

MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'

BRIEFING MEETING OF APRIL 21, 2026.

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Briefing Meeting on April 21, 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; Commissioner Terri Wells, Commissioner Al Whitesides; Commissioner Drew Ball; and Commissioner Jennifer Horton.

Absent: Vice-Chair Martin Moore and Commissioner Parker Sloan.

The following updates were reviewed and discussed:

Roadless Area Conservation Rule ("Roadless Rule") Resolution

Commissioner Ball explained that the proposed resolution recognizes the 25th anniversary of the federal Roadless Area Conservation Rule and highlights its importance in protecting roadless areas within Buncombe County and Western North Carolina. It emphasizes the environmental, economic, and public safety benefits these areas provide, and expresses concern over the U.S. Forest Service's proposal to rescind the rule.

The Board consented to adding the presented draft resolution to the regular meeting agenda for approval to send.

America 250 NC Buncombe County Committee Update

Jason Hayatt, Library Director provided background information. He explained that the Spring 2026 America250 NC Buncombe County Program Update outlines statewide resources and local initiatives to commemorate the nation's 250th anniversary, including grants, traveling exhibits, educational materials, and county-level programming. Buncombe County has received \$10,000 in grant funding and is hosting multiple exhibits and events through its library system to highlight local history and cultural narratives. The county's 250th Committee is organizing listening sessions and gathering community input around themes such as education, public art, heritage tourism, service projects, and July 4th celebrations. Signature initiatives like "Beyond the Liberty Tree," Explore Buncombe 250, and Experience Buncombe 250 will guide programming throughout 2026, including Arbor Day plantings, interfaith observances, Independence Day participation, and service and civics-focused events. Residents can stay connected through Buncombe250.org and ongoing partner-led activities.

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CoC Quarterly Update and Update on Within Reach Recommendations

Lacy Hoyle and Emily Ball provided the update. They explained that The Continuum of Care (CoC) update outlines recent homelessness data, showing an increase in total PIT Count numbers from 755 in 2025 to 824 in 2026, driven largely by transitional housing expansions and impacts from Tropical Storm Helene. It highlights demographic shifts, including increases in youth experiencing homelessness and changes in reported racial and gender identities, as well as geographic distribution of homelessness across Buncombe County. The presentation details major governance progress since the adoption of the new CoC structure in 2024, including strategic planning, expanded committees, and early wins such as strengthened Code Purple operations and new partnerships with the Housing Authority. Additionally, the CoC is advancing its 2025–2028 Strategic Plan, focusing on expanding shelter capacity, increasing exits to permanent housing, improving prevention systems, and building system-wide infrastructure. The update also notes significant new funding streams, including the \$5M “Right at Home” homelessness prevention pilot, and outlines upcoming next steps and engagement opportunities.

Health Insurance Update

Shuana Shepherd, HR Director and Ro with USI provided the update. They explained that the health plan update outlines that Buncombe County’s medical and pharmacy costs have risen 4–5% annually since 2020, totaling an overall increase of about 30%, which is still lower than the expected 45% market trend. Historical data shows growing gross and net expenses, with 2025 reaching over \$41 million in gross costs and \$20,662 in net cost per employee per year, driven by higher utilization and high-cost claimants across most service categories. Looking ahead to FY27, the County anticipates more than \$40 million in claims, with significant impacts on the General Fund, and proposes employee premium increases to more equitably share rising healthcare expenses. The adjustments include rebalanced contribution tiers and a combined employer-employee cost increase, with employees collectively contributing an additional \$522,000.

2025 Strategic Plan Closeout

Andy Zoller provided the update. He explained that the Strategic Plan 2025 Close-Out highlights major accomplishments across environmental stewardship, economic development, resident well-being, and education, including expanded electric vehicle infrastructure, 3,750 acres of preserved farmland, and hundreds of new affordable housing units and emergency home repairs. The County also reported improvements in household income, small business growth, and major investments in advanced manufacturing, along with increases in public transportation ridership and expanded

recreational programming. Significant progress was made in reducing overdose-related emergency department visits by 35%, lowering the percentage of children entering custody due to parental substance use, and expanding justice diversion programs. Education outcomes improved as well, with increases in kindergarten readiness support, growth in 3rd-grade proficiency rates, and a 43% decrease in juvenile complaints. Looking forward, the County will carry unfinished goals into its 2030 Strategic Plan, develop a public dashboard, and provide its first major update in Fall 2026.

MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'

REGULAR MEETING OF APRIL 21, 2026.

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Regular Meeting on April 21, 2026, 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 Drew Ball; and Commissioner Jennifer Horton.

Absent: Commissioner Parker Sloan.

Chair Edwards opened the meeting and provided opening remarks.

