

**MINUTES
TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
OCTOBER 14, 2024 – REGULAR MEETING**

The Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County met in a regular meeting on Monday, October 14, 2024, at 4:00 p.m. in the Multipurpose Chambers at the County Administration Building, located at 101 S. Broad Street, Brevard, NC.

Commissioners present were Larry Chapman, Chairman Jason Chappell, Vice-Chairman Jake Dalton, Teresa McCall, and Chase McKelvey. County Manager Jaime Laughter and Deputy Clerk to the Board Jennifer Wright were also present. Clerk to the Board Trisha Hogan was out of town due to a family emergency. County Attorney Julie Hooten participated remotely via Zoom meeting software.

Media: Dan DeWitt – *Brevard Newsbeat*
Jon Rich – *The Transylvania Times*

There were approximately 35 people in the audience.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Jason Chappell presiding declared a quorum was present and called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

WELCOME

Chairman Chappell welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the Commissioners and staff in attendance.

PUBLIC HEARING

EXTENSION OF BOND ORDER AUTHORIZING THE ISSUANCE OF \$68 MILLION GENERAL OBLIGATION SCHOOL BONDS

The Clerk to the Board of Commissioners reported to the Board of Commissioners that a **NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING ON EXTENSION OF BOND ORDER AUTHORIZING THE ISSUANCE OF \$68,000,000 GENERAL OBLIGATION SCHOOL BONDS OF THE COUNTY OF TRANSYLVANIA, NORTH CAROLINA** was published on September 26, 2024, in *The Transylvania Times* stating that the Board of Commissioners would hold a public hearing as described in such notice on October 14, 2024, at 4:00 p.m. or as soon thereafter as practicable.

Chairman Jason Chappell moved that the Board of Commissioners hold a public hearing on the question of whether the maximum time period for issuing bonds under the Bond Order Authorizing the Issuance of \$68,000,000 General Obligation School Bonds of the County of Transylvania, North Carolina should be extended from seven years to 10 years. The motion was unanimously adopted.

The Chair announced that the Board of Commissioners would hear anyone who wished to be heard on the question of whether the maximum time period for issuing bonds under the Bond Order Authorizing the Issuance of \$68,000,000 General Obligation School Bonds of the County of Transylvania, North Carolina should be extended from seven years to 10 years.

Maureen Keate: Ms. Keate spoke in support of the extension, expressing appreciation to the Board of Commissioners, the Board of Education, and the staff involved in planning the bond projects. She also encouraged citizens to attend future board meetings.

After the Board of Commissioners had heard all persons who requested to be heard in connection with the foregoing question, Chairman Jason Chappell moved that the public hearing be closed. The motion was unanimously adopted.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The comments represent the speakers' opinions or points of view.

Lisa Fletcher: Transylvania County Schools Superintendent Dr. Lisa Fletcher thanked the Board of Commissioners and all those present for the community's unity following Hurricane Helene. She extended special appreciation to the Sheriff and Emergency Management staff for collaborating with the School System and including school officials in daily briefings. Dr. Fletcher emphasized the positive impact of the Emergency Management team's dedication to County residents and offered a sincere "thank you" to everyone involved in the hurricane response efforts. She also acknowledged the community's support of schools and students. Dr. Fletcher reported that schools reopened today without issues on bus routes, and attendance was consistent with pre-storm levels.

David White: Mr. White, CEO of WNC Source, addressed the Board on affordable housing, outlining WNC Source's mission and programs. Since the 1970s, their housing initiatives, including the Housing Choice Voucher Program, have supported hundreds of families and landlords. Through the Family Self-Sufficiency Program, WNC Source provides case management to help participants pursue education, gain independence, and achieve first-time homeownership. Mr. White highlighted collaborations with Habitat for Humanity and other partners to expand affordable housing in the County, emphasizing the need for ongoing County support in areas like infrastructure, zoning, and partnerships with the City of Brevard. He offered to meet with the Commissioners for further discussions or to arrange a tour of WNC Source's facilities.

Shelly Webb: Reverend Shelly Webb, Executive Director of Sharing House/Transylvania Christian Ministries, expressed gratitude to the Board and County officials for their dedicated service during the challenges of Hurricane Helene. She commended the County's resource allocation and clear communication efforts, including their coordination with State and federal officials, which have been highly valued by the entire network of support services. Reverend Webb highlighted Transylvania Christian Ministries' role in housing support, especially in emergencies. The organization provides temporary financial relief, emergency shelter resources, and distributes essentials like tents to unhoused individuals. During crises, they allocate 100% of incoming revenue—half a million dollars annually—to assist with housing needs, including emergency rental deposits and other critical actions. She thanked the Commissioners for their efforts, transparency, and communication throughout this recovery.

AGENDA MODIFICATIONS

There were no agenda modifications.

Commissioner Dalton moved to approve the agenda as submitted, seconded by Commissioner McCall, and unanimously approved.

CONSENT AGENDA

Commissioner McCall moved to approve the Consent Agenda as presented, seconded by Commissioner Chapman, and unanimously approved.

The Board approved the following items:

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Board of Commissioners met in a regular meeting on Monday, August 26, 2024. (The Board also met in a closed session in which the minutes were sealed. The Clerk to the Board will submit the sealed closed session minutes at a future meeting for approval.) The Board approved the minutes as submitted.

REQUEST TO CLOSE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES OFFICES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Department of Social Services (DSS) sought permission to close offices on Friday, December 13 for an extended lunch period from 12 noon to 2:00 p.m., when staff will participate in professional development and team-building activities to benefit the department. If approved, staff will post/publish ample notice to the public and will ensure staff are on call to respond to emergencies. The Board granted permission to close DSS offices on Friday, December 13 from 12 noon to 2:00 p.m. for professional development and team building during an extended lunch period.

APPROVAL OF TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES ADOPTION SERVICES FEE SCHEDULE

The Clerk of Superior Court sometimes refers stepparent and relative adoptions, independent adoptions, and annual pre-placement assessments to the Department of Social Services (DSS). DSS cannot claim reimbursement for time spent performing these activities, so the NC Administrative Code allows DSS to charge reasonable fees for preparing these reports. DSS Director Amanda Vanderoef presented the following recommended fee schedule to the DSS Board on September 25, 2024. The DSS Board approved the recommendation and requested approval by the Board of Commissioners.

