

MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'

BRIEFING MEETING OF MARCH 17, 2026.

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Briefing Meeting on March 17, 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 Parker Sloan; Commissioner Drew Ball; and Commissioner Jennifer Horton.

Absent: Vice-Chair Martin Moore.

The following updates were reviewed and discussed:

1. Helene & Preparedness Plan Update

Kevin Madsen, the Helene Recovery Officer provided an update on the county's ongoing recovery and preparedness efforts following Tropical Storm Helene, including progress across community health, economic development, environmental resilience, growth and development, and public safety initiatives. He said that several community health projects have advanced, including completion of the Community Memory Project, ongoing cultural asset restoration, and new grant-funded mental health training and support activities. Economic development efforts highlighted significant funding for commercial corridor revitalization, continued expansion of the More Than a Job workforce program, and multiple public art installations tied to storm recovery. Environmental and infrastructure work includes open space property planning for flood mitigation and multiple buyout applications approved or under FEMA review. Growth and development updates noted the RenewNC home repair and reconstruction program, which has received a substantial number of Buncombe County applications. Public safety initiatives include landslide mitigation projects, resilience hub planning, and significant progress on high-priority items within the county's Preparedness Action Plan, such as Emergency Operations Center operations, staffing, and 911 resilience. Foundational updates included FEMA Public Assistance progress, Hazard Mitigation Grant Program applications, and the relocation and scheduling process for the Helene Resource Center. Long-Term Recovery Group reported extensive community outreach, service requests processed, and financial support provided to storm-impacted residents

2. Deaverview Mountain Property

Allison Dains, Parks and Rec Director, provided an update on the Deaverview Mountain acquisition, a 342-acre property located in the Deaverview community, approximately 5–8 miles from several Buncombe County population centers. She explained that the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy first approached the County in 2023 to partner on securing funding for the purchase and that key milestones include the Board of Commissioners' 2023 resolution to explore creating a county park, SAHC's receipt of a \$4.5 million LWF grant, and the County's allocation of approximately \$7.7 million in GO Bond funds in 2024 for development of

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the site. The County also submitted an ORLP grant application in late 2024 and was awarded \$4.475 million in July 2025, with acceptance approved by the Board in August 2025 and the tentative closing date for acquisition is March 2026.

Daines concluded with a request for the Board to approve a resolution authorizing the purchase of the Deaverview Mountain property. The Board consented to adding the proposed resolution to purchase the property onto the March 17 regular meeting consent agenda.

3. Update on Coxe and Ferry Road External Funding

Matt Card and Jonathon Jones provided the update the Coxe Avenue and Ferry Road affordable housing developments, including site plans, proposed unit mixes, affordability levels, and associated funding needs. Card explained that Coxe Avenue is planned for 203 units with a mix of one-, two-, and three-bedroom apartments, serving households at 30%, 60%, and 80% of the Area Median Income and that Ferry Road includes both Family and Senior LIHTC developments totaling 270 units, with designated affordability levels and an integrated community layout that includes market-rate units, amenities, daycare, and health services. The funding gap estimates indicate Coxe Avenue has a remaining shortfall of \$17.1 million, while Ferry Road requires an additional \$16.5 million beyond current commitments, with infrastructure needs adding further cost. Recent funding activities include LIHTC pre-application submissions in January 2026, City of Asheville CDBG-DR multifamily applications in February, and full LIHTC applications due in May. The presentation also detailed the competitive landscape for LIHTC awards, including county-level application volume increases and new scoring requirements. Additionally, the County's two major housing projects are collectively requesting \$30 million—which is half of the available statewide CDBG-DR loan funding for LIHTC projects.

4. 2022 General Obligation Bonds Update

Rachael Sawyer, Strategic Partnerships Director presented the update on the 2022 General Obligation Bonds, covering allocations, expenditures, and remaining funds for both the Affordable Housing and Open Space bond categories. She explained that of the \$40 million Affordable Housing Bond, approximately \$30.4 million has been allocated with \$10.8 million expended, leaving \$9.56 million unallocated; major funded projects include Meribel, Rocky River Apartments, and Asheville Affordable Pine Lane. The \$30 million Open Space Bond has allocated about \$22.2 million, supporting numerous land conservation projects and recreation initiatives such as Deaverview Mountain, Ferry Road Open Space, and multiple greenway improvements. Next steps for unallocated amounts include potential additional funding for the Coxe Avenue and Ferry Road housing developments, FY2027 Affordable Housing Services Program requests, and further support for land conservation, Helene Recovery projects, and recreation master plan implementation. She also highlighted pending requests from the Land Conservation Advisory Board and Agriculture Advisory Board that may affect remaining available funding. And explained that the General Obligation Bond Oversight Committee's composition and role have been reviewed, with one open seat currently accepting applications.