CONSENT

1. Approval of the March 17 Combined Meeting Minutes
2. Approval of the February 2026 Tax Collection Report
3. Request to waive occupancy tax penalty for Country Inn & Suites
4. Resolution Approving Pyrotechnic Experts for Firework Displays
5. GO 2026 (Debt) - Consideration of Issuance Resolution
6. LOBS 2026 (Debt) - Consideration of Issuance Resolution
7. Budget Amendment to accept additional State funding for Nurse Family Partnership

The Commissioners voted to move the presentations before Public Comment.

Commissioner Ball made the motion to add the Roadless Rule Resolution discussed at the Briefing meeting to New Business. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Whitesides and carried unanimously.

Commissioner Moore made the motion to approve the consent agenda and agenda with the amendment. Commissioner Wells seconded the motion, and it was carried unanimously.

MANAGER'S REPORT

PRESENTATIONS

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1. Food Waste Reduction Month Proclamation

Commissioner Wells read the Proclamation. She read that April is nationally known as Food Waste Reduction Month and that the County has incorporated food waste reduction goals into the Strategic Plan 2030 by setting a target increase of compost produced from 250.5 tons to 900 tons by 2030, contributing to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. It's important to highlight the importance of reducing food waste residentially and commercially, as well as showcase the valuable work being done by both the County and the community.

2. Child Abuse Prevention Month Proclamation

Vice-Chair Moore read the Proclamation. He read that April 2026 is Child Abuse Prevention Month and the theme is "Positive Childhoods Start with Us". Child Abuse Prevention Month reminds us that strengthening families from the start is one of the most effective ways to support children and help them reach their full potential. Families thrive when they have strong relationships, access to support, and live in connected communities.

3. Public Safety Telecommunicator Week Proclamation

Commissioner Whitesides read the proclamation. He read that the proclamation designates April 12–18, 2026 as Public Safety Telecommunicator Week in Buncombe County. It recognizes 911 telecommunicators as essential first points of contact during emergencies, highlighting their calm professionalism, ability to manage complex communications, and vital role in coordinating emergency responses. It commends their dedication, resilience, and service despite stressful conditions, increasing call volumes, and evolving technologies.

4. Airport Authority Annual Update

Lew Bleiweis, Asheville Regional Airport President and CEO, will provide the annual report to the Board.

PUBLIC COMMENT

David Reid – Expressed support for the Roadless Rule Resolution.

Susan Schiemer- Thanked Commissioners for funds allocated to the Supplemental Aging Funds and noted the profound impacts on aging adults in the community.

Chris Gordon- Requested that the work of Reparations Commission be picked back up and that his group be at the table in conversations to move forward.

Josh Kelly- Expressed support for the Roadless Rule Resolution.

Ken Brame – Expressed support for the Roadless Rule Resolution.

Judy Mattox- Expressed support for the Roadless Rule Resolution.

Bill Malony - Expressed support for the Roadless Rule Resolution.

Kenneth Buckner – Thanked the Board for listening and noted he would return for further public comment to discuss his complaint with the Sheriff's Office.

Robb Cambell - Expressed support for the Roadless Rule Resolution.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance Text Amendment

Angela Lee and Nathan Pennington in the Planning Department provided background information. They explained that the proposed text amendments to Buncombe County's Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance, aimed at strengthening floodway regulations and adding clearer definitions related to flood risk management, including conveyance shadow, repetitive loss, and multiple FEMA Letter of Map Change categories. The amendments also expand the definition of substantial improvement and introduce stricter limits on temporary structures, materials, travel trailers, and storage within the floodway to reduce hazard exposure. The Planning Board recommended approval of the changes, which align with the County's Comprehensive Plan, Community Rating System goals, and resilience strategies in both the Strategic Plan and Helene Recovery Plan.

The Chair opened the Public Hearing at 6:14 p.m. There were no public comments, the Public Hearing was closed at 6:14 p.m.

Commissioner Wells asked about the new maps. Pennington explained that new maps are underway, with aerial data already collected and hydraulic and hydrologic studies currently in progress. These studies will feed into the new Flood Insurance Study, which forms the basis for the updated maps. Adoption of the new maps will involve a multi-step public process and coordination with local municipalities participating in the National Flood Insurance Program. Staff noted they are working closely with the state on elements expected in the forthcoming model ordinance, and this work also supports future participation in the Community Rating System.

Commissioner Ball made the motion to approve the text amendment, as it is consistent with Buncombe County plans. Commissioner Moore seconded the motion, and it was carried unanimously.