Stepparent and Relative Adoptions	\$200
Independent Adoptions	\$1,500
Annual Pre-placement Assessment Update	\$200

If the family's income falls below the poverty guidelines, no fee will be assessed. The recommended fees are the maximum allowable for the service. Surrounding counties that charge for this service are Buncombe, Haywood, and Yancey.

The current fee schedule dates to 2010, but the staff could not find any records indicating approval by the Board of Commissioners at that time. The Board approved the Transylvania County Department of Social Services Adoption Services Fee Schedule as requested.

PRESENTATIONS/RECOGNITIONS

EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO HURRICANE HELENE

The Manager provided an update on the County's emergency response to Hurricane Helene, noting that additional updates will be shared in upcoming meetings as needed. She began by thanking the many agencies, individuals, and organizations that supported the response efforts. The Manager outlined the stages of the County's response, following the standard phases of emergency management: pre-planning, active response, addressing immediate needs, and progressing into recovery and rebuilding.

The Manager emphasized the importance of public awareness regarding the County's current focus on recovery and rebuilding. She credited the Commissioners' investments in personnel, equipment, infrastructure, and river debris management for enhancing the County's preparedness. Since hurricanes in 2004 led to severe log jams and flooding on the French Broad River, the County has prioritized annual river debris cleanup, managed by the Soil & Water Department. This proactive measure has improved stormwater management and could serve as a model for other counties.

The Manager commended the exceptional teamwork demonstrated by County departments, partner agencies, and the community.

On Wednesday, September 25, County staff prepared for the impacts of an approaching storm expected to arrive just before Hurricane Helene. Anticipating potential flood hazards, staff requested two high-clearance vehicles and two swift water rescue teams, which North Carolina Emergency Management approved and deployed on Wednesday, arriving the following day. The National Weather Service (NWS) then provided County Emergency Management with projections indicating record rainfall and significant river flooding, signaling an unprecedented weather event in Transylvania County. Based on this forecast, Chairman Chappell declared a County State of Emergency.

Following updated NWS data, the County issued its first-ever mandatory evacuation order for specific high-risk areas. The Sheriff's Office promptly delivered printed evacuation notices—translated into English and Spanish—door-to-door in these mapped zones. Despite these preparations, the rainfall levels from Thursday's storm and Hurricane Helene exceeded all initial projections, leading to flooding in areas not initially identified for evacuation.

By Thursday, September 26, flooding from the preliminary storm had begun creating hazardous travel conditions across the County. Staff shifted from planning into active response mode, setting up a primary shelter and a warming shelter in Rosman. As Hurricane Helene's forecast changed throughout the day, indicating a delayed impact, County staff prepared for high winds and heavy overnight rains.

Key emergency personnel—including the Sheriff's Office, 9-1-1 Communications, Fire Marshal's Office, Emergency Management, EMS, and Operations and Transit staff—mobilized to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) for coordinated response efforts. Makeshift sleeping arrangements were prepared within the EOC to ensure staff could remain on-site and on shift throughout the night.

By mid-morning on Friday, September 27, the effects of Hurricane Helene began to ease. The aftermath left widespread power outages throughout Transylvania County. Downed power poles and lines, coupled with flooding and numerous landslides, severely restricted travel, and complicated emergency response efforts. The volume of landslides surpassed typical expectations for the area, frequently altering road access and affecting response routes.

Communication infrastructure suffered extensive damage, with main and backup fiber lines cut, causing a near-total blackout of VOIP phones, cell service, and internet access across the County. With most residents unable to communicate, Emergency Services depended heavily on radio systems. Although radios were deployed through every fire department, interference from neighboring counties' radio traffic created additional challenges, adding to the strain on emergency responders.

As conditions stabilized, Emergency Services entered the rescue phase. This stage involved significant rescue activity, with ongoing efforts and data collection. The staff has confirmed that at least 66 individuals required rescue during this period.

- Balsam Grove: 2 individuals rescued by Balsam Grove Fire Department

- Cemetery Road: One individual rescued by the task force
- Everett Road: Two individuals rescued by the task force
- Blythe Park Drive: One individual rescued by the task force
- Ducks Drive & Cherry Street Subdivision: Brevard Fire Department, Transylvania County Rescue Squad, and the task force rescued 60 individuals
- Additional Incidents:
 - Two firefighters became trapped in downed power lines and trees; one sustained injuries but was released from the hospital the following day.
 - A structure collapse trapped individuals inside, all of whom survived.
 - 15 water rescues involved individuals directly rescued from the water rather than flooded homes.

Staff installed Starlink to facilitate communication from the EOC, enabling connections with the State EOC and other key partners. Fire departments served as essential communication hubs, relaying crucial information across the County. Without the fire departments, Rescue Squad, and strike teams, staff would have been unaware of events unfolding in much of the County. The fire departments were critical in assisting those in need during communication outages.

On Saturday, September 28, staff continued emergency response efforts as waters began to recede. They learned that the City of Brevard's water treatment plant had lost power, with the generator surging and threatening the water supply. One of the investments made by the Commissioners was hiring two County electricians. One was dispatched to work on the generator. Emergency Management also coordinated with Carolina Energy Systems to restore power to the Brevard and Rosman water plants, a critical part of the response.

The Town of Rosman reported water system breaks that drained their capacity. Town staff worked to repair the lines, and Emergency Management secured generators to restore capacity within a few days. Ensuring access to water was a key priority. Emergency Management also requested water delivery from the State, as the need for water and communications infrastructure was a major concern, especially in areas still inaccessible or where the situation remained unclear.

At the same time, the City of Brevard notified staff of critically low fuel reserves, heightening concerns since rescue operations would halt without fuel. Fortunately, the County received a fuel shipment and replenished the City's tank to continue fueling first responder vehicles.