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REGULAR MEETING OF MARCH 17, 2026.

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Briefing Meeting on March 17, 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.

The Chair opened the meeting and provided opening statements.

CONSENT

1. Approval of the March 5, 2026 Combined Meeting Minutes
2. Resolution Approving Pyrotechnic Experts for Firework Displays
3. Letter of Support for Buncombe County School Board's Ability to Provide Calendar Flexibility
4. Resolution Identifying the Deputy Finance Officer to Include Tourism Development Authority
5. Resolution to Authorize the Purchase of Property Located at Deaverview Mountain

Commissioner Whitesides made the motion to add the Resolution to Authorize the Purchase of Property Located at Deaverview to the consent agenda. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Wells and carried unanimously.

Commissioner Sloan made the motion to approve the consent agenda with the amendment. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Wells and carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

David Greenson with GAP AVL urged the Board to adopt a comprehensive approach to preventing displacement, emphasizing that housing preservation should encompass housing, economic, cultural, and spatial impacts. Greenson further encouraged the Board to request and publicly share displacement impact assessments so policy decisions don't unintentionally contribute to displacement.

MANAGER'S REPORT

Eric Cregger, Tax Assessor, provided an update on property reappraisal. He explained that all values have been finalized and paper notices should be in mailboxes this week. He said that residents can appeal now and the deadline to file a formal appeal is May 5th. Lastly, Cregger provided information related to appeal clinics going on now.

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The Commissioners asked detailed questions about the process and what the tax appraisal means in comparison to the tax bill. Cregger explained that new value and the percentage of change does not reflect that same change in the tax bill. The County budget needs are not considered during the assessment process and are independent of the budgeting process. The value is the first half of the tax bill and the rate which is the other half is set by the County Commissioners. He said the rate will be set in June as part of the budget process and bills will not be estimated until after those rates are adopted.

PRESENTATIONS

1. Agriculture Month Proclamation

Commissioner Wells read the Proclamation to Jackie Gillepsie, FAA and 4H Students. The Proclamation proclaimed March 24 as National Agriculture Day to remind the public of the importance of agriculture in Buncombe County's history and culture. The proclamation reads in part, "the Buncombe County Commissioners recognize the importance of agriculture in our daily lives and the critical role it plays in supporting the diverse cultures, economy, and heritage of Buncombe County."

2. Red Cross Month Proclamation

Chair Edwards read the Proclamation to Jerri Goldberg, outgoing Red Cross Executive Director. She said that Western North Carolina's Red Cross Chapter has a long history of helping our neighbors in need, and the Board of Commissioners proclaimed March 2026 as Red Cross Month. The proclamation reads in part, "the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners hereby proclaim March 2026 as Red Cross Month in Buncombe County and encourage all to recognize the daily efforts and contributions made by the American Red Cross in our community and across the nation in its vital work to prevent and alleviate human suffering in the face of emergencies."

3. Unified Fire District Findings Report

Kevin Tipton, Fire Marshall provided the report overview. Tipton outlined the county's current structure of 20 fire service districts served by 19 independent fire departments and funded primarily through district-specific property taxes. He explained that the report was prepared in accordance with state law, which allows consolidation of districts when services are substantially similar or need alignment. The presentation detailed challenges in the current model, including uneven financial sustainability, staffing difficulties, inconsistent service standards, and aging equipment across departments. He further explained that over the past five years, the County has collaborated with fire chiefs and completed a compensation and benefits study, concluding that financial sustainability cannot be achieved without a unified fire tax district. Tipton said that consolidation would improve firefighter and community safety, reduce risks to life and property, and create a more resilient and sustainable funding system. He further explained that the proposed plan includes adopting basic service standards across all departments and establishing a unified tax district to ensure consistent funding. Tipton also reviewed engagement efforts with fire departments and the community, along with a timeline for

public hearings, commissioner votes, and budget adoption related to the proposed district. He stated that the next step is to hold a Public Hearing on April 21, 2026.

