

## WCC Starts Arts Council, Commerce Park Projects

Written by Steve Frank  
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Watauga County Commissioners started the processes on two projects in their meeting this morning. One would hopefully lead to a new Commerce or Industrial Park, the action coming after emerging from an executive session in which the matter was discussed. After more discussion in the open session, commissioners voted to start the process toward purchase of a 190 acre site off NC 194 in the Meat Camp area, just past Castle Ford Road, property belonging to Debra Earp Greene. Chairman Nathan Miller announced that the county had negotiated a \$1.7 million purchase price for the tract, and although not ideal, was the best tract of land for the purpose and at the price. The county will put \$50,000 in earnest money in escrow for the 5 months of due diligence, researching various aspects of the property, with hopes for development over a 5 to 10-year term, should all pan out.

The other process is on a new home for the Watauga County Arts Council, joined by the Michael Patricelli Craft Enrichment Program and the Community Music School at a property the county owns by default at 377 Shadowline Drive. The former New River Behavioral Healthcare facility has been vacant since the program folded and the property was foreclosed on by the county. Various aspects of Cherry Johnson's proposal for the new Blue Ridge Art Space were debated by the commissioners who ended their discussions with a motion from Commissioner Perry Yates... The vote to proceed was unanimous, but with a number of issues yet to work out before the final vote can come. The Arts Council, who lost their location in the Jones House Community Center a year ago, is now losing the space given freely pending the leasing of the property, and with a new business wanting the King Street space, that time has come, with the Arts Council having to move by April 15th.