On that day, staff began distributing written briefings to AM radio stations and fire departments across the County. With other communication channels down, staff resorted to "old-school" methods. They focused on radio stations within reach, physically delivering the briefings. Staff received inquiries about why KISS FM, based in Asheville, did not receive a briefing. The reason was that staff could not leave the County to deliver it. Additionally, the County delivered daily briefings to fire departments whenever possible, as people turned to these locations for help and information.

Due to landslides, downed trees, and powerlines, numerous public travel safety concerns were identified. As a result, a curfew was instituted countywide from 8:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. to limit travel during the most dangerous conditions and ensure Duke Energy trucks and other emergency vehicles could navigate the County. Public Health managed the emergency shelter, which housed over 80 people at that time. The shelter, now operated by the Red Cross, remains active.

Road closures and safety assessments of transportation assets began during this period. Based on these assessments, some damaged roads were closed until repairs could be made. Non-emergency County staff also reported to the EOC to assist in the emergency response. The Manager commended the willingness of these

staff members, who, although not required, volunteered to work, and take on any task needed for the response.

From Sunday, September 29, to Sunday, October 5, the emergency response shifted to addressing immediate needs. Water concerns persisted due to water quality issues and boil-water requirements in the Town of Rosman. Emergency Management was notified on September 29 that a water tanker was enroute from Burlington, but it did not arrive until Thursday. In the meantime, staff contacted external partners to arrange water deliveries. Oskar Blues was a valuable partner, making direct water deliveries to the community to meet urgent needs. Late in the week, helicopter deliveries of water, food, and supplies began. By week's end, Emergency Services had accumulated more water than necessary and redirected excess resources to neighboring counties still lacking supplies. Unloading, inventorying, and distributing supplies became key responsibilities for County staff. The Manager praised the effort required to unload helicopter shipments, organize supplies, and distribute them to the community. She expressed gratitude to the staff who stepped up to ensure these critical functions were conducted.

With widespread power outages and extended disruptions, Emergency Management initiated a public feeding plan in collaboration with Anchor Baptist, Transylvania County Schools, and the Detention Center. The effort focused on identifying food supply vendors, hot meal preparation capabilities, and distribution coordination. The School System specifically targeted students in need of hot meal deliveries. Hot meals were also provided to first responders, including those from other counties, while public feeding efforts continued. Numerous nonprofits and faith organizations, acting independently, also stepped up to provide meals as they recognized the need. Thousands of meals were served that week, free of charge to the public. While the County has not yet gathered all the data on the total meals provided, the level of collaboration and community support in delivering food was remarkable.

Rumors of a fuel shortage led to long lines, despite assurances that fuel supplies were sufficient in the County. The resulting panic caused traffic congestion, hindering emergency vehicles and linemen trying to navigate through. Emergency Services developed traffic control plans, which law enforcement implemented, to ensure access to the hospital and other critical areas. Fuel deliveries were made to the City garage, and arrangements were made to prioritize first responder access. However, the County continued to struggle with diesel supplies for fire department vehicles. The Superintendent of Transylvania County Schools, who was embedded in the EOC, offered diesel from the school's reserves to fuel fire trucks and fire department generators. Without this support, some fire stations might have had to shut down.

As communications improved with the deployment of mobile towers from cell companies, the County began holding daily video briefings with the media while continuing to distribute written updates. Damage assessments also began, a crucial step for securing FEMA reimbursements, which must be accurate and complete. On Tuesday, shelter management transitioned to the Red Cross, and the shelter continues to serve families. By mid-week, most County services were restored, and some non-emergency Library staff were reassigned to assist with food distribution. Parks and Recreation continued supporting shelter operations.

Solid waste disposal boxes were placed to help with storm-related disposals, including debris from flooded homes and food losses. FEMA only reimburses for bona fide storm-related disposal, not regular household waste, even under a disaster declaration. Some confusion arose in the County about the purpose of these disposal boxes, likely due to areas with minimal damage not fully understanding the storm's impact in other parts of the County and neighboring counties. At the same time, EMS coordinated medical resources, including maintaining a third ambulance and addressing calls regarding prescription medications, oxygen tanks, and other medical needs.

Many agencies collaborated in the storm response, and the Manager highlighted several key partners in her presentation.

The Sheriff's Office worked closely with Public Safety, with the EOC operating from the Sheriff's training room. From this single location, Emergency Services coordinated feeding for hundreds of first responders, held meetings, and conducted briefings. The Sheriff's Office also leveraged its contacts with other sheriff's departments across North Carolina and beyond. Notably, the Brunswick County Sheriff sent a helicopter for damage assessments, and the Brevard County Sheriff's Department in Florida sent supplies. Many other agencies also provided staffing and resources. The Sheriff's Office worked with Emergency Management on numerous tasks, including emergency response, wellness checks, documenting roadblocks, tree cutting, food deliveries to students, and supporting feeding efforts.

Fire and Rescue Departments, along with the Rescue Squad, played vital roles in rescue operations, road closures, supply distribution, and communication. They also collaborated with community partners to address feeding needs.

Duke Energy was another key partner, with over 600 crews in the County at one point, restoring power to most residents within a week. Haywood Electric proactively supported restoration efforts ahead of Duke Energy.

Transylvania Regional Hospital coordinated with Transit to help discharge patients and get them home, as hospitals were full and Buncombe County hospitals, struggling with infrastructure and water shortages, were not accepting new patients.

The Manager emphasized the successful coordination to restore access to the Turkey Pen Gap community. The County is also seeking funding for a permanent solution to the road access issue. In addition, partner organizations and volunteers have assisted with tree removal, cleanup, food distribution, well-testing, and other recovery efforts.

Transylvania County Schools supported the response with feeding efforts, student wellness checks, supply drives, and deliveries. They also provided fuel for fire departments and assisted with road information coordination.

FEMA began door-to-door applications on Thursday and plans to open a fixed site later this week. Due to safety concerns over the weekend, door-to-door services were suspended in Transylvania County and across Western North Carolina. The County is working to establish a secure FEMA site. Emergency Management is also planning for a Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) to offer more than just application assistance.

