

MINUTES
TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
FEBRUARY 10, 2025 – REGULAR MEETING

The Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County met in a regular meeting on Monday, February 10, 2025, 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, County Attorney Julie Hooten, and Clerk to the Board Trisha Hogan were also present.

Media: Laura Denon – *The Transylvania Times*

There were approximately 50 people in the audience, including staff presenters.

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 COMMENT

The following remarks reflect the opinions and viewpoints of the speakers.

Steve Keate: Mr. Keate addressed the Board to share his perspective on the City of Brevard's request for County funding to subsidize the construction of affordable housing units. He acknowledged that affordable housing is in short supply, particularly given that 50% of the County's land is owned by the federal and state government, and much of the remaining land is prone to flooding or has poor soil conditions. However, he urged the Board to reject the use of taxpayer dollars for this initiative, arguing that public funds should not be used to benefit only a small segment of the population. He stated that local government should remain focused on providing essential services for the entire community rather than directly subsidizing housing. Instead, he suggested that the County's role should involve reviewing zoning regulations and providing physical infrastructure support to facilitate development. He emphasized that the free market is best equipped to allocate private capital efficiently and meet local housing needs, rather than relying on government intervention. Mr. Keate urged the Board of Commissioners to embrace individual liberty and free-market solutions, not socialism.

AGENDA MODIFICATIONS

There were no agenda modifications.

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

CONSENT AGENDA

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

The Board approved the following:

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Monday, January 27, 2025. The Board approved the minutes as submitted.

PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION BYLAWS REVISION

The Parks and Recreation Commission adjusted its regular meeting schedule from monthly to quarterly. Since the bylaws previously required monthly meetings, staff proposed a revision to state that the Commission would establish and adhere to a regular meeting schedule, allowing flexibility without frequent bylaw amendments. Additional minor changes were also included. The Board approved the revised bylaws.

APPROVAL OF RECORDS RETENTION AND DISPOSITION POLICY

County staff have experienced a sharp increase in extensive public records requests, often spanning multiple years and thousands of records. In response, the County Attorney and Manager provided a presentation to the Board on January 27, outlining public records requirements under North Carolina law as a precursor to drafting a public records policy. A key component of the policy will be adherence to the State's records retention and disposition policy, which helps manage record storage and retrieval. Historically, County departments have retained all records, but with the growth of digital files and associated storage costs, following retention schedules will streamline records management and improve efficiency in responding to requests. Retention and disposition schedules, developed by the NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, guide local government agencies on when and how records can be destroyed. These schedules require approval from the local governing board before implementation. The last update to the County's policy was on October 1, 2021, and approved by the Board on November 8, 2021. To support policy development, staff recommended approving schedules for all departments simultaneously. The Board approved the current records retention and disposition policies for all County departments.

TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY COMMUNITY CHILD PROTECTION TEAM (CCPT) 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

The purpose of the Community Child Protection Team (CCPT) is to develop a community-wide approach to addressing child abuse and neglect, identify gaps in service delivery, and recommend improvements to support the safe and healthy development of children while preventing future abuse, neglect, and fatalities. Under N.C.G.S. § 7B-1407.10(d), local CCPTs are required to submit an annual report to the Board of County Commissioners, outlining their activities, findings, and any recommendations for systemic improvements and resource needs. A copy of the report is also submitted to the State office. The 2024 annual report for the Transylvania County CCPT summarized the team's activities, including the number of fatality reviews and Department of Social Services (DSS) case reviews conducted. It also provided recommendations to enhance the system and address service gaps to better protect children. The Board accepted the report.

CARE COALITION REQUEST TO APPLY FOR SOBER TRUTH ON PREVENTING UNDERAGE DRINKING (STOP) GRANT FROM SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION (SAMHSA)

The CARE Coalition requested Board approval to apply for the Sober Truth on Preventing Underage Drinking (STOP) Grant, administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The purpose of this grant is to strengthen substance misuse prevention efforts in Transylvania County by reducing underage drinking and its associated risks through community-based prevention and early

intervention programs. Additionally, the initiative aims to limit youth access to alcohol. This grant aligns with Transylvania County's strategic opioid response plan, where prevention programming was identified as a top priority. Pursuing this funding opportunity reflects CARE's commitment to securing external resources to enhance substance misuse prevention services within the county. The grant provides up to \$60,000 per year for four years, supporting CARE and its partners in expanding evidence-based prevention and intervention programs. These efforts address an often-overlooked aspect of substance use prevention—underage drinking. Existing program staff are trained and prepared to implement the initiative. The application deadline is March 17, 2025, with the program start date set for September 30, 2025, if awarded. The Board approved CARE Coalition's request to apply for the STOP Grant.

SPENDING AUTHORIZATION RESOLUTION AMENDMENT FOR OPIOID SETTLEMENT FUNDS

The Board approved an amendment to Resolution #33-2024 to authorize the use of \$200,000 from the opioid settlement special revenue fund through June 30, 2028, to support a Substance Use Systems Coordinator. This position will oversee compliance with North Carolina's Memorandum of Agreement requirements and facilitate the implementation of strategies outlined in Transylvania County's opioid response plan. The amendment rescinds previously authorized funding for jail-based reentry and treatment services, as the original resolution provided emergency funding to sustain staff positions due to delays in federal funding disbursement. To maximize the impact of limited opioid settlement funds, the CARE Coalition will continue seeking grants and other nontaxpayer funding sources to support additional priority strategies identified in the county's opioid response plan.

A RESOLUTION BY THE COUNTY OF TRANSYLVANIA TO AMEND RESOLUTION #33-2024

WHEREAS Transylvania County has joined national settlement agreements with companies engaged in the manufacturing, distribution, and dispensing of opioids.

WHEREAS the allocation, use, and reporting of funds stemming from these national settlement agreements and bankruptcy resolutions ("Opioid Settlement Funds") are governed by the Memorandum of Agreement Between the State of North Carolina and Local Governments on Proceeds Relating to the Settlement of Opioid Litigation ("MOA") and the Supplemental Agreement for Additional Funds from Additional Settlements of Opioid Litigation ("SAAF").

WHEREAS Transylvania County has received Opioid Settlement Funds pursuant to these national settlement agreements and deposited the Opioid Settlement Funds in a separate special revenue fund as required by section D of the MOA.

WHEREAS section E.6 of the MOA states that, before spending opioid settlement funds, the local government's governing body must adopt a resolution that:

- (i) indicates that it is an authorization for expenditure of opioid settlement funds; and,
- (ii) states the specific strategy or strategies the county or municipality intends to fund pursuant to Option A or Option B, using the item letter and/or number in Exhibit A or Exhibit B to identify each funded strategy; and,
- (iii) states the amount dedicated to each strategy for a specific period of time.

WHEREAS the jail-based treatment and reentry program began and previously had been funded exclusively through grant funding, and continuation of said funding had been delayed and uncertain at the time of the original resolution.

WHEREAS a portion of the funding approved in Resolution #33-2024, as originally adopted, was in the nature of an emergency funding resolution for the jail-based reentry and treatment program because Transylvania County sought to ensure the continuation of staff positions for this program.

WHEREAS no local appropriation was included in Transylvania County's FY24-25 budget or in previous years to fund the jail-based reentry and treatment program.

WHEREAS Transylvania County did not intend to use Opioid Settlement Funds to support the jail-based reentry and treatment program because it would prohibit the use of the funds for other strategic priority programs, identified and recommended in Transylvania County's Opioid Response Plan.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, in alignment with the NC MOA and SAAF, Transylvania County authorizes the expenditure of opioid settlement funds as follows:

1. Strategy authorized:

- a. Name of strategy: Collaborative Strategic Planning
- b. Strategy is included in Exhibit A
- c. Item letter and/or number in Exhibit A or Exhibit B to the MOA: 1
- d. Amount authorized for this strategy: \$ 200,000
- e. Period of time during which expenditure may take place:
Start date January 31, 2025 through End date June 30, 2028
- f. Description of the program, project, or activity: Funding will support salary, benefits, expenses, and equipment to support Substance Use Systems Coordinator. This 0.5 FTE position will plan, organize, and manage Transylvania County's strategic plan and NC MOA requirements. The Substance Use Systems Coordinator will provide oversight of county programs, contracts, and grants related to substance misuse and behavioral health.
- g. Provider: Transylvania County

The total dollar amount of Opioid Settlement Funds appropriated across the above named and authorized strategies is \$ 200,000 .

2. The use of Opioid Settlement Funds for the jail-based treatment and reentry program strategies from the original resolution are rescinded.

Revised and amended this the 10th day of February 2025.

PRESENTATIONS/RECOGNITIONS

SEMI-ANNUAL DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS - FY 2026 BUDGET KICKOFF

Department Heads presented mid-year reports summarizing their accomplishments over the first six months of the fiscal year and highlighting trends that may impact future budget planning. These reports, along with supplemental materials, were provided to the Board in a separate notebook for reference. The presentations will continue over the next two meetings.

The County Manager officially kicked off the FY 2026 budget season, emphasizing the importance of showcasing the County's work in serving its citizens. Each department was allotted five minutes for their presentation, with exceptions for those overseeing multiple functions. These reports serve as a snapshot to help the Board prepare for upcoming budget discussions.

To maintain efficiency, the Manager enforced time limits on presentations; however, the Clerk to the Board included the full reports for reference. The Board was encouraged to submit questions after the meeting to keep the presentations on schedule.

Department of Social Services (DSS) – by Director Amanda Vanderoef

Accomplishments

- Exceeding State Standards in child welfare and adult services per the NC DHHS Memorandum of Understanding.
- Achieved permanency for eight children in DSS custody since July 2024.
- Medicaid programs consistently passing monthly report card evaluations.
- Veritas HHS (Child Support Services contractor) ranked 3rd-10th statewide.
- 21 licensed foster homes, with numbers continuing to increase.
- Five frontline staff completed the 2024 Rise Up mentorship program (developed in-house); seven staff members enrolled in the 2025 session.
- Holiday Support: Facilitated community sponsorships for 60 children and disabled adults.
- D-SNAP Operations:
 - Processed 1,026 applications, approving \$670,634 in benefits.
 - 49 of 56 DSS staff participated in the implementation.
 - The Library and Sheriff's Office collaborated to provide the service over seven days.
 - USDA praised staff and operations.
- Transylvania County selected as one of two NC counties to receive a scholarship to attend the National Elder Abuse MDT Summit in Washington, D.C. (May 2025), sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice Elder Justice Initiative.
- Food & Nutrition Division:
 - State audit (Management Evaluation) included customer service calls.
 - DSS staff earned the highest rating of "5" in all areas.

