the sciences, technology and business to advance contemporary Appalachian culture and regional innovation.

(b) A flexible design/maker space focused on prototype or single use/small scale fabrication.

(c) Student and community users could plan and develop aesthetic and environmentally friendly projects and businesses.

Informational item.

(4) GENERAL DISCUSSIONS:

(a) Chairman McMahan stated that the Green Energy Park was a jewel in the county and he thought this was an opportunity to rebrand and turn the area into a very useable space. This was located in the heart of Dillsboro and was important to them as they had a strong artisan and tourism based community. This would be a way for Dillsboro to have growth and activity generated in their area. He was excited to explore this opportunity, continue these ideas to go down the road to work and bring this project to reality.

(b) Mayor Fitzgerald stated that Dillsboro had worked with WCU for many years and they had been wonderful to work with.

(c) Commissioner Elders expressed appreciation to WCU and Dillsboro for working with the county. He was thrilled to see this happening.

(5) NEXT STEPS: Mr. Adams stated that if they wished to proceed forward, they would spend approximately one year in design and another six months to one year before they moved earth. The Green Energy Park/Campus was zoned as an industrial district. In order to contemplate some of the uses they were looking at, they would have to go through a text amendment process through the Town of Dillsboro Zoning Ordinance to look at adding potential uses. This would be the first next step. The second step would be for the Board of Commissioners to authorize the County Manager to hire engineers and architects to create a true master plan with costs for the project.

Chairman McMahan stated that the presentation that day was to give the public and the Boards a chance to take in and absorb the information. At an upcoming work session they would have a more in-depth discussion about how they felt about the concept, timelines and the next steps for each of the Boards.

Informational item.

There being no further business, Commissioner Elders moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Mau seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 6:24 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

Brian Thomas McMahan, Chairman