The County received support from elected officials at both the federal and state levels. Congressman Edwards and Senator Budd's offices, along with Senator Corbin, Representative Clampitt, and the Governor's Western Coordinator, were instrumental. Representative Clampitt spent two days in the County, working on emergency response efforts before moving on to assist another county. The Manager also expressed gratitude to the Commissioners for their direct involvement and support throughout the response.

The emergency response has now entered the rebuilding phase, with housing emerging as the most urgent need. FEMA vouchers for hotel stays are not accepted in the County, and FEMA benefits are capped at \$42,000. Many residents lacked flood insurance, and FEMA's assistance will have limitations in fully covering the damage. Homes require significant repairs, and temporary housing is needed. There will not be enough FEMA funding to support all families in need. The County is collaborating with the City of Brevard, the Town of Rosman, the Housing Assistance Corporation, El Centro, Platt Architects, Sycamore Builders, and other partners to address housing needs. The Housing Assistance Corporation is urging those needing temporary housing or home repairs to register on their website. Individuals with rental units, RV or mobile home sites, or RVs to donate or lend are also encouraged to register to help match available resources with community needs. Addressing housing needs will require extensive case management, as each situation will

be unique. Emergency Management is working to coordinate additional emergency housing resources through State Emergency Management and FEMA, making progress despite the challenges of navigating state and federal systems.

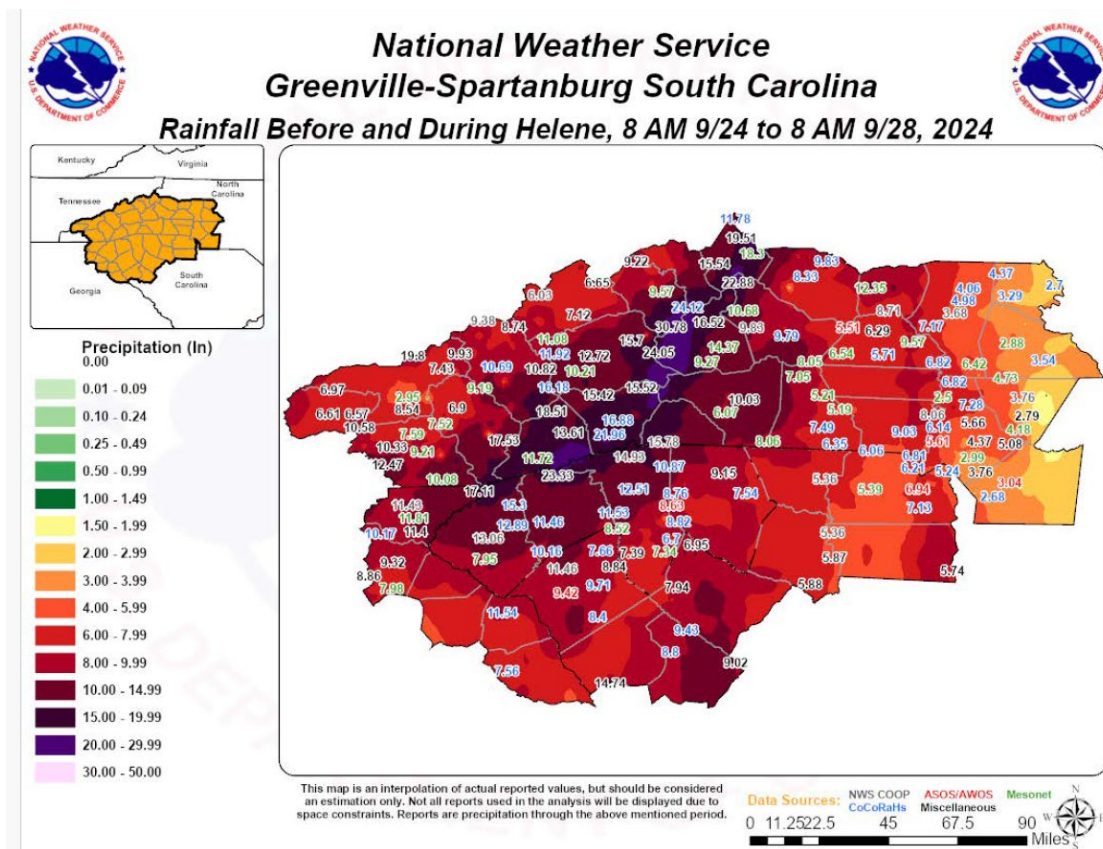
The Manager reported that Transylvania County experienced no storm-related deaths. Many residents lost their homes and possessions, and they continue to need ongoing assistance. County staff distributed over 200,000 water bottles, 90,000 MREs, and hundreds of food boxes. On September 27, the County received 600 calls for service, a significant increase from the typical 200 calls. Another spike occurred once cell communications were restored, as people who had previously been unable to call for help now reached out. In total, there were 18,000 radio calls on the primary dispatch channel, four to five times the usual volume. The Rescue Squad and Sheriff’s Office conducted over 500 wellness checks.

Three dams in Transylvania County failed, though fortunately, these failures did not cause catastrophic damage. River levels were significant, with the Davidson River peaking at 14 feet, the French Broad at Rosman peaking at almost 15 feet, and the French Broad at Blantyre peaking at 25 feet. Blantyre stopped reporting for several days, so the maximum height remains uncertain.

A total of 237 County employees worked 15,021 hours in the storm response:

- Non-exempt employees: 181 employees, averaging 64 hours worked
- Exempt employees: 38 employees, averaging 86 hours worked

The Manager presented a heat map from the National Weather Service showing rainfall before and during Hurricane Helene. Despite advances in technology and weather projections, no one could have predicted the full scope of the storm. The map clearly illustrated the extreme rainfall levels that contributed to devastating conditions in neighboring counties.



The Manager emphasized that this event would have a lasting impact on Transylvania County and Western North Carolina, with economic repercussions still unfolding and residents facing challenges in rebuilding their lives. She expressed deep gratitude for the community's resilience and cooperation and voiced hope that the spirit of goodwill and collaboration would continue as the County works through recovery and rebuilding efforts.

