

MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'
BRIEFING MEETING OF NOVEMBER 18, 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 read the joint statement between the Board of Commissioners and City Council. The letter expressed their commitment to keeping Asheville and Buncombe County safe, welcoming, and respectful of everyone's rights, especially amid concerns about expected U.S. Customs and Border Protection operations. They urge residents to stay informed, remain peaceful, and stand together in support of all families.

Helene Update

Kevin Madsen, Helene Recovery Officer, started the update. He briefly reviewed the Helene Recovery Plan that was scheduled to be adopted at this afternoon's regular meeting of the Board. He explained that the Plan has 114 countywide projects with short-term, medium-term and long term project goals. Burnett Walz provided an update on landslides. He said that a vendor has been selected to perform the Architectural and Engineering (A&E study) for the Grovemont landslide. Staff is working to finalize the contract for Board approval. Two other slides, 40 McCormick Plan and Landfill on Riverside Dr., will have an A&E study within the next 90-120 days. The next step is to evaluate applying for stabilization funds and launch RFQ for the landfill slide. Brad Hughes provided an update on the HMGP program. He stated that there as been a total of 429 applications and 277 acquisitions have been made. Hughes further explained the acquisition project timeline and how projects are grouped.

Hauler Rebate Program

Dane Pedersen, Solid Waste Director, provided background information. He explained that in FY15, the Board of Commissioners passed a budget ordinance of \$4/ton rebate for haulers who hauled greater than 23,000 tons/year to a BC facility. In FY18 it was reduced to 12,000 tons/year. The purpose was to increase the County's competitive advantage in the market by incentivizing MSW & C&D haulers, to support waste dispersion and recycling efforts by utilizing County-created efficiency practices and to protect the revenue streams that fund landfill operations with high-volume haulers. Thus, keep per-ton disposal costs stable for residents and smaller customers. Staff is now recommending terminating the program. Pedersen further explained that There are approximately 620+ active commercial accounts. However, currently 5 haulers qualify for the rebate, less than 1% of total accounts. Essentially, this is just a large-hauler discount and that terminating the program would:

- Promotes equity and competitive neutrality among all haulers as currently only larger haulers qualify.
- Simplifies fee structure and administrative tracking.
- Ending the program restores pricing fairness and equal opportunity.
- Aligns with board goal of equitable service delivery

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- Rebates reduce disposal revenue that could otherwise support landfill operation, equipment, and long-term capital planning and obligations

Staff recommend the effective date of December 31, 2025 and the final rebate submission would be Jan. 31, 2026. Termination of the Rebate Program will be on the Board's December 2 regular meeting for a vote.

Proclamation Policy Update

Sarah Gross, Clerk to the Board, provided background information. She explained that the current Proclamation Policy was drafted and reviewed by the Board in 2021 and that the proposed updated policy aims to clarify recent questions related to submitting and getting approval for a proclamation. She further explained that the current policy is written as an internal guideline, whereas the updated policy would be public-facing documents for requesters to understand the process. Gross explained each of the proposed changes and said that the Policy would be on the December 2 regular meeting agenda for review and adoption.

Ordinance and Policy Recommendations – Longevity Pay for Employees

Karen Marshall, Interim Human Resources Director, provided background information. She explained the current longevity pay plan for all Buncombe County employees and said that staff recommends discontinuation of the longevity for new hires and rehires who start work on January 1, 2026 or after. She explained that the International City/county Management Association guidance emphasizes a shift toward more market-based and performance driven compensation strategies to compete for talent. Lastly, Marshall noted that employees who started work prior to January 1, 2026, will not be impacted. A public hearing will be held on December 2, 2025 with a vote by the Board to follow.

Swannanoa Small Area Plan Update

Gillian Phillips, Planner, provided the update. She outlined the project timeline and explained the community engagement underway. She noted partner roles, including Land of Sky Regional Council, NC Wildlife Resources Commission, and Mountain True. Phillips provided in depth on the Boundy Poll that was open from May 8 – July 25, 2025 which asked the public which map option best represented the boundaries of Swannanoa. The Steering Committee is reviewing to make recommendations before a final Policy Map is ready to take to the public. Additionally, Phillips outlined the SWOT analysis of the poll results. She said that 397 people took the poll and 72% said they want the County to make major changes to prepare for future disasters. She then provided an overview of the Vision Statement Creation which is also being finalized for public feedback. In closing, Phillips highlighted the ongoing steps and upcoming public engagement opportunities.

MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'
REGULAR MEETING OF NOVEMBER 18, 2025.

