



Foothills Regional Commission
Full Board Meeting
March 28th, 2024
Minutes

Board Members Present

- **Chair:** Fred Baisden, Polk County
- **Secretary:** Bryan King, Rutherford County
- Doug Bridges, Cleveland County
- Janet Gerald, Town of Kingstown
- David Guy, Town of Ruth
- Rodney Willis, Town of Bellwood
- Ashley Wooten, McDowell County
- Jack Shytle, Town of Polkville
- Scott Webber, Town of Spindale
- Jimmy Dancy, Town of Rutherfordton

FRC Staff Present

- Danna Stansbury
- Charlotte Sullivan
- Amanda Scott
- Annette Staley
- Pam Hall
- Laura Lynch
- Alan Toney

Virtual

- Preston Blakely, Mayor of Fletcher
- Cyndy Caravelis, Western Carolina University

- Sherman Hillary, NC Economic Development Representative
- Drew Christy, Director, Western Governor's Office

Board Members Absent

- **Vice-Chair:** Max Hopper, Cleveland County
- Jeffery Emory, Town of Grover
- Tom Helton, Town of Ellenboro
- Rick Howell, City of Shelby
- Scott Neisler, City of Kings Mountain
- Ray Padgett, Town of Lawndale
- Mark Phillips, Town of Columbus
- Jeff Swink, Town of Bostic
- Dorris Weaver, Town of Fallston
- Bob Boyette, City of Marion
- Carol Pritchett, Town of Lake Lure
- Tommy Greene, Town of Boiling Springs
- Larry Dooley, Cleveland County
- Justin Conner, Town of Forest City
- David Moore, Polk County
- Marche Pittman, Polk County
- Dean Buff, McDowell County
- Steve Garrison, Rutherford County
- Mike Lugo, Rutherford County



Call to order

The Full Board Meeting of Foothills Regional Commission was held at Foothills Regional Commission in the conference room on March 28th, 2024. Chairman Fred Baisden called the meeting to order at 12:00 pm and welcomed everyone. Chairman Baisden gave an invocation followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of minutes

Chairman Fred Baisden requested approval of the October 3rd, 2023, amended minutes. The motion was made by Jimmy Dancy with a second by Janet Gerald. All were in favor.

Chairman Fred Baisden requested approval of the December 14th, 2023 Board Minutes. The motion was made by David Guy with a second by Ashley Wooten. All were in favor.

Reports

1. Presentation of the Governor's Task Force for Racial Equity and Criminal Justice

Cindy Caravelis (Western Carolina University)

- Briefed the Board about their operation with Preston Blakely and Mike Hawkins on the report of 125 recommendations by the Governor's commission.
- Briefed about the Community care program.
- Informed the Board of the questions that they asked during the phase of the project:
 - i. Can social workers be used in place of or with law enforcement officers? How do those partnerships work?
 - ii. Why aren't we already doing it here in western North Carolina?
 - iii. How can we, as educators, prepare students to work in these contexts?
- Informed the Board about their project in Sylva, North Carolina.
- Educated the Board about the Community Care Program's purpose.
- Stated that they are trying to reduce the risk of trauma from negative interactions between law enforcement and community members.
- Informed the Board that their majority issues are substance use, unhoused individuals, mental health issues, and poverty.
- Informed the Board of the operations of the Care Interns.
- Informed the Board that between 2022 and 2023 they have managed to house 25 people that did not have a home.
- Informed the Board that they received a grant from Dogwood Health Trust.
- Informed the Board that Waynesville has received its first intern, and she will be hired full-time starting April 1st, 2024.

- Informed the Board that they encounter criticism from those who do not want to work with the program, especially from social workers who referred to themselves as Abolitionists.
- Informed the Board that Chief Paton wants to know if they can have a local mobile crisis unit.
- Shared Preston Blakely's presentation with the board.
- Stated that Drew Christy (Director of Governor Cooper's Western Office) plans to send all the information he received from her up to Raleigh to see if we can get Legislative support for communities who are interested in trying to do the Community Care Program.
- Informed the Board that they are placing an intern at the Lincolnton Police Department.
- Informed the Board that they are lobbying the government for funds and have also been applying for grants.
- Informed the Board that the reason for using social worker interns is because it is less costly.
- Informed the Board that they are talking with the SEC Foundation to introduce paid internships across the UNC system program.
- Informed the Board that they have created the first police social work class they plan to offer next fall.
- Briefed the Board of the need for the town and the police department to agree on this program.
- Briefed the Board about the safety policies and safeguards for the social workers.

Comments

- Danna Stansbury: Asked Cindy if she was trying to share this information with all the Councils of Government in the State.
- Jimmy Dancy: Raised concern about the effect of introducing a new program on the budget and acknowledged the need for this Community Care Program.
- David Guy: Raised concern about the safety of social workers in dangerous environments.

2. EDA Presentation

Hillary Sherman (NC Economic Development Administration)

- Briefed the Board about EDA and the duties of EDA.
- Briefed the Board on how EDA operates and the process of securing grants from EDA.
- Informed the Board that the EDA is working collaboratively with other funders to ensure investment leverage.
- Informed the Board that they are interested in helping Foothills Regional Commission get a yes on their grant application.
- Informed the Board that any applications for funds are welcomed and that the applications in the regional office are open on a rolling basis.
- Briefed the Board about considerations put in place by EDA for eligibility for funds. These are economic considerations, portfolio considerations, and operational considerations.

- Explained to the Board what their role would be in partnering with Foothills Regional Commission and appreciated their fantastic work.
- Introduced USDA and Golden Leaf as partners and collaborators with EDA.
- Informed the Board that they require matching share funds for their investments.