Chairman Chappell praised the dedicated service of the Emergency Management team, recognizing the many individuals who sacrificed personally, without knowing the status of their own homes, to ensure the safety of the community. He expressed hope that their contributions would not be forgotten. While acknowledging that Transylvania County was fortunate compared to others, he emphasized that recovery is ongoing, and the effects of the storm will be felt for many years. Drawing on stories from his grandparents and great-grandparents about the 1916 floods, he noted that the County's future recovery efforts would be remembered similarly. Chairman Chappell commended the professionalism, sacrifice, knowledge, and community dedication of the Emergency Management team. He also thanked Superintendent Dr. Fletcher and the staff of Transylvania County Schools for their crucial involvement, without which the response could not have progressed as effectively. He extended gratitude to volunteer and faith-based organizations, recognizing their pivotal role in ensuring the survival of many residents. He appreciated their relentless efforts to secure necessary resources for the County. Additionally, Chairman Chappell thanked State and federal elected officials for not only providing resources but also contributing their personal support. He stated that while the team should be proud of their accomplishments, the work is far from over, and the entire County needs to continue collaborating in the recovery process.

Commissioner Chapman shared a personal reflection about his wife, who serves on the Abandoned Cemeteries Board, receiving a call about gravestones found in the creek after the storm. He also mentioned his recent attendance at a North Carolina County Commissioners Board of Directors meeting in Greensboro, where he heard from other commissioners about the devastating loss of lives and entire communities in their areas. He expressed his gratitude to everyone who stepped up during the crisis. He reiterated the County Manager's point that the economic impact is still to come, particularly given the community's reliance on tourism. Commissioner Chapman highlighted the strain on local businesses, which depend on tourist traffic during this time of year for their profits. He extended thanks to the County Manager and staff for their efforts, as well as to Reverend Webb of the Sharing Housing for ensuring the community remains aware of ongoing needs. Commissioner Chapman also commended Anchor Baptist Church for coordinating the faith-based community and nonprofits during the crisis. He thanked the community and expressed his pride in serving and being part of it.

Commissioner McCall shared her admiration for the County Manager's leadership, first witnessing it during Tropical Storm Fred, and continuing to be impressed by the response team, including EMS, fire departments, and others, during the recent storm. She expressed immense pride after attending the evening briefings over the past few weeks. When asked by *The Transylvania Times* for her thoughts on the response, Commissioner McCall reflected on her career with the National Parks Service, where she participated in many incident command teams for hurricane recovery and wildfire response. She noted that she was in awe of the County's Emergency Response Team and found nothing to criticize. The County's preparations, led by the County Manager and the Emergency Management team, ensured Transylvania was better prepared than other counties. She recalled a conversation with a Brunswick County representative about the challenges of preparing for a hurricane in mountainous regions. Commissioner McCall also mentioned her nephew, a veteran volunteering in multi-county relief efforts, who compared the damage to what he saw during his deployment in Iraq. Commissioner McCall expressed her pride in the County's emergency response, reaffirming her belief that the community is fortunate to have such a dedicated team working on their behalf.

Commissioner Dalton shared his experience of the storm's severity, noting that with internet and communications down, many rain gauges were not reporting. He hiked to a neighbor's home to check a rain

gauge, which recorded over 36 inches of rain, highlighting the extreme volume of rainfall coming from the mountains. He believed that the County's location at the headwaters may have spared the area, as much of the water flow went north of Transylvania. Commissioner Dalton also recounted his visit to a nearby community to assist with relief efforts and was struck by the height of the water line. He expressed deep appreciation for the fire departments and EMTs from other counties and states who came to support local responders, giving them much-needed relief. Local churches providing meals to linemen and utility crews from places as far as Canada and Kentucky, played key roles in the recovery effort. Many Haywood Electric customers had their power restored, and North Toxaway Baptist Church was transformed into a supply warehouse, receiving shipments from as far as Vermont and Alabama. He emphasized the remarkable speed of recovery in some areas, such as East Fork, where the road was completely gone but reopened within days, and the immediate response to Turkey Pen Gap, where volunteers built a bridge in under half a day. While three of the County's 69 dams failed and others may be damaged, the response from the community was swift and effective. Commissioner Dalton shared personal experiences, such as assisting clients with prescriptions and driving as far as Greenville to obtain oxygen tanks. He praised the teamwork and dedication of first responders and communities, which put aside their own needs to assist others. Lastly, he urged a change in flood insurance coverage, noting that less than 2% of homes in Western North Carolina have flood insurance.

Commissioner McKelvey reflected on how the storm and the response period felt much longer than two weeks. He acknowledged that while the County was as prepared as possible, no one could have predicted the storm's magnitude. He praised the County staff for their tireless efforts, stating that they gave their absolute best in managing the situation. He expressed deep gratitude for the teamwork that brought the community together and shared his pride in Transylvania County. Commissioner McKelvey recalled assisting residents in Mills River and other areas who lost their homes and learning about the devastation in communities like Burnsville, where people were missing, and the entire water supply had been lost. While grateful that Transylvania County did not suffer any fatalities, Commissioner McKelvey recognized that a long road of recovery lies ahead. He thanked the County Manager, the staff, and all community partners for their dedicated response.

UPDATE ON 2024 GENERAL ELECTION BY ELECTIONS DIRECTOR

Elections Director Jeff Storey provided an update on preparations for the upcoming General Election and how the aftermath of Hurricane/Tropical Storm Helene may impact elections in Transylvania County.

The State Board of Elections approved a resolution on October 7, 2024, for 13 counties, later extended to 25 storm-affected counties by the NC Legislature. This resolution allows county election boards in these areas to alter early voting plans by bipartisan majority without needing State Board approval. This change addresses the destruction or damage to several early voting sites. However, Transylvania County has not modified its early voting plan, maintaining its scheduled dates, hours, and locations at the old Kmart and Rosman Town Hall. Mr. Storey noted the commitment of election workers, who attended training sessions during recovery despite limited communication.