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Regular Meeting on November 18, 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 November 4, 2025 Combined Meeting Minutes
2. Appointment of Wilson Bishop to the Skyland Fire & Rescue Firefighters' Relief Fund Board of Trustees
3. Budget Amendment to accept Dogwood Health Trust grant funds for Grant Writer Support for FEMA HMGP Applications
4. Budget Amendment to accept grant funding from the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission Green Growth Toolkit Grant
5. Budget Amendment to accept additional disaster funding from NCDHHS
6. Budget Amendment to accept Donations for Foster Care Wishlist

Commissioner Sloan made the motion to approve the Consent agenda and to follow the agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Whitesides and carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Gino Perez, with Better Together Transportation informed the Board that Mountain Mobility has a two-grocery bag per rider policy, which is limiting for the elderly riders. He recommended that the County amend the policy and create opportunities that help riders with their groceries.

Shelly Mckethny thanked the Board for their consideration of Passive Recreation Lands, which is on the agenda. She said she lives in one of the impacted neighborhoods and it means a lot to them.

PRESENTATIONS

1. Transit Comprehensive Operational Analysis - City of Asheville

Ricky Angueira, Consultant with Jarrett Walker and Associates, provided background information. He explained that the purpose of this presentation is to summarize the purpose and goals of the City's ART Comprehensive Operational Assessment (COA); Identifying opportunities to improve ART service based on existing resources and that Asheville's current system is oriented more towards coverage, in order to serve outlying areas, but this results in routes on which buses arrive infrequently. He explained that no decisions have been made and there are no proposed changes or cuts to transit service being recommended at this time.

Angueira explained the different pros and cons of ridership vs coverage and talked through concept maps. He said that Ridership consent has higher frequencies along the city's main corridors which can lead to more access opportunities but there is a loss of coverage;

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whereas, the Coverage concept has higher coverage, where everyone with service today still has coverage which leads to better on-time performance and better connections.

The Board members had several questions about the maps presented and the Black Mountain route that is currently paid for by the County. Angueira explained that the maps are still conceptual and that routes that the County pays for would be an on-going conversation with the Board if there was a recommendation to make changes in the future. Commissioner Ball asked for more data related ridership. Angueira explained the productivity model for effectiveness and pointed the Board to the City's Study and project page for in-depth data analysis.

2. Vaya Health LME/MCO Updates - Vaya Health

Angie Garner with Vaya Health provided the update. He explained that Vaya Health is a local political subdivision of the state of North Carolina and a Local Management Entity/Managed Care Organization (LME/MCO) governed by Chapter 122C of the North Carolina General Statutes and that Vaya Health is one of 4 Tailored Plans in NC which manages publicly-funded mental health, substance use disorder, intellectual/ developmental disability, and traumatic brain injury services in 32-county region. She said that Vaya received funding from answering an RFA in the Spring of 2024 from the Bi-Partisan Safer Communities Act: Developing Behavioral Health Crisis Intervention Models in NC. Buncombe was one of the three counties identified. The Sheriff Office and RHA provide community outreach and timely response to community members who may be in crisis with a mental health and/or substance use emergency, overdose, or other issues, with trained and coordinated response personnel and other resources. She provided an overview of programs, which include Child Recovery, Workforce Development Grant, the Hope 4 NC Grant, Vaya Transition and Housing.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Adoption of Helene Recovery Plan

Kevin Madsen, Helene Recovery Officer provided background information. He explained that the Plan is a comprehensive five-year strategy developed in partnership with the County's six municipalities. With the City of Asheville, Town of Biltmore Forest, Town of Black Mountain, Town of Montreat, Town of Weaverville and Town of Woodfin, the Helene Recovery Plan will guide recovery, resilience, and growth across the county in the wake of Tropical Storm Helene.

The Plan is based on the input from more than 2,600 community members and establishes a roadmap of 114 projects to address flooding, landslides, infrastructure damage, and other significant impacts.

He further outlined the the plan's key recovery areas, which include:

- Housing repair and replacement
- Infrastructure restoration (roads, bridges, utilities)
- Natural and cultural resource recovery
- Disaster preparedness and resilience

- Economic revitalization and social services

The Commissioner's thanked staff for their hard work on this comprehensive plan. Commissioner Horton made the motion to approve the Resolution adopting the Buncombe County Tropical Storm Helene Recovery Plan. Vice-Chair Moore seconded the motion and it was adopted unanimously.

2. Resolution to Approve the Contract with John R. McAdams Company for Hominy River Park Engineering and Design Services

Joseph Gusman, Parks and Recreation, provided background information. He explained that Hominy River Park sustained catastrophic damage during Tropical Storm Helene, and rebuilding the park remains a priority project. He reviewed the two-phased approach to rebuilding, which includes a redesign of the park. Gusman explained that a request for qualifications was issued in June and nine submittals were received in response. After conducting an evaluation, staff determined Raleigh-based John R. McAdams Company demonstrated competence and qualification. This design phase is expected to be completed by the end of July 2026.