2. Unified Fire District Public Hearing

Rafael Baptista provided background information. He explained that the County's proposal to create a Unified Fire Tax District to replace the current system of 20 separate fire service districts funded through uneven property tax rates. The unified model aims to improve firefighter and community safety, ensure consistent service standards, support recruitment and retention, and provide a financially sustainable structure for staffing, stations, and apparatus. The plan includes adopting countywide basic service standards, addressing budget challenges such as low firefighter pay and aging stations, and implementing a single tax rate projected between 9.19 and 14.45 cents depending on final FY27 budget decisions. Broad engagement efforts with fire departments and the community informed the proposal, and most public feedback focused on understanding impacts rather than opposition. The Board of Commissioners is asked to hold a public hearing and vote on consolidating all districts into one unified Fire Protection & Ambulance and Rescue Service District

The Chair opened the Public Hearing at 6:36 p.m. and there were 2 speakers:

Wayne Hamilton, Reems Creek – expressed support for the Unified Fire District and urged the Commissioners to look at level of service as well.

Chuck Robinson, Jupiter Fire –was unsupported for the Unified Fire District at this time.

The Public Hearing closed at 6:42 p.m.

During discussion, Commissioner Wells shared that she had contacted colleagues in 3 Counties across the state to learn about their experiences with transitioning to a unified fire tax district. She reported that all counties spoke positively about the change and noted that adjustments over time were both expected and manageable. She then asked Raphael whether staff had also reached out to other counties during their research. Raphael confirmed that outreach had been conducted, that several counties responded, and that the overall feedback was favorable. He noted that while some challenges are unique to Buncombe County, many of the broader issues are shared across the state, and the unified tax model has become a common solution.

Commissioner Ball asked Raphael to describe how the process had evolved since October, particularly how the fire chiefs had shaped the proposal. Raphael explained that the chiefs played a significant role in refining the policy language, standards, and priorities. Initially, the work focused heavily on response times and salary structure, but after receiving input from chiefs and learning from other counties, staff adjusted the proposal to

better reflect operational needs and local priorities. He emphasized that the chiefs' expertise guided these changes.

Commissioners also asked about the compensation plan and asked if the new plan would make salaries more competitive. Raphael explained that while the study proposed a model compensation framework, fire chiefs made it clear that departments needed flexibility to structure their organizations independently. As a result, the county shifted away from a uniform compensation model toward allowing departments to submit budget requests aligned with their individual needs. He said that staff observed that many departments requested increases in their salary line items to raise base wages and stay competitive. Additionally, he acknowledged that fire departments are already competing for firefighters and noted that the unified tax structure is intended to create more consistent funding and reduce disparities between departments, although salary decisions ultimately remain with each department. Manager Pinder added that while the county cannot guarantee wage increases, nearly every department asked for funding that would raise starting pay.

Commissioner Wells asked whether the requested clarification about preserving existing insurance districts had been added to the resolution. Staff confirmed that the language was included and explained that while tax districts would be consolidated into one unified district, the service departments and their insurance boundaries would remain intact. The resolution specifies that the county manager will enter into contracts with each department to ensure service within these boundaries.

Commissioner Wells noted that if the Board voted to proceed, they will continue to learn and make adjustments on this as needed to ensure the fire departments are strong and the community is safe.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to approve adoption of the resolution creating the Unified Fire Service Protection District.

Before the vote, a Commissioner Ball asked whether there was still time to continue refining the proposal without causing problems for the budget timeline. County Attorney Euler said that a second to the pending motion was needed before additional discussion could proceed. Commissioner Whitesides seconded the motion on the floor.

Manager Pinder clarified that the Manager's proposed budget is scheduled for May 5 with the Public Hearing on May 19th and that this decision is necessary if it's to be included in the proposal. She noted that staff will continue to work with the Chiefs and that she will share the number with them before May 5.

The motion passed 5-1 with Commissioner Horton voting no.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Asheville Regional Housing Consortium Membership Update

Jonathon Jones provided background information. He explained that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds housing construction, rehabilitation, homeownership and rental assistance activities through the HOME Investment Partnerships Program. The Asheville Regional Housing Consortium (HOME Consortium) was formed by local units of government in 1992 to direct these entitlement funds to increase the availability of safe and affordable housing in Buncombe, Henderson, Madison and Transylvania counties. A Joint Cooperation Agreement was executed in 2010 identifying eleven member governments and establishing the City of Asheville as the Lead Entity. Mars Hill and Marshall have historically participated but were not formally recognized as members. The HOME Consortium voted to update the Joint Cooperation Agreement on January 14, 2026 to add Mars Hill and Marshall as members. The Joint Cooperation Agreement must be updated by each participating governing body to officially include the two townships. The Affordable Housing Subcommittee recommended approval of the updated Joint Cooperation Agreement at its March 5, 2026 meeting.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to approve the updated agreement. Commissioner Moore seconded the motion and it was carried unanimously.