Goals

- Enhance recruitment efforts for foster and respite care providers, including kinship placements.
- Invest in staff development through leadership training and professional growth initiatives.
- Strengthen communication with stakeholders and staff to improve engagement and outcome tracking.
- Recruit and retain a qualified workforce.

Trends

- Lack of affordable/appropriate housing for disabled adults; increase in hoarding and unsanitary living conditions.
- Increase in Assistance Applications:
 - Medicaid: 800+ applications since July.
 - Food & Nutrition: 780 applications since July.
- Seven children entered DSS custody since July due to parental substance use and untreated mental illness.
 - 35-40% of children in DSS custody placed with kinship caregivers.
 - 34% of children in DSS custody placed within the county.
- Work First Program:
 - Increased demand for rent and utility assistance to prevent homelessness.
- Medicaid Expansion:
 - Steady application rates with a sharp increase from November 1 – January 15 due to open enrollment.
 - 1,653 Medicaid expansion applications approved, covering 9.8% of the county's adult population.

- Staff retention improved by 50% in 2024.

New Adventure Learning Center – by Director Amanda Vanderoef

Accomplishments

- Hired a full-time processing assistant to support operations.
- Staff pursuing higher education in Early Childhood Education.
- Maintained superior sanitation rating.
- Successful annual State License visit with no findings.
- Continued 5-star license status.
- Full compliance with all regulatory training requirements.

Goals

- Enhance security by adding keyless entry systems.
- Expand substitute teacher and volunteer pool.
- Strengthen parent, family, and community involvement.
- Increase staff training opportunities.
- Receive training on the New Environmental Rating Assessment System.

Trends

- Hiring challenges: Limited pool of qualified applicants.
- Strong partnerships with community, parents, and caregivers.
- More operational days compared to other daycare centers.
- Partnership with Transylvania County Schools:
 - High school students taking EDU 119 through Blue Ridge Community College gain Early Childhood Education classroom hours.
- High demand for services: Waitlist exceeds 150 children.
- Health concerns: Increased RSV cases throughout the center.
- Behavioral challenges: Rising cases of challenging behaviors among children.

Building Permitting & Enforcement – by Director Mike Owen

Accomplishments

- Strong performance in 2024 with increased permits issued, fees collected, and inspections performed.
- Rapid response to Hurricane Helene: Inspections for life safety and damage assessments.
- Timely damage assessments completed with minimal disruption to regular operations.
- Staff certifications:
 - Rick Mickewicz: Level III Standard certifications in all trades.
 - Spencer Groner: Level I in Electrical and Level II in Plumbing.
 - Mabry Robinson: Level I in Plumbing.
- Excellent customer service with responses within 24 hours of requests.
- Stable staff with no turnover.

Goals

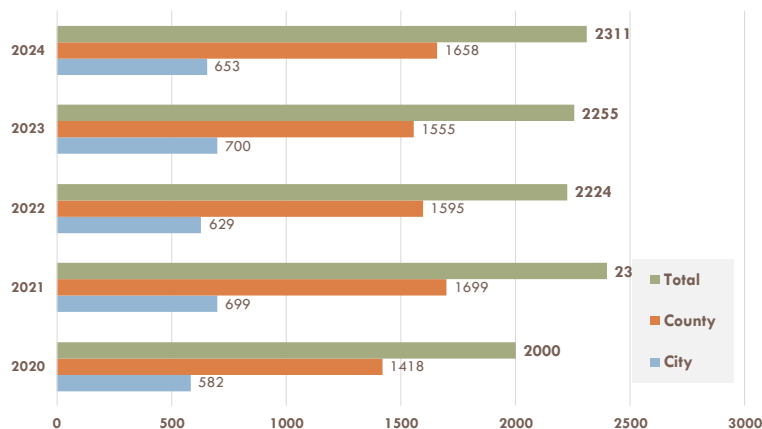
- Enforce minimum code requirements to ensure the safety, health, and welfare of citizens and contractors.
- Expand software capabilities to improve service for contractors and citizens.
- Retain qualified inspectors (Level III) to meet Department of Insurance trade requirements.
- Educate staff on 2024 NC Building Codes and relevant laws and statutes.
- Ensure accurate property identification to avoid issuing permits in floodplain areas or other restricted zones.

- Provide quality inspections for the county’s residents.

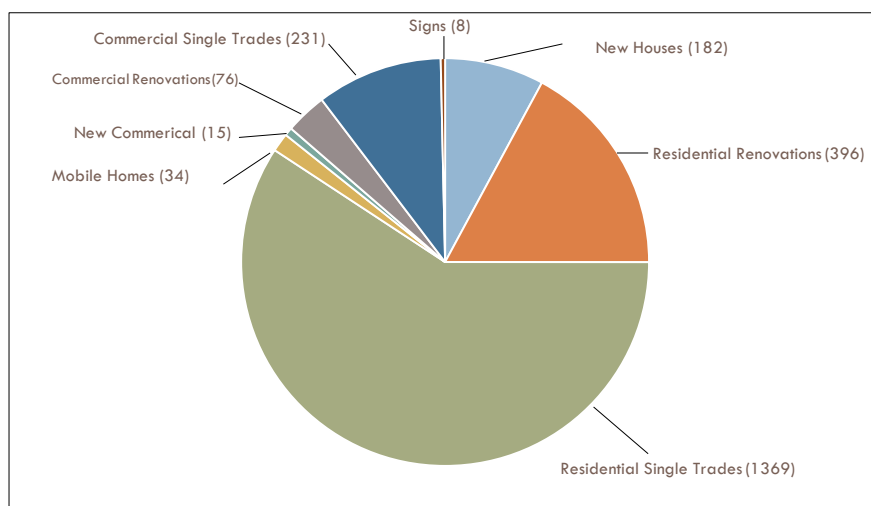
Trends

- Hurricane Helene brought historic flooding and tree damage, requiring additional inspections and increasing community questions.
- Strong local collaboration: Worked with contractors, government agencies, and local government to guide affected residents.
- Flood damage assessments were also completed in the City of Brevard and the ETJ.
- Price increases have led homeowners to act as their own general contractor, leading to delayed inspections and an increase in questions for staff.

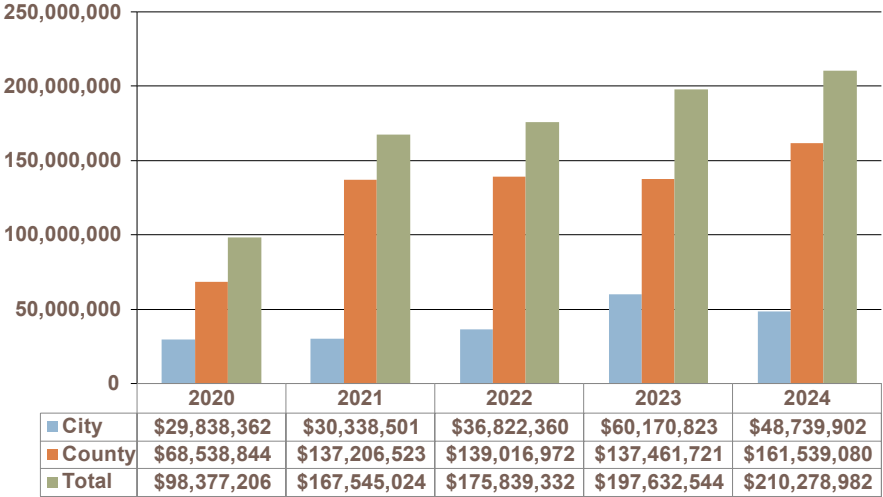
Total Permits Issued 2020 - 2024



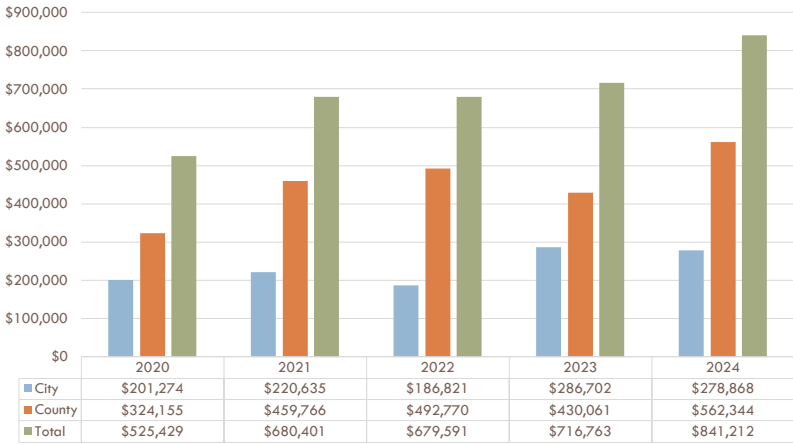
2024 Permits by Type



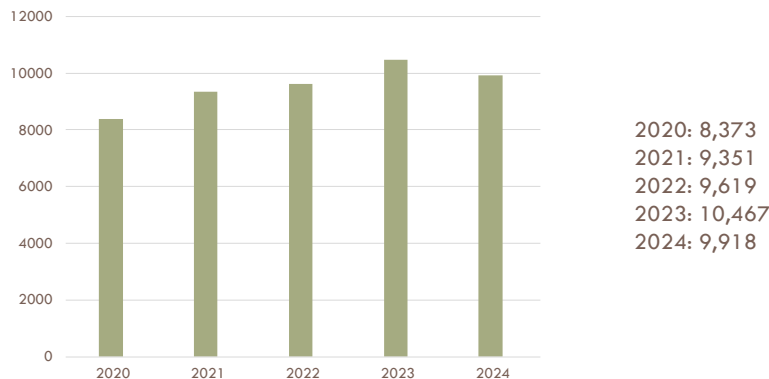
Total Construction Value 2020 - 2024



Total Fees Collected 2020 - 2024



Number of Inspections 2020 – 2024



EMS – by Director Kim Bailey

Accomplishments

- Staffing collaboration with community partners to tackle local recruitment and retention challenges.
- Completion of TCEMS Brevard base relocation and replacement:
 - Ribbon cutting and open house on July 18, 2024.
 - Operations began on July 24, 2024.
- Worked with local, state, and federal agencies during Hurricane Helene to ensure service continuity and resources for citizens and staff.
- Peer Support Team development: Continuing recruitment and application acceptance, along with making referrals to available resources.
- Vital equipment and software procurement.
- Protocol and SOP updates to meet NCOEMS standards.
- Ongoing collaboration with Mission Health/HCA on strategies to reduce out-of-county transports.
- Worked with Finance to meet Medicare reporting requirements.