Commissioner Wells thanked staff and noted this is a beloved park in the community. Commissioner Sloan asked if there would be a community engagement element. Gusman confirmed and said that staff will also lean on the Parks Master Plan engagement and document.

Commissioner Sloan made the motion to approve contract with the firm for engineering and design in the amount of \$159,432.50. Vice-Chair Moore seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

3. Budget Amendment for Open Space Bond Allocations for Passive Recreation Lands Projects

Kevin Conrecode, the Passive Recreation Lands Subcommittee Chair, provided the recommendations. He explained that in November 2022, Buncombe County voters approved a \$30 million general obligation bond with goals to support greenway infrastructure, protect farmland and natural resources, and increase access to recreational activities. The Board of Commissioners established a subcommittee to guide the project funding process. The Passive Recreation Lands Subcommittee released an application process for project proposals in early 2024, but project recommendations were put on hold due to Tropical Storm Helene. In July of this year, the subcommittee resumed applicant check-ins and completed recommendations for projects slated to receive bond funding. Eleven proposals were submitted from three local government partners and eight private entities with a total funding request of \$10,931,182.

The Subcommittee recommended the approval of seven (7) passive recreation projects that are recommended for funding by the Passive Recreation Lands Subcommittee which total \$4,376,262. Impacts from the establishment of these projects are anticipated to be 254 acres newly open to the public, 33 acres newly conserved, and 14 miles of supported trails/multi-use paths.

Following the Subcommittee presentation, Rachael Sawyer, Strategic Partnership Director, provided more information and Staff's recommendation to not include the project that is 33+/- Acres on Sandhill Road, submitted by Balsam Gardens. She further explained the background and rationale, noting that the proposed project is for Buncombe County to acquire a parcel of land along Hominy Creek near the intersection of Sand Hill and Sardis Road in Asheville. The current owner is Balsam Gardens, LLC, and the current use is agricultural (tomato farm); the proposal scored well due to its alignment with the Enka Heritage Trail. The subcommittee is recommending purchase of the property at a lower price than proposed (up to \$750 K rather than the \$1.6 M proposed); and that Staff recommends not moving forward with the purchase of the property at this time for the following reasons:

- The Enka Heritage Trail project has not secured the required easements due to continued negotiations with the owner.
- This parcel would not have been a critical link in the Enka Heritage Trail; it has the potential to be a future extension if the project moves forward.
- 85% of the parcel is encumbered by the floodway, and it has an extremely irregular shape which would significantly limit development options, meaning it may be available in the future if the County wishes to pursue easement options for greenway extension.
- The owner is seeking a very high price per acre for this property considering the environmental constraints.
- Buncombe County is currently participating in the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program which will potentially result in acquisition of hundreds of acres of other floodplain properties at no cost to County. These properties will significantly expand our open space lands portfolio and will come with significant maintenance and programming needs.

She explained that the Board had two Budget Amendments in front of them. The first, Budget Amendment A is the Subcommittee recommendation for all 7 projects and the second, Budget Amendment B is Staff's recommendation for 6 projects, totaling \$3,626,262.

Projects include:

- Haw Creek Park Greenway - Haw Creek Community Association
- Gateway Park – RiverLink
- Hominy Creek Greenway - Asheville Greenworks/Friends of Hominy Creek
- Improving Public Access & Use of Lands - Warren Wilson College
- Riverside Park - Town of Woodfin
- Worx Community Forest Trail Development - Camp Grier

The Board had questions about the Balsam Gardens project and it's relation to the Enka Heritage Trail. Sawyer explained that the Balsam Gardens parcel is not a critical link in the Enka Heritage Trail.

Commissioner Wells thanked the Subcommittee for their work and acknowledged the request that the Board of Commissioners hold the remainder of funds for future committee/subcommittee funding cycles. She said her preference would be not to tie the

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board to a specific funding requirement at this time and requested that staff review projects and funding for all Open Space funds and then come back in early 2026 to provide updates and make a recommendation regarding future funding cycles.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to approve Budget Amendment B with the 6 projects. Commissioner Whitesides seconded the motion, and it was carried unanimously.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

Commissioner Whitesides made the motion to appoint Christoher Gorder to the African American Heritage Commission. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Moore and carried unanimously.

Commissioner Moore made the motion to appoint Emily Troisi and Jeff Fodi to the Parks, Greenways and Recreation Advisory Board. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ball and carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 6:42 p.m.