The resolution also permits county boards to adjust Election Day precinct voting sites, if necessary, with a bipartisan vote and a written resolution detailing the impact of the disaster. In Transylvania County, 14 out of 15 precincts are confirmed as ready. The Cedar Mountain Community Center, however, experienced some damage and is currently serving as a supply distribution hub for storm recovery efforts. The County Election Board plans to consider a resolution to relocate this precinct temporarily to the nearby Family Life Center, just half a mile away.

The resolution provides additional flexibility for county boards in managing Election Day precinct poll worker assignments. Election law mandates a balance of poll workers from different political parties and specifies that most poll workers must reside within the precinct. Transylvania County currently has no

changes to its planned appointments. The County has designated 132 precinct workers for Election Day and 42 for early voting.

The resolution also extends the deadline for processing absentee ballot requests until November 4, typically a week before Election Day. This extension addresses disruptions in mail services caused by the storm. Additionally, it allows for an in-person "spoil and reissue" of absentee ballots at county offices, enabling voters to replace a damaged or undelivered absentee ballot. Completed absentee ballots may be delivered to the Elections office by 7:30 p.m. on Election Day from other county boards to ensure timely processing before the official canvassing.

The resolution permits voters (or a near relative/legal guardian) from designated hurricane-affected counties to hand-deliver their completed absentee ballots to any North Carolina county board of elections or the State Board by 7:30 p.m. on Election Day. Election officials will log each hand-delivered ballot's details, including the time, the person delivering and receiving the ballot, and the designated county. These ballots will be securely sealed, tracked with chain-of-custody documentation, and transported to the respective counties. This provision assists displaced residents by enabling them to submit their ballots outside their home county, ensuring their votes are counted. For voters who lost their homes or have mail delivery challenges, the post office is holding absentee ballots and will assist in transporting ballots to the appropriate election offices.

Additionally, the resolution authorizes the Board of Elections to appoint Multipartisan Assistance Team (MAT) members from other North Carolina counties. MATs, typically tasked with assisting in care facilities, can now assist with absentee ballot requests and voting in disaster shelters. This support is available upon request and extends MATs' ability to deliver completed absentee ballots or required cure documentation back to the county board of elections for processing, ensuring access to voting assistance for displaced voters.

The resolution allows county boards of elections in affected areas to process voter registration applications, though the deadline for voter registration itself has not been extended. However, same-day registration remains available during early voting. Additionally, the resolution permits election staff from other counties or the State Board to assist with voter registration or other office functions, increasing staffing flexibility for counties in need. While Transylvania County does not currently need outside assistance, this option remains available to other affected counties.

Commissioner McCall asked if absentee ballots require a witness, and Mr. Storey confirmed that two witnesses or a notary are necessary to validate the absentee voting process. Witnesses are only required to verify that the person voted, not the specific votes cast.

Commissioner McCall also inquired about the Multipartisan Assistance Teams (MATs) visiting nursing homes. Mr. Storey explained that the Elections Office reaches out to nursing homes to assess voter needs, and MATs are deployed if any residents require assistance.

Commissioner Chapman asked about the functionality of the new voting location in Cedar Mountain. Mr. Storey confirmed that it is fully operational, with more parking and ADA compliance, meeting all necessary election requirements.

APPOINTMENTS

JUVENILE CRIME PREVENTION COUNCIL

There is one Member-at-Large/County Commissioner Appointee vacancy on the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council. April Cameron applied for the position. She has an extensive background working with youth in the court system and would be an asset to this council.

Commissioner Dalton moved to appoint April Cameron to fill a vacancy on the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council, seconded by Commissioner McCall and unanimously approved.

VOTING DELEGATE TO NCACC LEGISLATIVE GOALS CONFERENCE

The NC Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) will hold its Legislative Goals Conference on November 14-15 at the Raleigh Marriott Crabtree Valley. This biennial event allows counties to participate in voting sessions to finalize the NCACC's legislative goals, guiding its advocacy for the upcoming General Assembly session. Each county appoints a voting delegate to represent their interests.

Due to scheduling conflicts, Commissioners Dalton, McKelvey, and McCall are unable to attend. Commissioner Chapman indicated he could serve as the Voting Delegate if another Commissioner would act as an alternate, given a possible personal commitment. Chairman Chappell agreed to serve as the alternate delegate if needed.

Commissioner McCall moved to appoint Commissioner Chapman as the Voting Delegate for Transylvania County, with Chairman Chappell as the alternate if Chapman cannot attend. Commissioner McKelvey seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved.

NEW BUSINESS

REVISIONS TO TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY INCENTIVE POLICY AND SCORING SYSTEM

Commissioner Dalton, along with a committee from the Transylvania Economic Alliance (TEA) Board, enlisted an incentives expert to assess the competitiveness of the County's current incentive program. This evaluation included a comparative analysis of incentive policies across North Carolina and neighboring states (TN, VA, and SC), aiming to strengthen Transylvania County's approach to attracting and retaining businesses. Another goal was to develop a draft policy for Brevard City Council's formal adoption, enabling TEA staff to extend incentive proposals within the City's jurisdiction as they currently do in partnership with the County.

TEA Executive Director Burton Hodges, with input from economic development attorney Ernie Pearson, conducted a detailed market analysis covering economic output, tier status, population, and other indicators. This analysis informed several proposed updates to the County's policy:

- **Minimum Investment Threshold:** Slightly raised to encourage significant investments in new projects.
- **Points and Scoring Matrix:** Revised to prioritize high-wage job creation, aligned with the NC Department of Commerce's wage standards for each county.
- **Extended Incentive Range:** Increased the incentive period for high-scoring projects to up to nine years.
- **Discretionary Criteria:** Added for high-impact projects that align with TEA's strategic goals, including building rehabilitation, support for existing industries, and target market alignment.

Staff recommended that the Board consider these revisions to the County's Incentive Policy and Scoring System as proposed by the TEA.

Commissioner Chapman asked if the goal was for the City of Brevard to adopt the same incentive policy as the County. Mr. Hodges confirmed that this alignment would be ideal, allowing the area to respond efficiently to competitive projects with clear expectations for both jurisdictions when negotiating incentive agreements.

