

MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'

BRIEFING MEETING OF JANUARY 6, 2026.

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Briefing Meeting on January 6, 2026, 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 Drew Ball; and Commissioner Jennifer Horton.

NC CPACE Program

Jeremiah LeRoy presented an overview of the North Carolina Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (NC C-PACE) program, a state-sponsored financing tool that enables privately owned commercial, industrial, agricultural, and multifamily properties to fund clean energy, energy efficiency, water conservation, and resiliency improvements through long-term, low-cost financing. The program is administered by the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC) and allows repayment through a lien on the property that transfers with ownership, typically over a 20–30 year term, subject to mortgage lender consent. Eligible project costs include both hard and soft costs, with financing capped at 35% of the property's value. LeRoy outlined stakeholder roles, noting that local governments adopt resolutions, conduct a public hearing, and record liens but incur no financial or legal liability, while EDPNC oversees project eligibility and private capital providers manage funding and repayment. He said that examples of C-PACE implementation in other North Carolina counties were shared, including the Trenton Mills Lofts project in Gastonia, which utilized \$6.5 million in C-PACE financing for energy efficiency upgrades. LeRoy presented a proposed schedule, including Board consideration of a Resolution of Intent in January 2026, a public hearing and vote to join the program in February 2026, and a potential educational event with EDPNC in Spring 2026. The Board had several questions about the loan programming, which were clarified by LeRoy.

Section 5307 Funding Rescission

William High presented an overview of FTA Section 5307 transit funding, which supports urban transit capital, operating, and planning expenses, and reviewed the allocation distribution among Buncombe County (32%), the City of Asheville (47%), and Henderson County (21%). It was noted that Section 5307 funds may only be used for urban transit activities, limiting their applicability to Buncombe County's Mountain Mobility operations, which also serve rural areas. High explained that current annual allocations exceed eligible operating expenses, with allocations exceeding \$1 million annually compared to approximately \$500,000 in eligible costs, increasing the risk of unspent funds. A comparison of FY 2026 transit budgets showed that the City of Asheville has greater capacity to absorb additional 5307 funding, while Buncombe County is currently fully leveraging available urban transit grant funding.

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High also reviewed Federal Transit Administration (FTA) direction from the City of Asheville's triennial review, including reducing open grants and programming unallocated funds. The Board was briefed on the FY 2026 rescission of \$864,000 in Section 5307 funds to the City of Asheville, which was completed with agreed-upon conditions, and informed that approximately \$801,836 in FY 2027 funds may be at risk of rescission. Potential conditions for a FY 2027 rescission were outlined to prevent the return of funds to the FTA, and staff identified next steps for Board consideration and possible approval of rescission actions at the January 20, 2026 regular meeting

TDA LIFT 2026 - Grant Planning

Allison Dains provided an overview of the Tourism Development Authority (TDA) grant programs, including the Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF) and the Legacy Investment from Tourism (LIFT) program. She explained that TPDF applications are accepted in odd-numbered years and focus on shovel-ready construction projects, while LIFT applications occur in even-numbered years and allow design, engineering, and construction costs for restoration, rehabilitation, and infrastructure expansion projects. Daines reviewed statutory eligibility requirements, including project location within Buncombe County, demonstrated tourism and economic development benefits, legal control of the property, and a minimum one-to-one funding match. Grant planning considerations were discussed, emphasizing long-term alignment with the budget process, the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), and leveraging additional funding sources.

Daines also reviewed recent TDA-funded Buncombe County projects, highlighting significant investments in recreation, greenways, and sports tourism facilities, including multiple phases of the Enka Recreation Destination and the Ferry Road Greenway and Trail System. Potential long-term projects were presented for discussion, along with two concepts under consideration for the Spring 2026 LIFT application cycle: River Park Restoration and an Indoor Recreation Facility. Staff noted that the LIFT application cycle is anticipated to open in April 2026, with awards expected in Fall 2026, and identified current projects that continue to advance through prior TDA investments.

MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'

REGULAR MEETING OF JANUARY 6, 2026.

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Regular Meeting on January 6, 2026, in the Chamber 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 Drew Ball; and Commissioner Jennifer Horton.

Chair Edwards opening the meeting and provided opening remarks.

CONSENT

1. Approval of the December 2, 2025 Combined Meeting Minutes
2. Approval of the November 2025 Tax Collection Report
3. Approval of Interlocal Agreement with the City of Raleigh for Backup Public Safety Answering Point
4. Annual Approval of County Bonds

Commissioner Whitesides made the motion to approve the consent agenda and the agenda as presented. Vice-Mayor Moore seconded the motion, and it was carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Barbara Booty –reported ongoing concerns about alleged drug activity and harassment by neighbors, including claims that teenagers were targeted with drugs and alcohol, and stated that repeated reports to authorities did not result in action. She urged stronger enforcement and accountability to protect children.