Trends

- Recruitment and retention remain a significant challenge locally, statewide, and nationwide.
 - Staffing shortages continue to impact TCEMS operations.
 - Recent changes (pay study recommendations and new Brevard Base) are aiding recruitment and retention.
- Stress management and mental health needs continue to rise: Increased PTSD and suicide prevention education needed for emergency services personnel.
- Healthcare reform and regulation changes are affecting EMS agencies, including updates to OSHA “Fire Brigades” Standard.
- Response times:
 - Turnaround times over 15 minutes persist due to hospital volume, staffing needs, and hospital diversions.
 - Out-of-county transports increased by 70 compared to 2023.
 - Average response time: 11.4 minutes in 2024 (2.5 minutes longer than the national standard).
 - Response time by district ranged from 8.6 to 26.8 minutes.

- Peer counties had average EMS response times from 9.5 to 11.9 minutes.
- Call volume: 5,086 in 2024, a 1.4% decrease from 2023.
- Helicopter transports: 57.
- Transylvania County Rescue Squad assisted 51 times, resulting in 29 transports.

Goals

- Collaborate with community partners to address staffing challenges.
- Focus on mental health training: Enhance Stress Management, PTSD, and Suicide Prevention education for emergency service staff.
- Coordinate mental health and resiliency training for local emergency responders.
- Reduce response times with Board of Commissioners' guidance, focusing on outlying areas with moderate call volume.
- Replace outdated equipment to maintain service efficiency.
- Resuming mass violence training in partnership with Blue Ridge Community College and Sheriff's Office.
- Improve continuing education for EMS personnel and increase training offerings.
- Continue efforts to reduce out-of-county transports with HCA collaboration.
- Work with Transylvania Regional Hospital to reduce diversions and ensure timely EMS coverage across the County.

Soil and Water Conservation – by Director Jeff Parker

Accomplishments

- Water Quality Improvement: Secured two contracts totaling \$182,999 to enhance water quality.
- NRCS Agricultural Contracts: Obtained five contracts worth \$703,596, benefiting 210 acres.
- Streambank Stabilization:
 - Partnered with Resource Institute to stabilize 7,950 feet of streambank.
 - Prevented 430 tons of sediment from entering surface waters.
- Education Outreach:
 - Conducted 34 educational presentations for over 850 students, exceeding the goal of 30 presentations.
- NC Agriculture Cost Share Program (NCACSP):
 - Allocated \$182,999 across two contracts.
 - Reduced 77 tons of soil loss (128% of goal).
 - Impacted 45 acres (113% of goal).

Trends

- French Broad River Debris Removal:
 - \$14,400 expended on five sites so far.
 - Post-Hurricane Helene, 14 additional debris sites have been reported.
- Equipment Rental Program:
 - Rented equipment to six farmers over 11 days, impacting 56 acres.
 - Expected increase in rentals during spring planting season.

Goals

- Complete Hurricane Helene recovery projects, including Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) efforts.
- Administer NCACSP and other funding sources to reduce sedimentation and improve water conservation.
- Expand awareness of the district's rental equipment program to increase usage and revenue.

Solid Waste – by Director Kenn Webb

Trends



Current placement of waste January 2025

How long do we have in current landfill?

- Landfill Lifespan (4A) is affected by several factors of which compaction and landfill receipts are primary

Date	Estimated Years	Estimated Lifespan
June 2024	2.0 years	June 2026
June 2023	2.9 years	April 2026
June 2022	3.3 years	October 2025
June 2021	5.4 years	October 2026
June 2020	7 years	May 2027

- Landfill Volume Increase:
 - 21% increase in landfill material, primarily due to fourth-quarter surges.
- Landfill Lifespan Management:
 - Compaction efforts continue to help stabilize and extend the lifespan of the current landfill cell.
- Hurricane Helene Impact:
 - Significant increase in solid waste receipts due to storm debris.
 - Additional impacts expected in 2025, especially from demolition-related waste.
- Recycling & Scrap Metal Trends:
 - Household recycling credits improved from 2023 to 2024.
 - Monitoring scrap metal receipts for long-term Hurricane Helene impact.
- Land Clearing & Inert Debris (LCID):
 - Hurricane Helene debris removal will extend into 2025.
 - Totals do not include materials collected by NCDOT or USACE.
- 2024 Environmental Data:
 - Total Rainfall: 100.26 inches (compared to a five-year average of 90.97 inches).
 - Leachate Collected: 3,582,600 gallons (five-year average: 4,070,320 gallons).

Goals

- Landfill Expansion:
 - Permit to construct received from NCDEQ.
 - Two bid attempts in 2024 failed due to lack of multiple bidders.
 - Phase 7 landfill construction rebid to be released by March 1, 2025.
 - Construction expected to begin in April 2025, with an anticipated seven-month completion timeline.

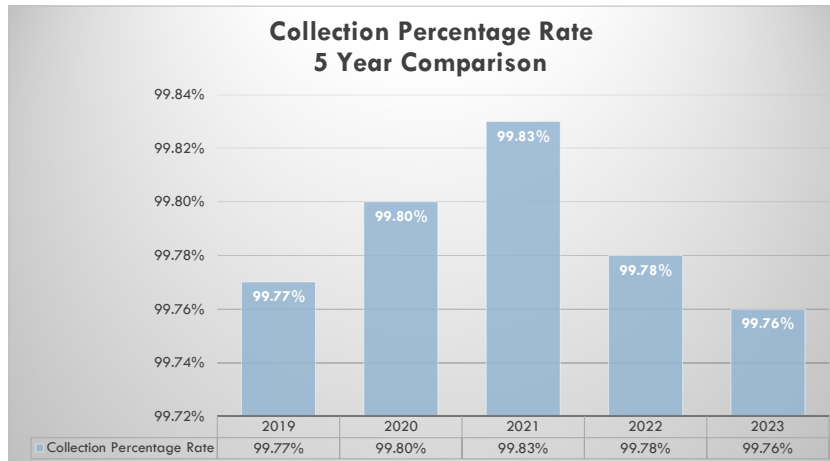


Photo from July 2023 facing Northwest -
as of February 2025, this area is now being
filled as a part of Phase 6 Vertical Expansion

Tax Administration – by Administrator Jessica McCall

Accomplishments

- Top Collection Rates in NC:
 - 99.76% collection rate for 2023 tax bills as of June 30, 2024.
 - All districts achieved a collection rate of 99.33% or higher.
 - Processed approximately 5,600 phone calls, 155 payment plans, \$19,504 in bank attachments, and \$8,100.44 in wage garnishments.
- Enhanced Payment Options:
 - Payment coupons and e-Statements included with 2023 tax bills.
 - Well-received by taxpayers, leading to more partial payments and fewer delinquencies.
- Implementation of New Credit Card Platform (Invoice Cloud):
 - Launched October 31, 2023, and positively received by both taxpayers and staff.
 - Expanded payment options: e-checks, credit/debit cards, PayPal, Venmo, and more.
 - Supports paperless billing, scheduled payments, and streamlined online payments.



- Present Use Value Review:
 - Reviewed 202 properties per GS 105-296(j), discovering \$16,635.30 in adjustments.
- Occupancy Tax Collection:
 - Collected \$1,961,826.20 for Fiscal Year 2024.
 - Implemented online filing for occupancy taxes in August 2024.
- License Plate Agency:
 - Opened to the public on February 2, 2022.
 - \$120,586.95 in Net Compensation received from NC Department of Transportation for January 2024–December 2024, marking a \$20,217.98 increase from 2023.
 - 29,388 walk-in customers recorded in 2024, an increase of 2,533 from the previous year.
 - Consistently achieved a 91 or higher rating in monthly audits.
- 2025 Reappraisal:
 - 2025 Reappraisal brochure available in office and on the website.
 - Educational videos available online.
 - Schedule of Values presented on November 12, 2024, with public hearing held on December 2, 2024, and adoption on December 9, 2024.
 - Notices of Value to be mailed to all real property owners by February 14, 2025.
- Cross-Training and Certification:
 - Cross training of staff continues to expand, improving the department's flexibility.
 - Several staff members obtained or maintained certifications with NCDOR, NCAAO, NCTCA, NCPMA, and/or IAAO.
- Safety Training:
 - Monthly safety training continues for staff.

Trends

- Collection Rate:
 - The collection rate remains above the state average.
 - 90.42% of citizens have paid their taxes in a timely manner as of 1/6/2025, marking a 2.28% improvement over last year.
- License Plate Agency:
 - Monthly State audit scores for the License Plate Agency consistently exceed 85.
- Staff Cross-Training:
 - Ongoing effort to cross-train staff in all areas of the Tax Administration Office to enhance efficiency.