Commissioner Chapman also questioned whether the proposed adjustments would make Transylvania County more competitive. Mr. Hodges affirmed this, highlighting the added focus on high-wage job creation as a positive enhancement. He noted that the committee's review of past projects informed the proposal to extend

the incentive agreement period from seven to nine years, further strengthening the County's competitive position.

When asked by Commissioner Chapman if companies have historically met their incentive obligations, Mr. Hodges confirmed that all projects receiving incentives during his tenure had remained compliant.

Commissioner Dalton added that the committee's research spanned incentive policies from other counties, noting that some were highly detailed while others had no formal policies. Drawing on this research, the committee focused on refining job and wage targets in the County's policy, which had not been reviewed in a decade, underscoring the need for an updated approach.

Commissioner Dalton moved to accept the revisions to the Transylvania County Incentive Policy and Scoring System, seconded by Commissioner McKelvey, and unanimously approved.

Chairman Chappell requested a summary of the Transylvania Tomorrow small business grants program. Mr. Hodges explained that in response to COVID-19, a coalition including the Heart of Brevard, the Chamber of Commerce, the Tourism Development Authority, the Transylvania Economic Alliance, and the Small Business Center at Blue Ridge Community College established a support fund for small businesses. Through private donations, they raised \$250,000, which was distributed to over 110 small businesses across the County. This coalition has now reconvened to relaunch the Transylvania Tomorrow Fund, aiming to raise \$500,000 to assist small businesses impacted by the recent hurricane and its potential long-term economic effects.

LAND OF SKY GRANT FOR COMMUNITY CENTER PUBLIC WI-FI UPGRADES

Information Technology Director Nathanael Carver presented a proposal to accept a \$20,000 grant from Land of Sky for public Wi-Fi upgrades in community centers. Since 2018, the County has provided funding for public Wi-Fi at various centers, including Eastatoe, Quebec, Lake Toxaway, Balsam Grove, Cathey's Creek, Dunn's Rock, See Off, Little River, El Centro, Williamson Creek, and Cedar Mountain. This grant will support equipment upgrades, improve Wi-Fi coverage, and add outdoor Wi-Fi to centers that lack it.

Commissioner McKelvey moved to accept the grant and authorize the County Manager to execute the documents, with Commissioner Dalton seconding. The motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner McCall thanked Mr. Carver for recent efforts to restore County connectivity, highlighting the grant's relevance as improved Wi-Fi will benefit communities now.

Commissioner Chapman proposed evaluating community centers as potential emergency communication hubs in future disasters and inquired about using Starlink for additional resilience. Mr. Carver confirmed that community centers are being designated as anchor institutions to access more funding. He and Commissioner Dalton noted Starlink's current costs of \$300-\$400, with free service available through year-end.

AUTHORIZE MATCHING FUNDS FOR RADIO GRANT AND ACCEPTANCE OF GRANT

With Kenwood discontinuing support for certain radio models and exiting the public safety market, the County faces accelerated replacement costs for its radio equipment. To offset this, the County successfully secured a \$1 million federal grant to cover a significant portion of the \$1.3 million needed for new radios. The County Manager indicated that an assigned fund balance for emergency services would be used for the \$250,000 required match for the grant. The Manager also recommended establishing a replacement cycle schedule to avoid a future need for large-scale radio replacements. Despite recent economic strains due to the hurricane, the Manager emphasized the importance of this investment, underscored by the recent disaster's communication challenges.

Commissioner McCall moved to accept the \$1 million COPS grant and approve \$250,000 from the Emergency Services Assigned Fund balance as matching funds for the radio purchase. Commissioner McKelvey seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Chapman asked about the timeline for acquiring the radios. The County Manager confirmed that once funds are disbursed, Motorola could deliver the equipment within three days.

EXTENSION OF BOND ORDER AUTHORIZING THE ISSUANCE OF \$68 MILLION GENERAL OBLIGATION SCHOOL BONDS

The Board held a public hearing on extending the bond order authorizing \$68 million in general obligation school bonds, initially approved by voters on November 6, 2018, and effective until November 6, 2025. Following the Local Government Commission's approval, the extension will extend the authorization to November 6, 2028, allowing the County additional time to issue the second tranche of bonds.

The County Manager explained that this extension formalizes the ability to use the bond authorization through 2028. The Board has already planned a five-year funding cycle for the initial bond-funded projects in the Education Capital Fund. The first bond sale is scheduled for this week to fund initial projects, and this extension ensures flexibility for future bond issuance as planned.

Commissioner McCall highlighted that this extension is a procedural step in an ongoing plan that has been under discussion for several months. She also noted that the County received high bond ratings—second highest from both S&P and Moody’s—despite the timing during hurricane recovery efforts. The County Manager confirmed the sale date as Wednesday.

Commissioner Chapman moved to adopt the extension order and direct the Clerk to publish a Notice of Adoption. Commissioner McCall seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

**EXTENSION OF
BOND ORDER AUTHORIZING THE ISSUANCE OF
\$68,000,000 GENERAL OBLIGATION SCHOOL BONDS
OF THE COUNTY OF TRANSYLVANIA, NORTH CAROLINA**

WHEREAS, on July 23, 2018, the Board of Commissioners of the County of Transylvania, North Carolina (the “*Board of Commissioners*”) adopted a bond order (the “*Bond Order*”) authorizing \$68,000,000 General Obligation School Bonds of the County of Transylvania, North Carolina (the “*County*”) to pay the capital costs of constructing, improving, renovating and equipping school facilities, including improvements at Brevard High School, Rosman High School and Rosman Middle School, and acquiring land or rights-in-land required therefor;

WHEREAS, the Bond Order took effect upon its approval by the voters of the County at a referendum on November 6, 2018;

WHEREAS, as permitted by the Local Government Bond Act, the County applied to the Local Government Commission to extend the Bond Order from seven years to 10 years after November 6, 2018;

WHEREAS, the Local Government Commission formally entered an order approving the County’s request for a three-year extension of the Bond Order on September 10, 2024; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners held a public hearing on October 14, 2024, on the question of whether the maximum time period for issuing bonds under the Bond Order should be extended from seven years to 10 years after November 6, 2018;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDERED BY THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF THE COUNTY OF TRANSYLVANIA, NORTH CAROLINA, AS FOLLOWS:

Section 1. The maximum time period for issuing bonds under the Bond Order has been extended from seven years to 10 years after November 6, 2018.

