

Watauga Budget Packs the House

Written by Steve Frank

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It was certainly not the most fun night to be a sitting Watauga County Commissioner, that as dozens signed up to speak to the commissioners with the overflow standing-room-only crowd there to take issue with the county budget. Commissioners removed, reduced, or did not approve requested increases for quite a few agencies and non profits in and associated with the county, causing the face-to-face three-minute lectures and appeals from various county parks, AppalCart, Mountain Alliance at Watauga High, the Board of Education, and many agencies that help those unable to otherwise survive in our community. Curt comments and a math lesson were delivered by Todd Carter of Hospitality House, saying, “Eventually you’re going to pay for the 225 residents we served last year. You put them in jail, you pay \$64 a person a day to house that person in detention. Guess what our cost is? \$32 per person per day—and we offer a lot more than jail. It’s your choice. Do the math. From where I’m sitting, you’re making the fiscally irresponsible choice about what’s best for your citizens—and your budget.” Christy Welch, wife of commissioner John Welch, told of her family’s giving out of their pockets to save some individuals from possibly freezing, “Leadership gains authority and respect when the voiceless poor are treated fairly.” From the Hospitality House, cook Allison Jennings told the commissioners, “As a person who sees the face of hunger every day, from homelessness, job loss, addiction, or mental health issues, I ask on the behalf of those struggling neighbors that I love so very much to please help be a part of the solution.” Commissioners took no action after the hearing, and will adopt their 2013-14 budget in June.