Goals

- Customer Service:
 - Provide friendly, efficient, courteous, and prompt customer service to all taxpayers.
- Collection Rate:
 - Maintain a collection rate of 99.5% or better.
- Tax Billing and Payment Options:
 - Continue to implement payment coupons, e-Statements, and payment contracts to provide more convenient payment options during the annual tax billing process.
- Tax Records Management:
 - Continue to review, process, and maintain all tax records, including:
 - Real property
 - Business personal property
 - Personal property
 - Ensure that land records are updated, edited, and maintained accurately.
- License Plate Agency Audits:
 - Maintain a monthly audit score of 85 or greater for the License Plate Agency.
- Appeals Process:
 - Hear and respond to all property tax appeals in a timely manner, including:
 - Informal appeals (January – mid-April 2025)
 - Board of Equalization and Review appeals (mid-April – early May)
 - Property Tax Commission appeals as needed
- Property Reviews:
 - Continue to review present use and exempt properties for accuracy.
- 2025 Tax Bills:
 - Ensure that 2025 tax bills are mailed by late July, with a statutory due date of September 1, and a final payment date of January 5, 2026, without interest.
- Occupancy Tax:
 - Continue to expand knowledge and understanding of the occupancy tax process.
- Staff Development:
 - Continue cross-training and certification efforts to promote longevity and commitment to the Tax Administration Office.
- Safety Training:
 - Continue staff safety training, adhering to the County safety matrix.

Cooperative Extension – by Director Addison Bradley

Accomplishments

- Contacts and Volunteer Hours:
 - Contacts: Over 250,000
 - Total volunteer hours: Over 5,000
 - Total grants received: \$15,000
- Staff Collaborations:
 - Living in the Mountain Series: Introduction to Transylvania County with 225 attendees
 - 2nd Annual Agriculture Week:
 - Agriculture lessons taught to 350 first graders
 - Annual Agriculture Breakfast
- Family and Consumer Science:
 - SHIIP: 471 contacts
 - What's Cooking Transylvania?: 52 county employees participated
 - Collaboration with Transylvania County Farmers Market, The Hunger Coalition, and others
- 4-H Youth Development:

- 874 total 4-H participants in 2024
 - 198 members participated in community or after-school clubs
 - 458 youth participated in school enrichment programs
 - 56 youth participated in camp
- Collaborations with Rise and Shine, El Centro, and others
- Agriculture:
 - Extension Master Gardener volunteers contributed 2,900 hours
 - Gardens at Silvermont, the library, Pisgah Forest Ranger Station, and Allison Deavor House
 - Over 50 new certifications awarded, including pesticide and Beef Quality Assurance
 - Farm visits
- Hurricane Helene Response:
 - \$130,000 of disaster relief donations to farmers
 - Over 100 producers/growers assisted
 - Continued increase in donations and demand for support

Trends

- Diversity of Questions: Increasing variety of inquiries across all program areas.
- Youth Development: Strong focus on encouraging youth involvement in programs.
- Aging Farming Population: Rise in new and beginning farmers, many operating on smaller acreages.
- Local Food and Community Gardens: Growth of interest in local food systems and community gardens.
- Farmland Preservation: Ongoing focus on conserving farmland.
- Health and Nutrition: Strong trend towards supporting healthier living initiatives.

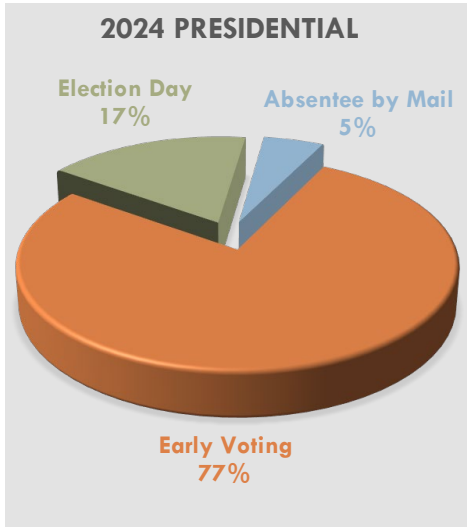
Goals

- Client Service: Continue providing a high level of service to all clients.
- Farmers' Support:
 - Assist farmers with regulatory compliance, farmland retention, and increasing profits.
- Advisory Board Support: Provide ongoing assistance to county advisory boards.
- SHIIP Program: Continue to support the SHIIP program.
- 4-H Youth Development: Foster continued youth engagement through 4-H programs.
- Healthy Lifestyles: Promote healthy living through Family and Consumer Sciences initiatives.
- Collaborations: Continue and expand various collaborations to benefit county residents.

Elections – by Director Jeff Storey

Accomplishments

- Successfully conducted four elections in a 12-month period:
 - November 7, 2023 – Municipal Election
 - March 5, 2024 – Primary Election
 - May 17, 2024 – 2nd Primary Election
 - November 5, 2024 – General Election
- Presidential Election Turnout:
 - 20,929 voters cast a ballot
 - 77.60% voter turnout



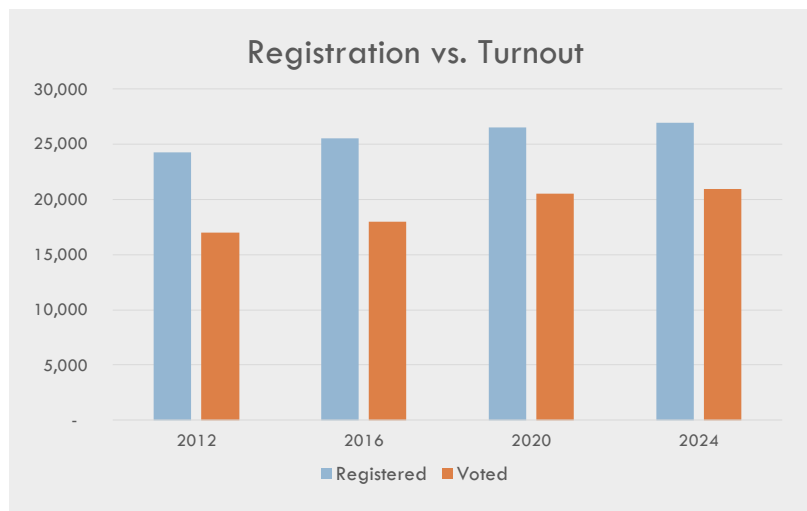
TURNOUT BY VOTING METHOD

Early Voting : 16,211
 Election Day : 3,639
 Absentee by Mail : 1,079

EARLY VOTING HISTORICAL

2016 : Early Voting 65% 11,590 of 17,988
 2020 : Early Voting 64% 13,017 of 20,498
 2024 : Early Voting 77% 16,211 of 20,929

Year	Registration	Voted	Turnout %
2012	24,302	16,994	70.00%
2016	25,540	17,988	70.43%
2020	26,513	20,498	77.31%
2024	26,970	20,929	77.60%



Trends

- Current Voter Registration (as of 1/27/2025):
 - 26,071 registered voters
 - 46% unaffiliated voters
 - Other smaller parties:
 - Libertarian Party
 - Justice for All Party
 - Constitution Party
 - Green Party
 - We the People Party
 - No Labels Party

Goals

- Board Appointments/Reappointments for a two-year term
- Equipment Upgrade:
 - Central tabulation software

- Voting equipment firmware upgrades
- Public demonstration and testing
- Expand Early Voting Equipment Inventory over the next three fiscal years
- Precinct Official Management Software

Upcoming Elections in FY 2025-26

- 2025 Municipal Elections:
 - City of Brevard (Mayor and 2 City Council seats)
 - Town of Rosman (3 Board of Alderman seats)
 - Candidate filing in July 2025
- 2026 Primary Election:
 - Multiple state, judicial, and county seats
 - Candidate filing in December 2025

Additional Tasks

- Precinct Evaluations
- List Maintenance and GIS Audits
- Certification/Recertification for Staff and Board Members
- Fiscal Considerations (not budgeted):
 - NC Supreme Court protest (could lead to a special election)
 - Runoff election (if needed) – 10 weeks after March 2026 primary

Planning, Transportation and Community Development – by Director Jeff Adams

Accomplishments

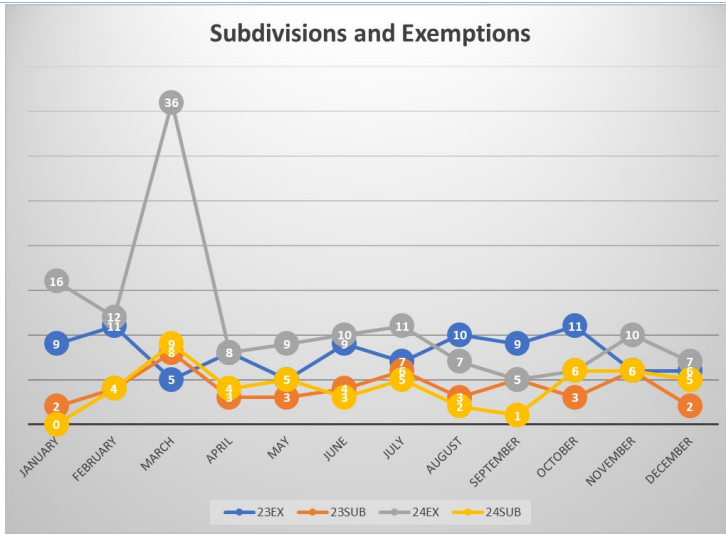
- Staffing:
 - Hired and on-boarded 3 full-time drivers, 3 part-time drivers, and 3 substitute drivers to achieve full staffing.
- Board and Committee Support:
 - Supported the Planning Board, Joint Historic Preservation Commission, Transportation Advisory Board, and Transportation Advisory Committee.
- Ordinance Compliance:
 - Administered and ensured compliance for several ordinances, including Subdivision, Sign, Telecommunication Tower, Pisgah Forest Community Zoning, and Mountain Ridge Protection.
- Grants and Funding:
 - Administered grants, including:
 - Transylvania County Tourism Development Authority (TCTA) grant for Community Appearance Initiative.
 - Annual Community Center Grant Program (\$85,000 for Community Centers).
 - Pisgah Health Foundation grant for Senior Transportation funding.
 - Secured additional grants from St. Philip’s Episcopal Women, Carolina Across 100.
- Training and Development:
 - Hosted various training and professional development opportunities for staff, advisory board members, and the public.
- Community Support and Housing Initiatives:
 - Worked with consultants on the Comprehensive Housing Report and other housing initiatives.
 - Coordinated the formation of the Regional Housing Alliance with Land of Sky Regional Planning Organization.