Chris Fink - representing the Buncombe County Community Advisory Committee, raised concerns about financial pressures on residential care facilities serving aging and vulnerable populations due to Medicaid cuts and rising operating costs, which may lead to evictions, consolidations, or closures in 2026. He highlighted the closure of the Riverview Group Home, the county's only transitional mental health living facility, and noted that stakeholders are working to identify solutions, urging the Board to actively participate in ongoing planning efforts.

Conner Brown – introduced himself as the new Buncombe County field representative for Congressman Edwards following a staffing transition. He noted his familiarity with the region and expressed enthusiasm for working with the Board and supporting the community.

GOOD NEWS

1. **Recognition of Holly Jordan as Governor's Excellence Award Winner for Outstanding State Government Service**

Jennifer Harrison provided background information and introduced Holly Jordan and team. She explained that Buncombe County Cooperative Extension Director Holly Jordan was

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presented with the 2025 Governor's Awards for Excellence for Outstanding State Government Service, which recognizes those who go above and beyond their call of duty to serve the residents of North Carolina.

She said that the State praised Jordan's day-to-day work engaging with local farmers and families, coordinating with university researchers, and facilitating educational programs and resources – but it was her service after Tropical Storm Helene that earned the honor. Jordan, who has been Cooperative Extension Director since May 2024, organized a donation drive with the WNC Agricultural Center that collected more than \$55,000 of clothing for survivors and coordinated helicopters and trucks to deliver 10,000 bales of hay and 60,000 pounds of cover crop seeds. She pivoted educational programming to address post-Helene questions and concerns, helped farmers and families apply for financial assistance and aid, and guided efforts with multiple partners and organizations to help meet the unique needs of the local agricultural community. Holly Jordan thanked the Board and explained the work of the Cooperative while thanking her team who were also present.

MANAGERS REPORT

Dr. Ellis Mathis provided an update on vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks in Buncombe County, including outbreaks of varicella (chickenpox), pertussis (whooping cough), and three confirmed measles cases within a single household, with potential exposure at Mission Hospital's emergency department. Staff outlined response efforts including case investigation, contact tracing, and public notification, and emphasized that vaccination is the most effective way to prevent illness and reduce spread. The public was urged to verify immunization status and contact healthcare providers or the County Immunization Clinic as needed

PRESENTATIONS

1. Tourism Development Authority Annual Report

Vic Isley, Explore Asheville President and CEO, provided the annual report and an update on tourism and economic recovery efforts, noting recent declines in lodging sales while highlighting positive indicators, including national travel accolades, major events, conferences, and cultural attractions supporting visitation. Staff reviewed current and upcoming tourism initiatives, including large-scale sporting events, conventions, the Thomas Dambo outdoor art exhibition, and the announced Biltmore Championship PGA TOUR event, which is expected to generate significant economic impact, media exposure, and nonprofit support. The presentation also highlighted ongoing community investments through the Tourism Product Development Fund and efforts to support local businesses and long-term destination promotion.

2. Board of Education Updates: Asheville City Schools and Buncombe County Schools

Dr. Jackson provided an update on the Buncombe County Schools academic update. He provided detailed information including:

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- Students earned 19,372 hours of college credit
- 19 school improved in grade-level proficiency
- 31 schools met or exceeded growth
- Cohort graduation rate of 91.4%, compared to a statewide rate of 88%
- ACT composite score of 19.1 for 2024-2025 compared to a statewide rate of 18.2
- Four schools increased one entire letter grade
- Eight schools exceeded growth for three or more consecutive years

Dr. Fehrman provided an update on Asheville City Schools (AS). She explained that ACS's had:

- Cohort graduation rate of 93% for 2025 compared to the statewide rate of 88%
- Drop-out rate of 1.08% compared to the statewide rate of 1.34%
- Grade three reading proficiency of 61% compared to a statewide rate of 47%
- 72% of students scored 19 or higher on the ACT compared to the statewide rate of 55%

Commissioner Whitesides asked for detailed data relating to the racial gap and suspension rates for ACS's. Dr. Fehrman stated that she did not have the numbers on her, but that she would get them. Ferman also noted the turnover of Superintendents through the years and noted that she is committed to providing consistency and improvements for the organization.

PUBLIC HEARING

- 1. ZPH2025-00036 Rogers Map Amendment: Ricky and Rebecca Rogers have applied to rezone three (3) parcels of land further identified as PIN 9626-91-0044 (4 Dry Ferry Rd), 9626-91-5134 (unaddressed parcel on Ferry Rd.), and 9626-91-5565 (80 Ferry Rd.), from R 1 Residential to R-3 Residential.**

Haylee Madfis provided background information. She explained that this is a zoning map amendment request for approximately 13.14 acres located at Dry Ferry Road and Ferry Road, submitted by Ricky and Rebecca Rogers, to rezone the property from R-1 (Residential Low Density) to R-3 (Residential). The property consists of three parcels, is currently used for residential purposes, and is served by public water and sewer. Staff reviewed the required public hearing notifications, including mailed notices, legal advertisements, physical posting, and website posting, and confirmed all notice requirements were met in advance of the January 6, 2026 public hearing.