Section 2. This order will take effect 30 days after its publication.

READ, APPROVED, AND ADOPTED this the 14th day of October 2024.

S://Jason R. Chappell, Chairman
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

MANAGER'S REPORT

The Manager provided several updates:

- The County achieved a strong bond rating (AA) from both Standard & Poor's and Moody's. The bond sale is scheduled for Wednesday. The Manager commended the Finance Director for successfully coordinating both the bond sale and emergency funding efforts during storm recovery.
- The County Manager and the School Superintendent were close to finalizing the school bond project agreement before the storm and plan to resume soon. Both entities will issue joint RFQs to advance the project. Additionally, the Superintendent reported minimal storm damage at the school facilities.
- Infrastructure challenges highlighted by the storm underscored the importance of the County-funded interconnect between Rosman and Brevard. The County has \$10 million in State funds from FY23 and aims to allocate these funds effectively. The Manager proposed issuing a request for Asset Inventories and Capital Needs Lists from Rosman and Brevard to assess critical needs, with potential investment in areas like Brevard's wastewater plant or a future Rosman water plant. This data will support an upcoming capital planning workshop in early 2025, coordinated with the budget process. By then, Commissioners will also have figures from the courthouse project and the first bond sale.
- Residents needing temporary housing or home repairs due to Hurricane Helene are encouraged to register with the Housing Assistance Corporation. The organization's website, www.housing-assistance.com, features a registration link for those in need. This initiative operates separately from the FEMA process, which residents should also complete. Additionally, owners of rental units, RV or mobile home sites, and those able to donate RVs or funds for housing solutions are encouraged to register through the same link. This will allow staff to assess needs individually and connect people with suitable resources.
- The Manager noted that the County's federal radio grant was approved, with special recognition to Congressman Edwards for his assistance. The Congressman's office is also collaborating with the County on a federal grant application for ambulances.
- In July, the Board voted to put a new quarter-cent sales tax on the ballot, which would raise the County's sales tax rate from 6.75% to 7% if approved by voters and enacted by the Board. Educational materials explaining the referendum's potential benefits have been made available in the foyer and online. The Manager highlighted that, given the economic impacts of the recent storm, the proposed sales tax would bolster County operations and maintain momentum for capital projects. The additional funding would play a significant role in the County's capital planning and future project investments.

The County Manager expressed gratitude to the Commissioners for allowing her to present an update on the County's storm response. She acknowledged that some County employees were significantly impacted personally by the storm, with some losing their homes. Many employees who were part of the response team continued their duties for days, prioritizing community service despite uncertainties about the safety of their

own homes and loved ones. The Manager emphasized the County's commitment to supporting these employees and ensuring they have access to necessary resources during recovery. Additionally, she reiterated the call for community members who can provide rental units, RV spaces, or other resources to assist those in need of housing due to the hurricane's impacts, including affected County employees and students in the School System.

Commissioner Dalton raised concerns about contractor availability for the school RFQs due to the increased demand for repairs following the hurricane. The County Manager acknowledged this, noting that while the four main construction contracts should attract responses, the timing could indeed be affected by the heightened activity in the area. Additionally, she mentioned that the County's engineering and legal resources have also been impacted by the storm, potentially creating challenges in securing professional services.

Commissioner Chapman asked about the potential impacts of the storm on the ongoing property tax reevaluation. The County Manager clarified that the reevaluation timeline will proceed as planned. However, damage assessments conducted by the Building and Inspections team will be forwarded to the Tax Office, ensuring that the January property valuations reflect any storm-related damage to homes. These valuations will be adjusted again once repairs are completed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The comments represent the speakers' opinions or points of view.

Karen Gleasman: Ms. Gleasman expressed her gratitude to the Commissioners and County staff for their hard work over the past three weeks. She acknowledged the immense challenges they have faced and suggested that they take time to process the emotional impact of the recent events.

COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

Commissioner Chapman extended his gratitude to everyone involved in the storm response and urged staff to take time off when possible. He reminded citizens that early voting opens on Thursday and encouraged everyone to vote, recommending that voters read to the end of the ballot.

Commissioner McCall inquired if the hurricane had led students from other areas to enroll in Transylvania County Schools. Superintendent Fletcher confirmed that approximately 18 students from other counties and, in one case, another state, had enrolled due to displacement. Dr. Fisher explained that the McKinney-Vento Act allows homeless students to enroll in any district. Commissioner McCall reflected on the unpredictability of the storm, recalling a comment: "Asking the mountains to prepare for a hurricane is like asking Florida to prepare for a blizzard." She thanked everyone again for their efforts.

Commissioner Dalton recalled stories from his childhood when family members shared memories of past significant weather events, such as the 1916 floods, 1964 floods, and the 1993 blizzard. He mentioned a family who recently rebuilt after Tropical Storm Fred, only to experience flooding again.

Chairman Chappell encouraged citizens to visit the resource page on the County website, highlighting resources like special unemployment assistance, SBA support at Blue Ridge Community College, and FEMA applications available through [disasterassistance.gov](https://www.disasterassistance.gov). He also recognized individuals who went above and beyond in the storm response, including County electricians who kept essential equipment running in Brevard and Rosman. He commended Senator Corbin for his ongoing support, particularly in expediting critical repairs on Highway 276. Chairman Chappell shared that Senator Corbin plans to hold a public meeting at the end of the month to discuss Phase 2 needs in the county.

Lastly, Chairman Chappell acknowledged Madison County Board Chairman Matthew Wechtel for supporting Transylvania County Sheriff's deputies with meals while they were deployed, as well as thanking the Town of Rosman, legislative partners, the School System, Emergency Management, Toxaway Charities, and many more for their collaboration.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, **Commissioner Dalton moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:10 p.m., seconded by Commissioner McKelvey and unanimously carried.**

Jason R. Chappell, Chairman
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

Trisha M. Hogan, Clerk to the Board