- Provided support for Helene response and recovery through the Brevard Transylvania County Housing Coalition.
- Transportation Planning:
 - Collaborated with the Transportation Advisory Committee to develop a Comprehensive Transportation Plan and annual STIP.
 - Worked on fixed route changes for Board consideration.
- Community Engagement and Transylvania 2050:
 - Held 11 outreach events with 200+ community members for Transylvania 2050 updates.
 - Developed community survey and snapshot for outreach.

Goals

- Support for Advisory Committees:
 - Continue administrative support for Citizen Advisory Committees, grants, and development regulations.
- Planning and Development:
 - Support the Planning Board & Board of Commissioners for the completion of Transylvania 2050, the update of the 2025 Comprehensive Plan.
 - Provide planning support for the Rosman corridor utilities expansion.
 - Support the development of affordable and workforce housing with regional partners.
- Transportation:
 - Ensure safe and efficient transportation, including:
 - Evaluate and market Transportation Services to Transylvania County.
 - Conduct a fee schedule review of comparable fare pricing.
 - Explore expansion of van service to underserved rural areas.
 - Work with NC DOT and area partners to update STIP projects.
- Emergency and Community Support:
 - Support Emergency Management, Hazard Mitigation, and the Community Appearance Initiative.
 - Administer grants for Community Centers and assist with Voluntary Agricultural Districts.
- Transportation Expansion:
 - Explore expanding van service to evenings and weekends.
 - Investigate linking van service with Henderson and Buncombe Counties.
- Data and Compliance:
 - Standardize data auditing procedures for compliance and reporting accuracy.
- Comprehensive Transportation Plan:
 - Finalize the Comprehensive Transportation Plan and continue work on transportation infrastructure.

Trends

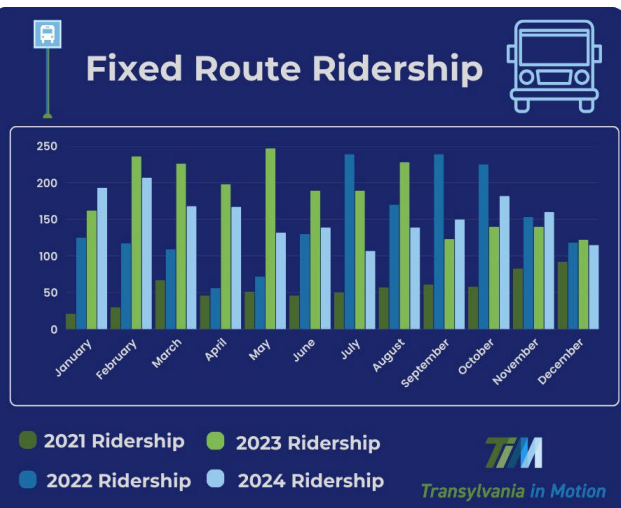
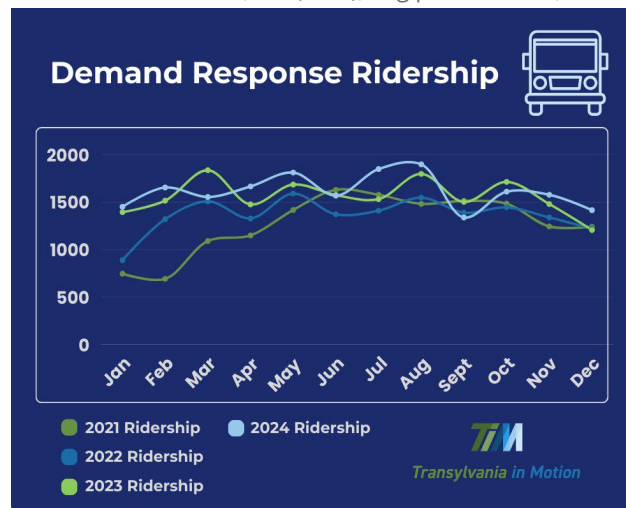


Totals

Subdivision Review
 2024: 50
 2023: 49
 Exemption Reviews
 2024: 137
 2023: 96

DR: Total Rides= 21,413 (Year), Avg per Month: 1,616

FR: Total Rides= 3,883 (Year), Avg per Month: 155



FY2026

Project	Total Amount	Local Share
5311 Administrative	\$181,328	\$27,200
Combined Capital	\$435,000	\$43,500
5310 Operating	\$104,000	\$52,000
Total Project	\$720,328	\$122,700

FY2025

Project	Total Amount	Local Share
5311 Administrative	\$164,470	\$24,671
Combined Capital	\$270,000	\$27,000
5310 Operating	\$104,000	\$52,000
Total Project	\$538,470	\$120,171

- ❑ Transylvania County requested a total of \$435,000 in capital funding for replacement of three (3) vans with lifts that have bike racks. This requires a County match of **\$43,500 (10%)** of the total.
- ❑ Note- these grant amounts are maximum eligible meaning they may not be realized in the budget depending on whether enough trips qualify for the grant funds. Staff is currently evaluating the revenue trends for grant revenue actuals. The local share of transportation funds is much higher than shown for the grants.

- Affordable housing remains a major challenge across the region. County Planner Ashley Minery will be working on the regional effort through NC Impact Our Community, Our Homes effort the UNC School of Government.
- The shortage of affordable housing is contributing to increased reliance on substandard housing options like RVs and unpermitted structures. There are also concerns over the development of ecologically compromised parcels, such as floodplains and steep slopes.
- Subdivisions and exemptions are continuing to decline in Transylvania County.
- There are ongoing challenges with driver shortages and actual grant revenue receipts, which continue to hinder efforts to expand transportation services.
- The demand for transportation services remains strong.

Housekeeping – by Director Chad Owenby

Accomplishments

- Maintained a safe and professional environment for employees and patrons.
- Continued collaboration with outside organizations, including TVS and the community service work program.
- Followed the established floor and carpet cleaning schedule.
- Managed the ordering, tracking, and delivery of housekeeping supplies for all County departments.
- Added smaller, job-specific equipment to improve efficiency.

Trends

- Increased use of contract services for specialized housekeeping tasks, such as floor stripping and waxing, carpet cleaning, external window washing, mold and mildew treatment, and bathroom tile and grout cleaning.
- Continued partnerships with TVS clients and the Probation and Parole community service work program for supply delivery and cleaning services.
- Ongoing evaluation of equipment, cleaning materials, and contract services to enhance efficiency and ensure the safest, most effective cleaning solutions.
- Rising janitorial supply costs due to inflation and increased facility usage by both citizens and staff.
- Continued focus on staff safety training.

Goals

- Streamline housekeeping supply management to reduce overhead storage, minimize waste, and control costs.
- Improve efficiency through revised housekeeping schedules, appropriate equipment acquisition, and the use of contracted services for specialized cleaning tasks.
- Maintain the cleanliness and safety of Transylvania County facilities.
- Monitor and update staff training through NEOGOV, BRAME, and Spartan to ensure best practices in housekeeping and safety.

Safety – by Director Chad Owenby

Accomplishments

- Held regular safety committee meetings to assess and promote workplace safety improvements.
- Collaborated with all departments to maintain a safe work environment.
- Reduced total Workers' Compensation claims by half, lowering both the incident rate and DART rate for the 2024 calendar year.
- Decreased the number of vehicle-related incidents.

- Selected by the NCACC as one of seven pilot counties in North Carolina to test the INCIDENTLI software, recognizing the County's strong safety program and performance. INCIDENTLI tracks and reports injuries, vehicle incidents, property damage, and other recordable events.

Trends

- Increased participation in individual department safety meetings, with most departments holding monthly sessions.
- Continued decline in Workers' Compensation claims.
- Expanded use of electronic safety and risk management training through NEOGOV.
- Further reduction in incidence and DART rates, reflecting fewer injuries, more total hours worked, and fewer cases of restricted duty or lost workdays.

Goals

- Maintain the use of the Accelerate/Velocity EHS Safety Data Sheet system for tracking and recording chemical and material safety data.
- Continue to monitor and encourage monthly department safety meetings.
- Track and analyze Workers' Compensation data to prevent an increase in claims.
- Educate all departments on OSHA and NCDOL tracking and reporting procedures for Workers' Compensation claims, ensuring staff readiness for inspections and audits.

Maintenance – by Director Chad Owenby

Accomplishments

- Maintained all County buildings, covering a total of 281,351 square feet.
- Completed a new roof installation on the Administration building.
- Continued flooring and carpet replacements as needed.
- Ongoing painting and wall repairs.
- Managed landscaping, pruning, mulching, and repairs across more than 250 acres weekly with a limited landscaping staff.
- Continued phased replacement of aging R-22 HVAC units.
- Successfully transitioned EMS operations from a temporary location to the new EMS facility.
- Assisted with Hurricane Helene relief and recovery efforts.
- Maintained the roofing preventative maintenance program with Piper Roofing for all County buildings.
- Continued upkeep and preparation of softball and soccer fields for youth soccer, flag football, youth football, Rosman Middle/High School athletics, Recreation summer camps, and adult softball.
- Coordinated with volunteers and contractors for invasive species removal at Silvermont.
- Established a preventative maintenance program for all garage and roll-up doors.

Trends

- Aging facilities and equipment are increasing maintenance issues and costs.
- Flat and aging roofs require ongoing repairs and replacements, with Child Development and Silvermont scheduled next.
- Continued collaboration with external groups to complete projects, including:
 - Blue Ridge Community College students
 - Community Service Work Program participants
 - Inmate work crews (when available)
- Growing need for an HVAC-qualified technician and continued replacement of R-22 units.
- Increased use of contract services for HVAC, refrigeration, elevators, asphalt/concrete, boilers, and specialized mowing needs.
- Moisture and humidity control issues persist in older buildings.