2. Budget Amendment for Project/Grant Closures

John Hudson, Budget Director, provided background information. He explained that the attached amendments close completed grants, projects, and debt service in the following funds:

- In the Public School Capital Needs Fund, 12 projects and debt service are closed at \$137,555,043, with \$6,700 of savings to be reapplied.
- In the Grants Fund, 20 grants are closed totaling \$7,771,931.
- In the AB Tech Capital Fund, four projects and debt service are closed at \$128,422,495 with \$2.5M of savings to be repurposed in the fund.
- In the Public School ADM Capital Fund, five projects are closed with a budget of \$1,466,631. As these are reimbursement projects, there are no savings.

- In the Capital Projects Fund, eight projects are closed at a total of \$4,612,588, with \$83,000 of savings for other projects.
- In the Solid Waste Capital Projects Fund, two projects are closed at a total of \$320,000, with \$21,600 to be repurposed for other projects.
- In the Housing/Open Space Bond Projects Fund, two projects are closed with a budget of \$229,787 that may be reallocated.

Commissioner Horton made the motion to approve the budget amendments as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Moore and carried unanimously.

3. Budget Amendment for the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program Subrecipient Management Funds

John Hudson, Budget Director, provided background information. He explained that the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) is a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) fund administered by North Carolina Division of Emergency Management. Buncombe County has been awarded a total of \$956,960 to serve as the point of contact with homeowners from application intake to project completion. The Program will acquire and demolish residential structures and return the land to green space. There are currently two groups of properties for which the County will receive Subrecipient Management Funds, which is 5% of the total of the projects:

Group 1: \$406,010

Group 2: \$550,950

Amendment Total: \$956,960

Commissioner Moore made the motion to approve the budget amendments as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Horton and carried unanimously.

4. Budget Amendment for FEMA Reimbursement Related to Helene Sheltering

John Hudson, Budget Director, provided background information. He explained that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has approved reimbursement in the amount of \$481,413 in costs associated with Helene sheltering at Trinity Baptist Church. Once the funds are received by the County, they will be sent to Trinity Baptist Church for their costs incurred.

Commissioner Ball made the motion to approve the budget amendments as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Wells and carried unanimously.

5. Budget Amendment to Realize Reimbursement Revenue for USAR TF2 Related to Tropical Storm Helene

John Hudson, Budget Director, provided background information. He explained that this amendment realizes \$424,184 of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) reimbursement revenue related to expenses incurred by the Urban Search and Rescue Task Force 2 (USAR TF2) team during Tropical Storm Helene. The following amounts will be paid to members of the Task Force 2 team:

Skyland Fire Department - \$39,485

West Buncombe Fire Department - \$182,745

He further explained that the remaining \$201,954 reimburses County Emergency Services for personnel expenses incurred.

Commissioner Whitesides made the motion to approve the budget amendments as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ball and carried unanimously.

6. Budget Amendment to Utilize Contingency for Unplanned Expenses

John Hudson, Budget Director, provided background information. He explained that this Budget Amendment authorizes the use of Contingency budget totaling \$306,009 for the following purposes:

- \$61,000 for the Unified Fire Tax District public notice mailer
- \$190,632 for shelter generator expenses related to weather incidents
- \$50,000 for legal expenses beyond budget
- \$4,377 for matching funds to fund Code Purple daytime operations during weather incidents

The remainder of the FY26 \$500,000 Contingency budget (\$193,991) will sit in the Public Safety function for anticipated increased inmate medical expenses for the Sheriff's Office.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to approve the budget amendments as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Horton and carried unanimously.

1. Roadless Rule Resolution

Commissioner Ball noted that this item was first discussed in the April 21 Briefing meeting and the Board consented to moving it to this regular agenda for approval. He further explained that the proposed resolution recognizes the 25th anniversary of the

federal Roadless Area Conservation Rule and highlights its importance in protecting roadless areas within Buncombe County and Western North Carolina. It emphasizes the environmental, economic, and public safety benefits these areas provide, and expresses concern over the U.S. Forest Service's proposal to rescind the rule.

Commissioner Ball made the motion to approve the Roadless Rule resolution. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Whitesides and carried unanimously.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

1. Board Appointments/Reappointments for April 21, 2026

Mountain Community Capital Fund – the Commissioners agreed to hold interviews on May 5 at 11:00 a.m. for this appointment.

Audit Committee – Commissioner Wells made the motion to appoint Jennifer Young to the Audit Committee. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Whitesides and carried unanimously.

BOARD UPDATES

1. NC Association of County Commissioners Video Update

Chair Edwards noted that Kevin Leonard with the NCACC reached out to see if the Board would play a short video at the meeting. In the two-and-a-half-minute video, NCACC President Nelson provides a recap of the NC Counties Care Forum held in Wake County last Friday and highlights the importance of our County Advocacy Days event, scheduled for June 9–10.

Meeting adjourned at 7:35 p.m.