



TOWN OF SYLVA BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS REGULAR MEETING

Thursday, May 14, 2026, at 5:30 PM

Board Room, 83 Allen Street Sylva, North Carolina

MINUTES

PRESENT: Perry Matthews, Commissioner
Samuel McGuire, Commissioner
Johnny Phillips, Mayor
Joseph Waldrum, Commissioner
Brad Waldrop, Mayor Pro Tem

Paige Dowling, Town Manager
Amanda Murajda, Town Clerk
Eric Ridenour, Town Attorney

ABSENT: Blitz Estridge, Commissioner

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Phillips called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

STAFF PRESENT: None.

VISITORS: Garrett Craig, Becca Pipitone, David Noland, Casey Walawender, Vanesa Salazar, Lyndsi Young, Brad Tollie, Phoumala Tollie, Emmy Schneider-Green, Nelia Waldrum, Dan Mackey, Joshua Yount, Nilofer Couture, Mikala Shuler, Brian Shuler and Anne Link.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Commissioner McGuire made a motion to approve the agenda. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

Commissioner Waldrum made a motion to approve the consent agenda. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

The following individuals addressed the Board regarding concerns about business signage in town that they believe contains references associated with the Ku Klux Klan (KKK):

- Garrett Craig, Sylva resident, expressed concerns regarding the impact of the signage on the community's image, tourism, inclusivity, and local businesses. He encouraged the Board to consider a resolution condemning racist symbolism and urged community members and business tenants to hold property owners accountable.
- Becca Pipitone, Sylva resident, spoke about the installation of additional signs and expressed concern that the messaging promotes racist symbolism. She referenced prior controversies involving the property owners and urged further scrutiny of their influence within the community.
- Casey Walawender, local resident, expressed disappointment regarding the signage, citing previous community efforts to remove similar signs. She stated concerns about the impact on the town's reputation, tourism, and local economy.
- Brad Tollie, speaking on behalf of his wife, spoke in support of Mr. Clapsaddle. He shared personal experiences regarding assistance provided by the Clapsaddle family to his wife and others, including support for minority business owners and employees. He argued that the controversy was misplaced and cited other examples of businesses with similar letter combinations.
- Emmy Schneider-Green, local resident, stated that the signage conveys an unmistakable association with the KKK and expressed concern regarding its impact on residents, visitors, and the community's image. She urged action to require modification of the signage.

- Nilofer Couture, a Jackson County resident, stated that the signage creates feelings of exclusion and fear and urged the community to reject racism and promote inclusion.

MAYOR'S REPORT: None.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT:

Commissioners McGuire congratulated Jackson County graduates, including students graduating from local schools, Southwestern Community College, and Western Carolina University. Appreciation was also expressed to educators and school staff for their service throughout the school year. Commissioner Waldrop provided an update regarding Jackson County's withdrawal from the Fontana Regional Library system. The commissioner noted that the current library board structure may change and encouraged residents to volunteer for local boards and committees. Commissioner Waldrum congratulated Chief Aimee Sumner on her appointment as Police Chief and recognized positive visibility and community engagement efforts by the police department. Commissioner Matthews reported attending a Hawthorn Heights fundraising golf tournament and noted that record fundraising totals were achieved. Residents were encouraged to support the organization through volunteering and donations.

MANAGER'S REPORT: Manager Dowling reported the following:

- Employment Updates – Police Department: Maleah Mathis has been promoted to Lieutenant from Sergeant. Maleah has worked for the Town since 2019. Briana Foster has been promoted to Sergeant from Officer. Briana has worked for the Town since November 2023. Officer Brittany MacLean is taking a promotion with the Sheriff's Department to become an investigator. Officer MacLean's last day is May 13th. The department is currently recruiting two patrol officers.
- Scott Creek wall stabilization project continues with engineering work progressing toward a 90% design and permitting completion.
- Poteet Park's permanent sinks should be installed by the end of the month.
- The town and Equinox will conduct a closeout meeting and trail visit for the RTP trail. The next step will be the RFP for the PARTF grant.
- Work continues on development of plans for the Ritz drainage system.

NEW BUSINESS:

FORMAL PRESENTATION OF FY 2026-2027 BUDGET: Manager Dowling formally presented the FY 2026-2027 budget to the board and reminded them of the public hearing scheduled for May 28, 2026, at 5:30 p.m.

Key highlights included:

- No property tax increase; tax rate remains at \$0.45 per \$100 valuation.
- Budget includes major capital purchases for fire, police, and public works departments.
- Salary study implementation includes a 7.9% market adjustment and a 3% cost-of-living increase for employees.
- Capital reserve appropriations total \$287,500.
- Budget adoption is scheduled for June 11.

No action was required at this meeting.

ABC BOARD CHAIR APPOINTMENT: The Board considered the reappointment of David Noland as chairman of the board for the FY 2026-2027. *Commissioner Waldrum made a motion to reappoint David Noland as the chairman. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.*

MOU MUNICIPALITY FIRE SERVICE DISTRICT: Manager Dowling explained that Jackson County is creating a service district to provide fire and EMS services. The MOU is being approved by each municipality. The county will lower their tax rate by the amount of the service tax. This agreement will guarantee the Town receives a level of funding equivalent to our current funding from the County for the Fire Department. This will help Sylva know there will not be a loss in funding while the agreement is in effect. If fire departments need additional funding, a request would need to be made to the County and/or municipalities for an increase. This agreement will protect the funding for both fire and EMS services throughout the county. The agreement will remain in effect through June 30, 2030. *Commissioner McGuire made a motion to approve the MOU for the fire service district. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.*

CANCEL JUNE 26, 2026, REGULAR BOARD MEETING: Commissioner Waldrop made a motion to cancel the June 26, 2026, regular board meeting. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

CLOSED SESSION: Commissioner Waldrum made a motion to enter closed session at 6:10 p.m. pursuant to NCGS. 143-318-11(a)(5) for contract negotiation. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

Commissioner McGuire made a motion to come out of closed session. The motion carried with a unanimous vote and the Board entered into regular session at 6:36 p.m. No action was taken during closed session.

ADJOURNMENT: Commissioner Waldrop made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:36 p.m. The motion carried with a unanimous vote.

Johnny Phillips
Mayor

Amanda W. Murajda
Town Clerk