- Parking lot maintenance, including resurfacing and restriping:
 - Child Development scheduled for replacement in Spring 2025.
 - Other lots in need of resurfacing include the Community Services Building, Library, and Administration/Board of Elections/Tax Administration.
- Interior and exterior beautification efforts:
 - Painting of handrails, parking curbs, and other structures.
 - Administration Building scheduled for updates in Spring 2025.
- Aging electronic equipment at the jail and public safety facility requires frequent updates and upgrades.
- Many aging exterior doors need repair or replacement to address security concerns.
- Increased repairs for aging boiler systems.
- Ongoing evaluation of exterior lighting at all facilities, including safety and pedestal lights.

Goals

- Enhance building and grounds appearance through better scheduling, efficiency, and service.
- Continue HVAC replacement efforts, manage R-22 unit phase-outs, and ensure compliance with regulatory guidelines (Public Safety, Courthouse, EMS Quebec base, Child Development, and Solid Waste).
- Complete building maintenance and work orders promptly using the MUNIS EAM asset management system.
- Conduct annual evaluations of service contracts (pest control, elevator service, boiler and air compressor service, roofing maintenance, landscaping, etc.).
- Maintain the yearly grounds contract to support staff with mowing and other designated facility services.

Parks and Recreation – by Director Chad Owenby

Accomplishments

- Program Participation – K-5 Sports Programs and Camps
 - 2024 Youth Sports – 528 participants
 - Includes flag football, volleyball, basketball, dodgeball, wiffleball, and SNAG golf.
 - 2024 Summer Camps – 780 participants
 - Includes day camps, Helene Camp, and summer camps at the Recreation Center and Rosman Elementary.
- Program Participation – Pre-K Camps and Miscellaneous Programs
 - Pre-K Programs – 876 participants
 - Programs include holiday programs, Future Football Stars, Start Smart Basketball, Indoor Fun Play, Pint-Sized Picasso's, Plant Party, The Reading Connection, Santa's Workshop and Wonderland, and summer camps.
 - Miscellaneous Programs – 317 participants
 - Includes Garden Tea Party, Employee 5K, Homeschool PE, and Senior Games and Silver Arts.
- Program Participation – Silvermont and Community Partner Programs
 - Silvermont Programs – 925 weekly/monthly participants
 - Includes the Lunch Plus program, exercise programs, Friends of Silvermont, Mountain Music Circle, and other senior activities.
 - Transylvania Youth Council – 65 high school students engaged in community service projects.
 - Factory Strong – 10 athletes enrolled in a weekly strength and conditioning program in partnership with the Fitness Factory for Special Olympic athletes.
 - Staff continue to assist with elementary school field days as needed.

- Community Programming – Community Partner Events 2024
 - Light Up the Night – 5,000 participants.
 - Super Soaked Saturday – 1,300 participants.
 - Both events result from successful partnerships with the Library, The Family Place, Maintenance, EMS, Brevard Fire Department, and the Heart of Brevard.
- Revenue
 - FY 2025 projected program revenue – \$106,000 (up from FY 2024, with trends suggesting projections may be exceeded pending school calendar).
 - FY 2024 projected rental revenue – \$8,000 (trending down due to Helene).

Trends

- Growing demand for summer camps, with record-breaking signups; all camps filled within 12 hours.
- Staffing levels and available locations limit summer programming expansion.
- Continued strong partnership with Transylvania County Schools, assisting with program relocations during Helene and supporting transportation and staffing needs.
- Increasing demand for childcare and youth programs, particularly for Pre-K and elementary-aged children.
- Senior programming at Silvermont is at an all-time high, reflecting community needs.
- The ongoing expansion of Pre-K programs requires increased part-time funding.
- Pre-K program participation has grown significantly with the addition of a full-time programming staff member.

Chairman Chappell called for a break at 5:06 p.m. The Board reconvened the meeting at 5:14 p.m.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO HURRICANE/TROPICAL STORM HELENE

The Manager provided an update on the County's ongoing response to Hurricane Helene, with continued updates planned for future meetings as needed. Her update is summarized here:

- FEMA Assistance: 4,753 households have registered; the deadline is extended to March 8.
- NC Emergency Management secured a 24-month FEMA grant to assist survivors with recovery plans, including temporary housing and repair assistance. Contact: 1-844-746-2326.
- Housing Assistance:
 - 64 households have received or are receiving rental aid.
 - 57 approved for direct housing; 5 moving forward, 52 declined due to other arrangements.
- Economic & Housing Recovery:
 - \$30 million Small Business Grant Program (Dogwood Health Trust & Governor Stein) – Grants up to \$50,000 for businesses with under \$2.5 million revenue (Managed by Appalachian Community Capital).
 - \$6 million for Housing Repairs – \$3 million each to Baptists on Mission & Habitat for Humanity NC.
- State Funding and Legislation:
 - Governor's Budget Proposal: \$1.07 billion requested for immediate recovery needs through July 1, 2025, with more to follow in the next fiscal year.
 - NC House Select Committee on Helene Recovery: Proposed \$500 million in additional funding and regulatory flexibility. Committee reconvenes February 11.
 - Hurricane Helene Disaster Recovery Meeting: February 11 in Asheville, hosted by NC League of Municipalities, NACC, and WNC Regional Councils of Government.
- Emergency Operations Plan (EOP):
 - Transylvania County is a designated emergency management entity with an EOP outlining roles and responsibilities. The City of Brevard and Town of Rosman approved the plan, available at local offices and online.

- The County’s Emergency Operations Ordinance details emergency authority and the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC), which meets regularly.
- Debris Removal:
 - NCDOT’s contractor is stepping aside for US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) debris operations.
 - Public right-of-way cleanup is approved; private property requires a Right of Entry form (available at [County Disaster Resources](#)).

Commissioner Chapman attended a meeting of Governor Stein’s new recovery committee and assured the public of significant ongoing efforts across Western North Carolina. He expressed confidence in the recovery process and shared that two lanes of I-40 will reopen by March 1.

Commissioner McCall noted large debris piles still present and asked about removal progress. The Manager explained that the County’s contractor is sorting debris at a designated site and managing disposal based on type—minimizing landfill impact by converting vegetative debris into mulch. Debris in public or private rights-of-way will be collected once a Right of Entry form is completed, and residents can report locations online.

Commissioner McCall also observed increased recovery activity in surrounding counties by USACE and other agencies, following orders from the President and Governor.

Commissioner Dalton inquired about debris at Calvert, and the Manager confirmed it as a sorting site.

APPOINTMENTS

JUVENILE CRIME PREVENTION COUNCIL

Missy Ellenberger has retired from Transylvania County Schools, leaving the Local Superintendent or Designee position on the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council (JCPC) vacant. Assistant Superintendent Brian Weaver, currently serving as a Commissioner Appointee, is recommended to move into this role. This shift opens a Commissioner Appointee slot, which will be advertised for a public appointment. Jennifer Jeter, who represented Vaya Health as the Mental Health Director or Designee, has transitioned to a new role.

Commissioner McCall moved to move Brian Weaver from the Commissioner Appointee position to the Local School Superintendent or Designee and to appoint Jessica Winkel to replace Jennifer Jeter as the Mental Health Director or Designee representing Vaya Health, seconded by Commissioner McKelvey and unanimously approved.

NEW BUSINESS

AFFORDABLE HOUSING FUNDING REQUEST FROM THE CITY OF BREVARD

Housing continues to be a challenge for many in Transylvania County, especially for families and those in the workforce. The County is engaged in several efforts to support housing in the community, including:

- Infrastructure investments in Brevard and Rosman’s water and sewer systems.
- Housing Consortium & HOME funds supporting home repair.
- Fair Market Rent advocacy, which led to increased FEMA rental assistance after Hurricane Helene (HUD formulas remain unchanged).
- Local & Regional Housing Initiatives like NC Impact’s *Our Homes, Our Community*.

Fairhaven Affordable Housing Project

The City of Brevard has requested County financial support for the Fairhaven affordable housing project, which was approved for LITECH tax credits. The project will provide 42 units that will average households making 60% of the Annual Median Income (AMI) for the County with all units qualifying at 80% or below.

For reference, HUD Income Limits:

- 60% AMI → 1-person: \$32,340 | 4-person: \$46,200
- 80% AMI → 1-person: \$43,100 | 4-person: \$61,600

Workforce housing is defined as 80% to 120% of area median income. A single person household of an entry level teacher (\$44,485) or patrol deputy (\$46,868) in Transylvania County qualifies for workforce housing, not the affordable housing category.

Funding Gap and Legal Consideration

The project initially faced a \$1.7 million funding shortfall, later revised to \$1 million, with \$524,000 related to public infrastructure.

North Carolina law restricts local governments from funding housing projects without explicit legislative authority. The County Attorney has provided a legal analysis to guide participation in housing projects, which will also inform the County's ongoing housing plan.

Legal Powers and Responsibilities

Before engaging in funding housing projects, Transylvania County must ensure compliance with North Carolina law and its constitutional responsibilities. The County has never provided direct funding to private or nonprofit developers. NC law limits local government authority, requiring careful legal review before new initiatives.

NC Constitution (Article VI, Section 7) and state statutes (G.S. 153A-26 & 160A-61) mandate that all elected and appointed officials swear to uphold the U.S. and NC Constitutions and laws. Counties can only act within granted legal powers; exceeding them can result in lawsuits and liability.

Funding Housing Projects with County Public Funds

Public funds must serve a public purpose, as outlined in the NC Constitution. Funding private entities for public needs is not allowed if it provides a direct benefit to the private entity (e.g., developers). *Foster v. North Carolina Medical Care Commission* affirmed this principle.

Counties may act as housing authorities, using public funds to build and manage affordable housing for households below 80% AMI (with an average of 60% AMI). Challenges exist when counties contract with nonprofit entities to manage housing projects, particularly related to negligence in property maintenance (e.g., mold issues). Counties must have statutory authority for both the activity and the expenditure of funds for that activity (*Morgan v. Town of Spindle*).