3. Governors Update

Drew Christy (Director of Governor Cooper’s Western Office)

- Informed the Board that on Monday, President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris visited North Carolina to highlight the almost 400,000 new enrollees to Medicaid expansion in response to the letters of resolution that were submitted and the great work that both the Governor and The General Assembly did cooperate to get Medicaid expansion pass.
- Reminded the Board that Governor Cooper announced 2024 as the year of public schools for the governor’s office and the importance of public education.
- Explained the private school voucher bill and its impact on taxpayers and public schools by decreasing public school funding by \$200 million. For the 2026-2027 fiscal year, the following counties are set to lose the following amounts to public school funding:
 - i. Cleveland County - \$1.46 million
 - ii. McDowell County - \$1.8 million
 - iii. Polk County - \$120,000
 - iv. Rutherford County - \$1.75 million
- Informed the Board that homeschooling does not qualify for funding.

Comments

- Bryan King: Asked if this loss included only the public charter schools or just the private schools.
- David Guy: Asked if homeschooling qualifies with the same funding.
- Jimmy Dancy: Asked how he calculated the losses.
- Ashley Wooten: Stated that there are both low-income and not low-income enrolled in Private Schools.

4. Finance Report

Charlotte Sullivan:

- Informed the Board of the following Revised Budget Amendment #1:
 - i. Was approved on November 16th, 2023. The correct amounts were approved, but the total appropriation was wrong. The total should be \$100,040.00.

Decision: Chairman Fred Baisden requested a motion to approve the Revised Budget Amendment. The motion was made by Scott Webber with a second by Ashley Wooten. All were in favor.

- Informed the Board of the following Budget Amendment #3:
 - i. Amends the Budget of \$779,841, federal funding of \$ 774,578, and local funding of \$5,263. And that is in ECD as the Ellenberg transportation funding.
 - ii. The workforce department is putting carryover funding for fiscal year 22/23 into the funds for this year.

Decision: Chairman Fred Baisden requested a motion to approve the Budget Amendment. The motion was made by Jimmy Dancy with a second by Jack Shytle. All were in favor.

- Presented the Cash Flow Report to the Board and gave a further analysis on each:
 - i. The Investment account which keeps most of the funds.
 - ii. Section 8 Housing which pays for the vouchers and where we receive all their funding.
 - iii. General fund which pays most of the bills.
 - iv. Payroll account which is where we transfer money in and out for our payroll.
- Informed the board that they did a revision of the Accounting Policy and Procedures and sent it to all staff.
- Announced to the Board that they are expecting a Workforce Monitoring visit soon.

5. Aging Department Update

Laura Lynch:

- Announced to the Board that it is time for the Four-Year Aging Services Plan for the years 2024-2028. This provides the department with service planning information that will guide their focus for the next 4 years and information to share with legislators about a much-needed increase in funding for senior adults.
- Informed the Board that from surveys received so far, access to affordable medications is the number one issue, home repairs/safety improvements are the number two issue, and access to in-home care is the number three issue.
- Informed the Board that surveys indicate a need for more focused outreach to isolated seniors within the region.
- Stated that the regular Block Grant funding is not enough to allow for providers in each of the four counties and that even if funding were adequate, finding service providers has been an issue in the past as it would be now. However, the State recovery funding that will be released soon should

provide around \$144,000 to be spent on Housing and Home Repairs for seniors. This is in addition to the regular Block Grant funding. The new funding expires in December 2026.

Comments

- Chairman Fred Baisden: Requested to link Laura Lynch with a free clinic in Henderson County that covers Polk and part of Rutherford County and provides free drugs to people who cannot afford them.

6. Housing Department Update

Pam Hall:

- Introduced to the Board a new staff member Kieran Nelson.
- Gave updates about the vouchers and when they will re-open the waiting list.
- Promised to inform the Board when the waiting list will be re-opened.

7. Community & Economic Development Update

Alan Toney:

- Informed the Board that they have kicked off the regional housing study in Polk County which started last month and that they will be doing the same in Rutherford and McDowell County around the same time. For Cleveland, it will be next year.
- Announced to the Board that they hope to distribute about \$1.2 million for housing projects through the HUD HOME Consortium Program. They hope to have checks out by the end of April.
- Informed the Board that there are projects in each of the four counties as of the 2022-2023 allocation and appreciated Mr. Wooten and McDowell County for their leadership and willingness to take on the lead role.
- Informed the Board that they have purchased a drone with LIDAR technology which can do site assessment, take pictures, and do site planning.
- Stated that they have met with all the county managers on a connect humanity program trying to map out Broadband connectivity and to figure out what is going to be the long-term cost for everyone to get fiber to their home.
- Stated that they are tracking BEAD requirements for grant funding.
- Announced that FRC was selected to host an NC Fellow again this year.

8. Executive Director's Report

Danna Stansbury:

- Informed the Board that while in Washington, DC for the NADO/DDAA Policy Conference in March, she was appointed to the Department District of Appalachia Association Board of Directors to represent North Carolina.
- Stated that Steve Garrison, the county manager, has put Foothills Regional Commission in the Budget for his General Assembly Ask for a new building.
- Announced that FRC completed roof repairs, HVAC repairs, and had carpet installed in the public areas.


Announcements

- Bryan King: Informed the board about the letter he signed for the General Assembly Ask for Foothills Regional Commission a new building.
- Fred Baisden: announced that Annette Staley is absent due to sickness


Adjournment

Chairman Fred Baisden adjourned the meeting at 1:43 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,



Chairman, Fred Baisden
Max Hopper v.c.



Secretary, Bryan King