

MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'
BRIEFING MEETING OF NOVEMBER 4, 2025.

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Briefing Meeting on November 4, 2025, in the 1st floor conference room at 200 College Street in downtown Asheville, North Carolina at 3:00 p.m.

Present: Chair Amanda Edwards; Vice-Chair Martin Moore; Commissioner Terri Wells, Commissioner Al Whitesides; Commissioner Parker Sloan; Commissioner Jennifer Horton; Commissioner Drew Ball.

Chair Edwards opening the meeting. Manager Pinder informed the Board that federal funding for the More Than a Job program (formally, STEP) has been removed, yet the Board has a budget amendment for More Than a Job (MTAJ-NC) program on the regular meeting agenda for this afternoon and asked whether the Board wanted to remove or keep the item on the Consent agenda. The Board members consented to keeping the item on the agenda so that it is approved when the program is funded again.

1. Helene Recovery Plan

Rachael Sawyer provided the background information. She explained that the Helene Recovery plan began in April with Community Input and is now ready for adoption. She provided an overview of the two rounds of public feedback as well as the priorities that were established from community feedback. The proposed plan has 114 projects across 7 local governments. Each local government governing board will be asked to consider endorsement of the Helene Recovery Plan and adoption of their projects. The Board is scheduled to approve the Recovery Plan at the November 18, 2025, meeting.

2. Open Space Bond Allocations for Passive Recreation Land Projects

Rachael Sawyer provided background information. She explained that In November 2022, Buncombe County voters approved a \$30 million general obligation bond with the following goals: Support greenway infrastructure; Protect farmland and natural resources while also contributing to the county's goal of conserving 20% of the County's land by 2030; and Increase access to recreational activities and protect natural resources. To date, \$17.5M of the \$30 M has been allocated. Currently 18 projects have been approved to move forward across both the Affordable and Open Space Bond portfolios. She explained that the Passive Recreation Lands Subcommittee is comprised of 7 members appointed by the Parks Greenways and Recreation advisory Board and the Land Conservation Advisory Board. She further explained the project criteria and provided an overview of the review process which begins with staff then goes to the Passive Recreation Lands Subcommittee and finally, to the Board of Commissioners to make final decision regarding project funding. Sawyer then provided an in-depth review of the 11 proposals received and said that the Subcommittee will present further details and their recommendations at the November 18, 2025 Board of Commissioners meeting.

3. Homeowner Grant Program Update

Phillip Hardin provided background information. He explained that 821 Homeowner Grant applications were received in FY26. The total spent was \$280K, which includes \$75K for

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City of Asheville program costs and \$155K for Buncombe County program costs with an additional \$50 K in administration costs. Hardin explained that no new funds were needed, and that admin costs can cover higher than expected program costs.

Following staff updates, Curt Euler, County Attorney stated that the Board needs to go into Closed Session to consider the qualifications, competence, performance, character, fitness, conditions of appointment, or conditions of initial employment of an individual public officer or employee. The statutory authority is contained in G.S. 143-318.11(a)(6).

Commissioner Moore made the motion to go into Closed Session for the reason stated. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Whitesides and approved unanimously.

MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'
REGULAR MEETING OF NOVEMBER 4, 2025.

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Regular Meeting on November 4, 2025, in the Chamber at 200 College Street in downtown Asheville, North Carolina at 5:00 p.m.

Present: Chair Amanda Edwards; Vice-Chair Martin Moore; Commissioner Terri Wells, Commissioner Al Whitesides; Commissioner Parker Sloan; Commissioner Jennifer Horton; Commissioner Drew Ball.

Chair Edwards opened the meeting and provided opening remarks.