Referendums may be used for gap funding in housing projects, but only if authorized by law (under NC General Statute section 159-58(c)). The statute provides 25 applications for bond referendums, but none apply to public housing projects. Legal precedent prohibits operating outside these defined uses.

Waiving Permit Fees

County Commissions have the authority to set and waive building permit fees, but the North Carolina General Statutes (N.C.G.S. Chapter 160D) specifically allow fee waivers only for LEED-certified buildings. Case law provides counties with authority to financially assist low-income individuals, meaning fee waivers for these individuals are permissible. Transylvania County implemented a permit fee waiver for low-income

individuals qualifying for services through Department of Social Services, specifically for single trade emergency permits. The County also waived fees for recovery efforts after Hurricane Helene, identifying a disproportionately impacted group. Fee waivers must be applied equitably and cannot be targeted at specific organizations or projects.

Legal consequences arise when local governments act outside of their legal authority. These can include financial consequences, such as lawsuits or settlements, potentially impacting property taxes to cover liabilities. Local government leaders must follow the law, even if they disagree with it, to avoid legal liability and unintended consequences for taxpayers. If the statutes do not authorize a specific action, it is against the law for counties to proceed with it, even if it seems like it would benefit the community.

In What Ways Can the County Support Housing?

- **Zoning Density:** While some jurisdictions offer developers increased density to lower per-unit costs in exchange for affordable or workforce housing, Transylvania County already allows residential density without restrictions.
- **Assistance to individuals:** The County has previously administered HOME funds for home repair, helping maintain housing for low-income families. Now, these funds are being administered through the Regional Housing Consortium. This ensures low-income households can preserve their homes, which is an effective way to address housing needs. As adopted in the most recent budget, the County can waive permit fees for low-income individuals who need emergency single trade repairs. This further aids home preservation by reducing the financial burden on qualifying residents.
- **Infrastructure:** The County has invested millions in water and sewer systems, which supports the creation of higher-density housing, lowering the cost per unit. Continued investment in infrastructure can facilitate more affordable housing development by reducing development costs.

Staff are exploring the possibility of using grant funds for public infrastructure to support the City's housing project. This will require a Preliminary Engineering Report from the City and approval from the funder.

The Manager sought direction on how the Board would like to proceed with the City's request for County support of the Fairhaven housing project. The request must remain within the County's statutory authority for providing assistance to such initiatives.

Chairman Chappell stated that when the County received the request from the City, staff committed to researching the matter with the County Attorney to ensure any action aligns with the County's legal authority. The Manager's presentation was the result of that research. He emphasized that there are ways the County can support housing, including the potential use of grant funds for public infrastructure. If the Commissioners wish to support that option, he encouraged them to do so formally, which would provide the Manager with the necessary clearance to proceed.

Commissioner Chapman inquired about what would be involved in establishing a housing authority. In response, the Manager explained that the County has the authority to act as a housing authority but would need to determine a funding source, with the primary option being property tax revenue. The Board would need to budget for a housing authority and define the terms of service. She further explained that the County has the authority to serve households earning 80% of the area median income (AMI) or below, as long as any given project averages 60% AMI or below, in accordance with HUD requirements. HUD updates these income eligibility figures annually, meaning the 2024 figures are currently in place, with 2025 figures to be released later in the year.

Chairman Chappell noted that in counties that have created housing authorities, it often becomes a separate department with dedicated staff to administer services. The Manager confirmed this and added that some jurisdictions contract with nonprofit organizations to operate their housing authorities. However, she

cautioned that local governments are increasingly facing lawsuits related to housing authority liabilities. In some cases, currently under legal review, jurisdictions have been held responsible for negligence on the part of contracted nonprofits. Given these considerations, the Board must carefully evaluate its options.

Commissioner McCall expressed her belief that it was not in the government's best interest to enter the real estate market by creating a housing authority or managing housing. She emphasized that the government's most effective role is in providing infrastructure support. In her view, any developer coming into Transylvania County should have their financing in place and should not rely on government entities to provide loans. She noted that the County Attorney's research clearly outlines that such financial involvement is not a role the County should assume. She also acknowledged the extensive efforts the County has already undertaken to support affordable housing, which the County Manager had reviewed in the fall of 2024. While she supported continued infrastructure improvements to promote economic development and housing, she did not believe the County should become a housing authority, manage real estate, or issue loans.

Commissioner Chapman stated that if the County were to enter the housing business, it would need to establish an authority; otherwise, there was no viable solution. He expressed concern about the financial shortfall the developer cited, noting that if the project were truly profitable, more developers would be involved in similar ventures. He pointed out that the City's request falls outside the County's legal authority and stated that he could not support it.

Commissioner Dalton noted that while tax incentives were mentioned, they must be directly tied to economic development by statute. Specifically, tax incentives must be linked to job creation and investment. However, he supported considering assistance with infrastructure improvements and granting the Manager the authority to explore that option, as it falls within the County's purview. He explained that providing infrastructure support could offer the project over \$500,000 in relief, which might allow the developer to adjust its financing and move forward.

Chairman Chappell agreed that supporting infrastructure improvements appeared to be the logical next step, particularly since the County has access to grant funding. He expressed appreciation for staff's proactive efforts in reaching out to grant providers to determine whether those funds could be used for public infrastructure. He also thanked the Manager for beginning the presentation with an explanation of the Board's constitutional and statutory responsibilities. He emphasized the importance of ensuring the public understands the legal limitations of the County's authority. He reaffirmed that the Board of Commissioners must follow the law established by the NC General Assembly and uphold the oaths they take upon entering office.

Commissioner McKelvey noted that the County was also being asked to act as a lender to support the project, which would require setting up an amortization schedule and collecting loan payments and questioned whether the County had ever provided loans before. The Manager clarified that under legal definitions, funding and loans are considered the same, meaning the County could not provide a loan to a private company. While it might be possible for the County to provide financial support to a nonprofit provider, doing so would be complicated and would require working within the housing authority framework, which raised liability concerns given the current legal climate. The Manager also noted that while the County had not historically loaned money, there was a promissory note associated with property transferred to the Transylvania Economic Alliance for the Sylvan Valley Industrial Building Phase 1. However, this transaction fell under specific statutes related to economic development, which allow county governments to engage in such agreements.

Commissioner McKelvey suggested that a greater percentage of homes should be allocated for workforce housing, particularly to support teachers and first responders, as this would serve a broader segment of the County's population. He highlighted the difficulty the local education system faced in recruiting teachers due to affordability issues and encouraged the City to broaden the project's scope to include more workforce

housing. He also supported Commissioner Dalton's recommendation to pursue infrastructure improvements and urged staff to continue investigating the potential use of grant funds.

Commissioner Chapman addressed the issue of infrastructure support, cautioning that the County needed to be mindful if it was considering supporting a single project. He pointed out that other developers might also seek infrastructure assistance if it became available, and the County needed to be prepared for that possibility.

Commissioner Dalton reminded the Board that this was not the first time the County had attempted to assist with housing development. He referenced a prior effort to extend sewer infrastructure on Wilson Road, which was denied. That project would have provided 16 units of workforce housing, and the County had planned to fund the sewer extension through a grant tied to economic development rather than using local funds.

Commissioner McCall emphasized the importance of considering any precedent the Board might set through its actions, whether related to this request or future ones. She expressed her preference for delaying any decision until more information was available, noting that County staff still needed to review the engineering report for the project. She also requested additional details, including soil reports and confirmation that the developer had the capability to complete the project successfully. She reiterated her stance that developers should have their financing secured before proposing projects in Transylvania County, rather than relying on government subsidies. She opposed moving forward with any portion of the City's request at this time and warned that approving such a request could lead to similar expectations from other developers. Instead, she urged the Board to consider the county as a whole and determine where infrastructure investments would best serve its residents. She acknowledged that City and County governments, as well as nonprofit organizations, have the ability to seek grant funding. The Manager added that while private developers have fewer grant opportunities, nonprofit developers may have access to specific grant funding.

Commissioner Chapman noted that housing developments were being built in neighboring counties and assumed that those projects were proceeding without government assistance. He questioned why developers in Transylvania County seemed unable to build profitably without public support. He argued that projects dependent on government funding should not be considered viable. The Manager responded by explaining that Henderson County has made infrastructure investments to support development, while Buncombe County has allocated funds directly to housing projects. However, she pointed out that both the County Attorney and the UNC School of Government have raised legal concerns about whether such expenditures align with state law. She reiterated that bond referendums must be tied to one of the 25 statutorily defined uses, or they could be vulnerable to legal challenges.

Chairman Chappell then called for the Board to provide clear direction to staff, noting that some Commissioners supported pursuing infrastructure investment while others preferred to delay action. He emphasized the need for the Manager to receive definitive guidance, particularly given her preliminary discussions with grant funders regarding the possibility of using non-taxpayer funds already allocated or authorized for the County. He believed this was a prudent approach but noted that grant providers required additional information, including a preliminary engineering report, before proceeding further.

Commissioner McKelvey voiced his continued support for the County's investment in infrastructure.

Commissioner Chapman suggested that the Board consider establishing a formal policy to guide when and how the County should provide infrastructure support for specific projects.

Commissioner McCall moved to table the issue until the first meeting in March, with Commissioner Chapman seconding the motion. Chairman Chappell asked for clarification on the motion and specific direction for staff in preparation for the March meeting. Commissioner McCall reiterated her motion to postpone the discussion until March, noting that Commissioner Dalton would be out of town for the next

meeting. She explained that this delay would allow the County Manager additional time to gather information on potential grant funds that could be directed to the City. However, she emphasized that she did not believe it was in the County's best interest to apply for these grants on behalf of the City. **The motion was unanimously approved.**

The Manager took a moment to clarify for the public that her presentation was an analysis strictly focused on County funding. She explained that municipal and county law operate under different statutory frameworks. While there are areas of overlap, the legal structures governing counties and municipalities have distinct differences and nuances. Her presentation did not weigh in on the legalities of municipal support for the housing project.