Commissioners asked clarifying questions about the proposed unified fire tax district, and staff confirmed that fire response and insurance districts would remain unchanged, with the same fire departments serving communities before and after the transition. Kevin Tipton emphasized that the proposal consolidates tax service districts, not fire departments, and that adopted service standards were developed collaboratively with the majority of fire chiefs to create an effective, countywide model. He affirmed that the unified district would improve both firefighters and community safety, noting his full professional support for the proposed plan. Commissioners asked about long-term risks if the county does not act, and Tipton explained that declining volunteerism and aging equipment would continue to strain departments without a stable funding mechanism. Questions were raised about meeting staffing and response standards, and Tipton explained that no department can meet them alone, making mutual aid essential and highlighting disparities between suburban and rural districts. He also described how a unified district could help rural departments with high tax rates but low staffing gain resources needed to meet adopted standards. Staff clarified that budget preparation and review processes for fire departments would remain the same, with no separate board planned. Rafael, the Strategy and Innovation Director added that the new standards provide a consistent benchmark for balancing funding and service expectations across the county. Commissioners expressed appreciation for the thoroughness of the work and the focus on improving response times, safety, and long-term resiliency.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. 2026 LOBs (Debt) - Public Hearing on Limited Obligation Bonds

Melissa Moore, Finance Director, provided background information. She explained that The County intends to issue Limited Obligation Bonds (LOBs) in an amount not to exceed \$145 million to fund approximately \$56 million in school capital projects, \$62 million in county capital projects, and \$18 million in potential refunding. The initial resolutions authorize the County Manager and Finance Director to carry out the financing transactions, to make certain application to the Local Government Commission concerning the debt, to retain certain professional organizations to serve in various capacities to complete the debt transactions, and declares the intent of the county to be able to reimburse itself for existing projects related to the debt issuances. The initial resolution relating to the school capital projects provides for the release of certain collateral from an existing financing structure for the purpose of supporting the school capital projects collateral package.

The Chair opened the public hearing at 6:17 p.m. There were no public comments. The Chair closed the public hearing at 6:17 p.m.

Commissioner Moore made the motion to approve the initial LOBS resolution, 2026 indenture for government facilities. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Sloan and carried unanimously.

Commissioner Moore made the motion to approve the initial LOBS resolution, 2015 indenture for schools. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ball and carried unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Budget Amendment for Conservation Easement Funding Requests

Ariel Zijp and Tom Fanslow from conserving Carolina provided the update. Zijp first explained that these 5 Conservation Easement funding requests are from the Fairview/Black Mountain Conservation Focus area and being requested by both the Land Conservation Advisory Board and the Agricultural Advisory Board. The Buncombe County Land Conservation Advisory Board recommends the following 3 conservation easement projects for funding. Conserving Carolina will be the conservation easement holding entity for these 3 projects. Totaling \$483,000 for easement purchase from Open Space Bond and \$21,000 for transaction costs from the Fund 224.

- Duck Branch - 62 acre project in Black Mountain — \$21,000 Transaction costs from fund 224 and \$155,000 for Easement Purchase from Open Space Bond
- The Light Center Nature Preserve - 112 acre easement project in Black Mountain — \$282,000 for easement purchase from Open Space Bond
- The Light Center Farm - 13 acre easement project in Black Mountain - \$46,000 for easement purchase from Open Space bond

The Buncombe County Agricultural Advisory Board recommends the following 2 full-donation conservation easements for transaction costs funding. Buncombe County Soil and Water Conservation District's Farmland Preservation Program is the conservation easement holder for these two projects. Totaling \$100,400 in transaction costs from Fund 224.

- Dador Farm Phase 2 - \$46,500 in transaction costs to protect a 31.5 acre farm in Fairview
- Dador Farm Phase 3 - \$53,900 in transaction costs to protect a 65 acre farm in Fairview

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

2. Budget Amendment for the North Carolina Community Foundation Disaster Relief Fund - Recovery Plan's Mental Health Training and Support Project

Victoria Reichard, Behavioral Health Manager, provided background information. She explained that the North Carolina Community Foundation Disaster Relief Fund, a fund administered by the North Carolina Community Foundation has awarded Buncombe County \$100,000 to support the Mental Health Training and Support project through 2/19/2027. Mental Health Training & Support, a County Recovery project, is intended to boost our community's trauma literacy, resilience, and well-being after the storm via training, counseling, case manager & first responder support, and community level connection events.

Commissioner Whitesides made the motion to accept the grant award terms and conditions and approve the budget amendment. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Moore and carried unanimously.

3. Resolution to Approve the FY25 Shelter Resiliency Generator Project Contract for AC Reynolds High School with McGill Associates PA

Robert Brown, General Services, provided background information. He explained the proposed contract is with McGill Associates, PA for design and engineering services for the installation of a backup generator and all associated gear and conductors to support back up power operations for the main gymnasium, auxiliary gymnasium, locker rooms with showering facilities, toilet rooms and kitchen/ cafeteria at AC Reynolds High School.

Commissioner Sloan asked if this is the model Commissioner's can expect to see in future locations. Brown affirmed that this model is ideal and is what Staff hopes to be able to achieve at each location.

Commissioner Whitesides made a motion to approve the contract. Commissioner Moore seconded the motion, and it was carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 6:47 p.m.