CONSENT

1. Approval of the October 21, 2025 Combined Meeting Minutes
2. Approval of the September 2025 Tax Collection Report
3. Request to Waive Occupancy Tax Penalty for Rahul, Inc. DBA Downtown Inn & Suites
4. Appropriation of Fund 270 Forfeiture Funds for Purchase Needs
5. Approval of the Courthouse Elevator Repairs Contract with Otis Elevator
6. Budget Amendment for More Than a Job (MTAJ-NC) program
7. Budget Amendment to Supplement Conservation Easement Projects
8. Budget Amendment to Appropriate Permits & Inspections Fund Balance for Demolition of Dilapidated Structure

Commissioner Moore made the motion to approve the Consent agenda and the agenda as presented. Commissioner Horton seconded the motion and was it approved unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

MANAGER'S REPORT

Manager Pinder introduced Kevin Madsen as the new Helene Recovery Officer. She provided his background information and said that Madsen most recently served Madison and Yancey Counties from the FEMA Community Liaison program and that his career began in North Texas responding to hurricanes Katrina and Rita. She and the Board members welcomed Madsen to the team.

Manager Pinder introduced Nathan Greene to provide an update on the Federal Government shut down update. Greene explained that there is an Incident Management Team in action for the federal government shutdown response, which was established to ensure continuity of operations, manage surge for key departments, coordinate food donation sites, and engage with community partners. He explained that the County also launched a food drive through Nov. 25 to address food access needs while the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is impacted, and the drive has collected an average of 2,300 pounds of food each day.

PRESENTATIONS

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1. FY25 4th Quarter Financial Update (Unaudited)

Mellisa Moore, Finance Director, provided the update. She provided an in-depth overview of the general fund budget to actual summary, fund balance analysis, solid waste fund-enterprise fund, County capital projects, debt summary and an investment overview. Vice-Chair Moore asked that the Moore and staff continue to keep the Board updated and investment changes.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Budget Amendments to Establish Two Conservation Easements

Ariel Zijp introduced Michelle Pugliese and Jess Laggis with Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy. They explained that for the acquisition of a Haw Creek conservation easement and four Warren Wilson College conservation easements have been approved by Commissioners. The 63-acre Haw Creek Headwaters conservation easement, which will be held by Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy (SAHC), will protect six streams, multiple scenic viewsheds, and recreation access to existing trails; provide connection to the Mountains to Sea Trail; and prevent stormwater runoff for the surrounding community and steep slope development. The budget amendment requested \$200,000 of Open Space Bond funds and \$54,000 of fiscal year 2026 conservation easement funding. This amendment represents 33% of the project budget; the remaining amount comes from a private leveraged match.

The Warren Wilson College project in Swannanoa is the second phase of a two-phase project to protect 790 acres comprising four agricultural conservation easements totaling 600 acres. They explained that among many other benefits, the SAHC-held easement adjoins other protected lands, provides educational and social opportunities, includes a Wildlands Network priority corridor, and houses threatened and endangered species.

Zijp further explained that the Board of Commissioners previously approved \$310,000 of fiscal year 2025 easement funding for the project, and this new budget amendment requested \$858,084 of Open Space Bond funds. The remaining 89.8% of project cost has been secured through private and grant funding.

Commissioner Wells thanked the team for both the projects and noted the important work in that community that also benefits the greater community.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to approve the two budget amendments as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Sloan and approved unanimously.

2. 2030 Strategic Plan Adoption

Rafeal Baptista, Strategic Innovation Director, provided the background information. He explained that over the past two years, Buncombe County has undertaken a comprehensive Strategic Planning process to develop the 2030 Strategic Plan—an evolution of the 2025 Strategic Plan. This effort has included input from dozens of subject matter experts, three rounds of community engagement, and multiple work sessions with the Board of Commissioners.

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He further explained that the 2030 Strategic Plan serves as a guiding framework for the County, outlining key priorities and desired outcomes over the next five years. The draft plan features six community focus areas and one foundational focus area, articulated through 17 objectives and 64 measurable goals. Each goal includes defined metrics that will be tracked following the plan's adoption.

He said that County staff will provide regular updates to the Board of Commissioners and the public through formal presentations and a dedicated dashboard on the Buncombe County website. If approved, the 2030 Strategic Plan will go into effect on January 1, 2026.