Chairman Chappell added that some counties have chosen to operate in legally uncertain areas, providing funding for initiatives beyond their statutory authority. He noted that during staff inquiries into what other counties were doing to support affordable housing, some had admitted that they might be acting outside their legal authority. He expressed appreciation for the diligence of County staff and the Board in proceeding cautiously on issues that could lead to litigation and impact all taxpayers in Transylvania County.

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS FOR DEFERRED MAINTENANCE STUDY AND CAPITAL RESERVE STUDY FOR TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY BUILDINGS AND BLUE RIDGE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The Board of Commissioners discussed the need for a comprehensive building assessment of County-owned buildings and the Transylvania campus of Blue Ridge Community College to support capital maintenance and improvement planning. Conducting this study will provide data to help the County plan for necessary funding beyond single budget years. This approach is similar to the facilities assessment previously conducted in partnership with the School System. In response to this need, staff issued a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for the study.

The County received five responses to the RFQ, and staff reviewed the submissions for qualifications and experience in building assessments, particularly those with expertise in North Carolina and the public sector. Based on this review, the recommendation was to authorize the County Manager to negotiate and sign a contract with Axias, not to exceed \$150,000, to conduct the assessments for County buildings and the Blue Ridge Community College Transylvania Campus. The funding for this project will come from the County's assigned fund balance.

Commissioner Chapman inquired whether this item was budgeted. The Manager explained that while it was not explicitly included in the budget, there is an assigned fund balance designated for capital projects in anticipation of this work.

Commissioner McCall emphasized that the study would provide valuable data, particularly for the upcoming capital workshop, and noted that Axias had previously done excellent work on the school maintenance reserve study. She highlighted the importance of preventative maintenance in extending the life of facilities and supported the recommendation.

Commissioner McCall moved to authorize the County Manager to negotiate and sign a contract with Axias, not to exceed \$150,000, with funds to come from the assigned fund balance. Commissioner Dalton seconded the motion. In response to Commissioner Chapman, the Manager clarified that the study would be similar to the school facilities assessment. The assessment will involve a review of all buildings, identification of needed replacements, scheduling of future replacements, and documentation of prior work. The final product will include both a summary report and detailed reports on each facility, providing a long-term budgeting tool for the County. Chairman Chappell expressed his approval, stating that Axias had

delivered an impressive and well-organized plan during their previous work. He noted that this study would be beneficial for both the County and the Community College. **The motion was unanimously approved.**

UPDATE TO PROJECT BUDGET FOR CAPITAL PROJECTS

The Capital Projects Fund enables the County to manage projects over multiple fiscal years, requiring budget adjustments as projects progress, RFQs and bids are processed, and contracts are finalized. Staff presented an update to the Capital Fund Ordinance to reflect the Commissioners' prior approvals of the Sylvan Valley II Project and recommended approving the update to align the project budgets with current needs.

The Manager clarified that the total budget remains unchanged from the Board's previous approval. This update simply reallocates funds between line items to ensure that contracts under professional services and contingency are properly accounted for within the existing budget.

The County maintains two capital funds, one dedicated to infrastructure and another for general capital projects. Staff will provide regular budget updates to ensure project costs remain accurate. Additionally, they are collaborating with auditors to close out several projects, making these updates a recurring agenda item to maintain financial accuracy and transparency.

In response to Commissioner Chapman, the Manager stated that Phase II of the project is expected to be completed in June, according to the contractor. She will continue providing updates as part of the monthly capital project reports.

FUND 40 UPDATE - CAPITAL PROJECTS		
	Last Board Action	Updated
2022-2026 Sylvan Valley Industrial Center Expansion (10004)		
Sylvan Valley Phase 2 Construction	\$ 4,728,775	\$ 4,700,000
Professional Services & Contingency	\$ 675,420	\$ 701,500
	\$ 5,404,195	\$ 5,401,500
2022-2026 Sylvan Valley Center Revenues (10004)		
Golden Leaf Grant	\$ 1,500,000	\$ 1,500,000
TEA Contributions	\$ 150,000	\$ 150,000
Transfers from the General Fund	\$ 3,754,195	\$ 3,751,500
	5,404,195	5,401,500

Commissioner McCall moved to approve the updates to the Capital Project Ordinance for the Sylvan Valley II Project, seconded by Commissioner McKelvey and unanimously approved.

MANAGER'S REPORT

The Manager provided updates on several key initiatives and projects:

- Repairs to County Administration due to damage from Hurricane Helene are ongoing. Access to Commissioners' Chambers may be restricted at times, but staff will communicate any disruptions. Contractors will work around scheduled meetings.
- NCDOT Public Input on 2026-2035 STIP – The NC Department of Transportation is seeking public feedback on the Draft 2026-2035 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). Regional drop-in sessions will be held across the state from February 17 to March 17, with an online option available through PublicInput.com. Flyers are available in the lobby. The public comment period runs through April 4, 2025.

- Transportation Advisory Committee Special Meeting – Scheduled for Wednesday, February 12, at 6 PM in Commissioners’ Chambers. Updates will be provided by NCDOT on Helene recovery and its impact on County transportation projects, as well as progress on the Comprehensive Transportation Plan and an update on the County transit system. Open to the public.
- Hearts & Hires Job & Resource Fair – Set for Wednesday, February 12, from 10 AM to 3 PM at the WNC Ag Center. Employers from government and private sectors, along with resource providers, will be available. NCWorks will offer career services.
- Interlocal Government Agreement & Joint School Bond Project Committee – The Board of Education and Board of Commissioners have executed an agreement negotiated by the Superintendent and County Manager. The Joint School Bond Project Committee will hold its first meeting on Thursday, February 13, at 4 PM in Commissioners’ Chambers. The committee will guide bond-funded school improvement projects following the October 2024 bond sale. The meeting will be recorded.
- Capital Update & Courthouse Project – The next meeting will spotlight the courthouse project. The architect is finalizing the programming review, incorporating input from courthouse stakeholders. Options for commissioners will include a reduced footprint from the original 60,000 sq. ft. plan and phasing options for future growth. Once the Board sets the project scope and budget, the design phase and financial planning can begin.
- Public Records Requests – There is a backlog of requests due to an increase in submissions in Spring/Summer 2024 and storm response priorities. Over 30 records requests have been received in the past year, many involving multi-year, multi-department searches. Staff continue to process them.
- Weather Alert – Three rounds of rain events are forecasted this week:
 - Tuesday into Tuesday night
 - Wednesday into Wednesday night
 - Saturday into Saturday night (1.5 to 2 inches expected, but subject to change).
 - Emergency Management is monitoring and will issue advisories for flood-prone areas as needed.
- Veterans History Museum Anchor Installation – In June 2024, the Board approved the placement of a submarine anchor from the Benjamin Franklin-class submarines at the museum entrance. The anchor, gifted by the Yorktown Museum (Charleston, SC), was installed in late January using a crane. A dedication ceremony is planned soon.

Commissioner Chapman asked about the staff’s plan for presenting the new courthouse project. The Manager explained that the presentation will focus on square footage, as the Board of Commissioners must determine the final size of the facility to establish the project budget and move forward with the design phase.

The architect will present several options, including: 1) 60,000 sq. ft. footprint (previously recommended); 90,000 sq. ft. option, which includes a 30,000 sq. ft. warm shell for future expansion; and 3) a reduced footprint alternative, developed in response to Board discussions, designed to maintain operational efficiency while minimizing costs. The architect will also outline phasing strategies to accommodate long-term needs and present projected budgets for each option. Once the Board provides guidance, the architect will proceed with design work, and staff will begin financial planning for the courthouse project.

Commissioner Chapman also asked whether stakeholders may raise concerns. The Manager confirmed that stakeholders oppose any reduction from the 60,000 sq. ft. facility. While the Board will likely hear their concerns, staff have demonstrated that a reduced footprint can still meet operational needs. However, future expansion may be necessary, and the Board must decide which option best aligns with current priorities and budget constraints.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no comments from the public.

COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

Commissioner Chapman expressed gratitude to the staff presenters, emphasizing the dedication of County employees who work daily to serve the citizens of Transylvania County.

Commissioner McCall addressed public concerns regarding a recent Board appointment of an individual with the last name McCall. She reassured citizens that there are many McCalls in the county, and she is not related to the appointee for the Planning Board. Additionally, she clarified that the Board does not traditionally read aloud the qualifications of appointees during meetings.

Chairman Chappell thanked department heads for their presentations, noting that they provided the public with insight into the outstanding work of County staff. He commended the Manager for presenting recommendations that safeguard Transylvania County and its citizens. He reaffirmed that the Board of Commissioners is committed to following the law, honoring their oaths to uphold the U.S. and N.C. Constitutions, and ensuring their decisions align with legal and ethical standards.

Chairman Chappell moved to enter into a closed session per N.C.G.S. § 143-318.11 (a) (4) To discuss matters related to the location or expansion of industries or other businesses in the area served by the public body, after a 10-minute recess, seconded by Commissioner Dalton and unanimously carried.

CLOSED SESSION

Per N.C.G.S. §143-318.11(a)(4) To discuss matters relating to the location or expansion of industries or other businesses in the area served by the public body, a closed session was entered into a 6:30 p.m. Present were Chairman Chappell, Commissioners Chapman, Dalton, McCall and McKelvey, County Manager Jaime Laughter, County Attorney Julie Hooten, Information Technology Nathanael Carver for IT support, Transylvania Economic Alliance Executive Director Burton Hodges, and Clerk to the Board Trisha Hogan.

The Board received updates on several economic development projects and directed staff on how to proceed.

Chairman Chappell moved to leave the closed session, seconded by Commissioner McCall and unanimously carried.

OPEN SESSION

Chairman Chappell moved to seal the minutes of the closed session until such time that opening the minutes does not frustrate the purpose of the closed session, seconded by Commissioner Dalton and unanimously approved.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, **Chairman Chappell moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:20 p.m., seconded by Commissioner McKelvey and unanimously approved.**

Jason R. Chappell, Chairman
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

Trisha M. Hogan, Clerk to the Board