Madfis further reviewed the proposed rezoning in relation to surrounding land uses, applicable bulk and density standards, and the Growth and Equity Corridor framework, noting that the request allows for an appropriate transition between higher- and lower-intensity uses. The consistency analysis found the request consistent with the Buncombe County 2043 Comprehensive Plan, citing proximity to public infrastructure, compatibility with surrounding development, and absence of environmental constraints. The Planning Board unanimously recommended approval of the rezoning at its November 17, 2025, meeting, and staff recommended approval for Board consideration.

Chair Edwards opened the Public Hearing at 6:31 p.m. There were no speakers. The Chair closed the Public Hearing at 6:31 p.m.

Commissioner Sloan made the motion to approve the zoning map amendment as it is consistent with the 2043 Comprehensive Plan. Vice-Chair Moore seconded the motion and it was carried unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Approval of FY2025 External Audit

Tim Lyons with Mauldin & Jenkins Audit Firm presented the fiscal year 2025 audit results to the Board. He explained that Per North Carolina General Statutes, local governments must have an independent financial audit each year. He said that as a recipient of significant Federal and State grant funding, Buncombe County must also be audited annually for compliance with certain grant guidelines and related regulations, also called the Single Audit. For the fiscal year ended June 30, 2025, Mauldin & Jenkins has issued unmodified ("clean") audit opinions for the County's financial statements and grant compliance. A draft of the FY25 audit and Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) was presented to the County's Audit Committee on December 2; the Audit Committee has accepted and recommends approval of the FY25 audit.

He further explained that for fiscal year 2025, the external auditing firm gives Buncombe County an unmodified or clean report meaning the County's financial position is considered materially correct. Some highlights include:

- The County maintains a triple-A bond rating from Moody's Investor Service, as well as AAA bond ratings from Standard and Poor's Rating Service and the Kroll Bond Rating Agency.
- The County's General Fund increased fund balance by \$1.6 million during the fiscal year.
- As of June 30, 2025, the total amount of outstanding long-term debt was \$396.5 million, a decrease of \$28.3 million, or 6.7% from the previous fiscal year.

Commissioner Whitesides made the motion to approve the fiscal year 2025 financial and single audits as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Wells and carried unanimously.

2. Approval of School Funding Agreement

John Hudson, Budget Director provided background information. He explained that in collaboration with Buncombe County Schools and Asheville City Schools, they have developed a funding agreement to fund the local current expense for K-12 schools. The first term of this agreement shall be three years.

Hudson explained that the proposed agreement with an initial term of three years for funding K-12 schools in collaboration with the County's two school systems. The funding will be

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based on a formula that will be equal to 37.76% of the sum of the 12 months of property and sales taxes from March to February prior (for example, March 2025 to February 2026, for the first year being Fiscal Year 2027). This formula would provide approximately \$119 million to schools based on last year's revenues and growth is expected year over year. Funding would be split between the school systems based on their average daily membership (ADM), roughly 85% (BCS) to 15% (ACS).

Additionally, he noted that if the percentage change from the prior year of certified enrollment is greater than 2%, the upcoming year's base funding percentage will automatically increase by half-percent. Should the certified enrollment drop below 2% between the prior and current year's attendance figures, the upcoming year's base funding percentage will automatically decrease by a half-percent. He said that this move helps bring sustainability to funding schools, the largest single expense in the County's general fund budget, which is currently \$117 million, up from \$87 million in FY2023.

Chair Edwards noted that the County cannot allocate funds and cannot dictate how the schools spend their money. The Commissioners had some clarifying questions about the formula in which Hudson further clarified with examples.

Commissioner Whitesides made the motion to approve the funding formula agreement. Commissioner Wells seconded the motion, and it was carried unanimously.

CLOSED SESSION

Curt Euler, County Attorney explained that the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners go into closed session for the following reasons:

1) discuss matters relating to the location or expansion of industries or other businesses in the area served by the Board of Commissioners, including agreement on a tentative list of economic development incentives that may be offered in negotiations, provided that any action authorizing the payment of economic development incentives will occur in open session. The statutory authority is contained in G.S. 143-318.11(a)(4); and; 2) to establish, or to instruct the public body's staff or negotiating agents concerning the position to be taken by or on behalf of the public body in negotiating the price and other material terms of a contract or proposed contract for the acquisition of real property by purchase, option, exchange, or lease. The statutory authority is contained in G.S. 143-318.11(a)(5).

Commissioner Sloan made the motion to go into closed session for the reasons provided; Vice-Chair Moore seconded the motion, and it was carried unanimously.

Adjourned from open session at 7:05 p.m.