Commissioner Horton expressed appreciation for the thoughtful development of the Strategic Plan 2030 and stated support for its adoption. However, she noted that despite extensive community feedback on issues such as homelessness, mental health, elder care, food access, and disaster recovery, the final plan did not reflect measurable changes from the draft. The commissioner emphasized that public input should meaningfully shape policy decisions and she pledged to continue advocating for underrepresented voices.

Commissioner Horton made the motion to adopt the Focus Area, Objectives and Goals in the 2030 Buncombe County Strategic Plan. Commissioner Wells seconded the motion and it was carried unanimously.

3. Reappointment of Jennifer Pike as Tax Collector

Jennifer Pike, Tax Collector, provided background information. She explained that pursuant to North Carolina General Statute 105-349 the governing body of each county shall appoint a tax collector to serve for a term to be determined by the appointing body, the term is not specified by 105-349. She was first appointed as Tax Collector in November 2017 and reappointed November 2, 2021 for a four-term. Since original appointment, she has lead the Tax Collections department in maintaining an exemplary County regular collection rate, averaging 99.71% for fiscal years 2018 through 2025. The municipalities of Asheville, Black Mountain, Montreat, Weaverville, and Woodfin have delegated their tax collector duties to the appointed County Tax Collector. Ms. Pike is also responsible for the collection and payment processing for Occupancy Tax, Gross Receipts (Heavy Equipment Rental & Rental Car), Beer & Wine Retail License Fees, and Solid Waste payments on account. The proposed resolution would extend her term by 5 years.

Commissioner Whitesides made the motion to reappoint Jennifer Pike for an additional 5-year term. Commissioner Moore seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

4. Resolution to Award contract for Buncombe County Sports Park Fields Upgrade

Allison Daines, Parks and Recreation Director, provided the background information. She explained that in 2023, Buncombe County applied for TPDF funds and received a grant award for Phase II of the Enka Recreation Destination Project. Phase II of this project focus is "Buncombe County Sports Park, A Premier Sports Park and Family Destination." The Buncombe County TPDF awarded \$4,054,415 to provide artificial turf and lighting to fields 3, 4, and 5 with

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accessible bleachers and walkway, installation of a universal designed playground, renovation to the central restroom to include a park ranger office and contact station, and renovated shelter with lighting. The approach to the project is below:

- Turf & lighting of fields 3, 4, 5, and walking path are in one contract
- Playground, shelter, and Park Ranger Office/Contact Station will be another contract

She further explained that the construction contract for the turf and lighted fields along with the accessible walking path is negotiated and ready for approval.

Commissioner Sloan made the motion to Approve the \$3,856,425 contract with Astro Turf, LLC for the construction of turfed and lighted fields at Buncombe County Sports Park. Commissioner Wells seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

5. Resolution Awarding Charles D. Owen Park Contract

Allison Daines, Parks and Recreation Director, provided the updated Owen Park. She explained that Owen Park experienced catastrophic damage after the Swannanoa River breached its banks through the ponds, shifting toward the park; the park was completely destroyed. The rebuilding of Owen Park remains a priority project for the county and will require a 2-phase approach.

Daines further explained that Phase I includes engineering and design development which includes community outreach to reach schematic design. Phase II will include 100% construction documents, permitting, bidding and contracting, and final construction once Phase I has been complete. The county received 11 submittals and has negotiated a contract with Hoerr Schaudt for Phase I of the project and is bringing forward this contract for \$448,980.

Commissioner Horton made the motion to approve the contract with Hoerr Schaudt. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Whitesides and carried unanimously.

CLOSED SESSION

Curt Euler, County Attorney stated that the Board will resume their previously recessed Closed Session to consider the qualifications, competence, performance, character, fitness, conditions of appointment, or conditions of initial employment of an individual public officer or employee. The statutory authority is contained in G.S. 143-318.11(a)(6).

Adjourned. 6:32 p.m.