

MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'

BRIEFING MEETING OF MAY 5, 2026.

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Briefing Meeting on May 5, 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; Commissioner Parker Sloan.

Absent: Vice-Chair Martin Moore.

The following updates were reviewed and discussed:

1. Resolution asking HCA CEO to Engage Directly with Stakeholders in WNC

Commissioner Wells provided background information. She explained that the proposed resolution urges HCA CEO Sam Hazen to come to Western North Carolina and directly address ongoing concerns about deteriorating conditions, staffing shortages, and repeated federal citations at Mission Health facilities. It states that HCA's management has harmed Mission's long-standing tradition of care, reduced transparency, and failed to engage meaningfully with community stakeholders.

The Board consented to adding the proposed resolution to the New Business agenda for discussion and approval.

2. Letter of Support for AdventHealth's Certificate of Need (CON)

Chair Edwards provided background information. She explained that the draft letter details the Board of Commissioners expressed support for AdventHealth's Certificate of Need application to add 92 acute care beds at its forthcoming Weaverville hospital, citing urgent community needs and ongoing concerns with limited hospital capacity in the county. The letter highlights longstanding issues at Mission Hospital, including regulatory findings and over-reliance on a single facility, and emphasizes that expanded capacity through AdventHealth will improve access, competition, and system resilience. The Board urges state regulators to approve the application to better protect the health and safety of Buncombe County residents.

The Board consented to adding the proposed letter to the Consent agenda for approval to send.

3. Community Paramedic Update

Justin Hall, Emergency Services, provided background information. He explained that the Community Paramedic Program provide 24/7 overdose response, mobile crisis support, wound care, case management, and connections to treatment and primary care services. He highlighted significant achievements such as reduced reliance on 911, expanded access to MOUD, strengthened partnerships, and growing service demand, alongside data showing

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declining overdose deaths. Testimonials underscore the programs' life-saving impact and the importance of sustained, community-centered support.

4. Wildfire Prevention Campaign

Ryan Cole, Emergency Services, provided background information. He outlined how Hurricane Helene dramatically increased wildfire fuel and risk in Buncombe County, prompting a multi-layered strategy focused on prevention, operations, and long-term mitigation. The campaign details public education efforts, defensible-space guidance, operational challenges, and a series of resilience projects, including risk assessments, community protection plans, monitoring networks, and AI-assisted early detection. He said that overall, the county is expanding coordination, technology, and community engagement to reduce ignition risk and strengthen wildfire response capacity.

5. Fire Chief's Budget Comments

Ryan Cole, Emergency Services, outlined the FY2027 Unified Fire Tax District funding methodology, which includes salary and benefit increases, select safety-related positions, debt service, and limited capital funding, though reserve contributions are not funded. The proposed FY27 budget reflects a 28% increase over FY26, driven largely by personnel and capital needs. He said that since the last budget work session, 10 fire departments have met with staff, 8 other departments confirmed no request to meet, and 1 department did not respond. Following, two Chiefs spoke: Swannanoa Chief Anthony Penland and Upper Hominy Chief Shane Prestwood.

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REGULAR MEETING OF MAY 5, 2026.

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Regular Meeting on May 5, 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 Drew Ball; and Commissioner Jennifer Horton; Commissioner Parker Sloan.

CONSENT

1. Approval of the April 21, 2026 Combined Meeting Minutes
2. Approval of the March 2026 Tax Collection Report
3. Resolution Approving Pyrotechnic Experts for Firework Displays
4. FY2026 External Audit Contract
5. Construction Contract for Parking Lot Improvements Countywide
6. Construction Contract for the 59 Woodfin Exterior Remediation
7. Construction Contract for the Asheville High School Culinary Kitchen Renovation

Commissioner Moore moved to move proclamations before the public comment on the agenda. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ball and carried unanimously.

Commissioner Whitesides moved to add the resolution asking the HCA CEO to engage directly with Stakeholders in WNC to the New Business on the agenda. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Horton and carried unanimously.

Commissioner Horton moved to add the letter of support for AdventHeath's Certificate of Need (CON) to Consent on the agenda. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Sloan and carried unanimously.

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

Steven Foster –requested the Board take hard look at discretionary spending and adopt a revenue neutral tax rate.

Dusty Pless – told story about budget and requested the Board consider the little guy and keep property taxes manageable.

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Bruce Oconnell- requested the Board remove discretionary spending for the time being and focus on funding education, fire and police.

Katherine Morosani – requested that Board examine each department budget and reduce by 10% and to look at the budget with new eyes.

Trudy Parker – requested that Public Safety remain top priority and requested the Board to adopt a revenue neutral tax rate.

Matt Allen- requested the board adopt a revenue neutral tax rate.

Laura McCue- requested the Board look at things that can be cut to not raise taxes and take a gradual approach.

Pepi Acebo- noted the property revaluation and how it impacts the schools request for special tax rate. He also said that the process and timeline for filing appeals is a burden.

Charles Warner- requested the Board adopt a revenue neutral tax rate.

Sherry Warner – requested the Board evaluate for efficiencies in the proposed budget.

CJ Domingo – opposed the proposed tax increase and recommend revenue neutral tax rate.

MANAGER'S REPORT

PRESENTATIONS

1. Nurses Week Proclamation

Commissioner Horton read the Proclamation. She said that the Proclamation is to officially acknowledge and honor the contributions of nurses during National Nurses Week which is May 6-12.

2. Wildfire Preparedness Month Proclamation

Commissioner Wells read the Proclamation. She said that May is Wildfire Prevention Month and with that the County encourages residents, property owners, businesses, community organizations and government agencies to take proactive preventative measures to prevent wildfires, and a presentation on Wildfire Preparedness & Resilience in Buncombe County

3. Hurricane Preparedness Proclamation

Commissioner Sloan read the Proclamation. He said that this Proclamation urges residents to sign up for BC Alerts, assemble emergency supply kits, and update their emergency plans.

4. Board of Adjustment Annual Report

Andy Ball, Board of Adjustment Chair provide the annual report. He outlined the Board's role as a seven-member quasi-judicial body supported by seven alternates and provided an overview of planning and legal functions, including application review, public hearing notices, and preparation of written decisions. Key activities this year included several major cases, such

as a commercial warehouse expansion, nine apartment projects totaling 1,537 units (with 43% affordable/workforce), and notable developments like The Worx Youth Camp and Ingles in Swannanoa. The Board also highlighted trends such as increasingly complex sites and more requests for height and parking deviations.

5. Public Finance Feasibility Study from Trust for Public Land

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) presented a feasibility report on voter-approved funding options for land conservation and affordable housing in Buncombe County. They highlighted their national and North Carolina track record, including helping pass 688 ballot measures nationwide and supporting Buncombe County's successful 2022 bonds. The presentation outlined ongoing assistance, including feasibility research, public opinion polling, and recommendations on program elements. Findings included potential bond financing scenarios, voter demographics, and best practices for structuring measures with strong accountability features. He further emphasized that the work is entirely privately funded. The public opinion polling was in process and recommendations on the program elements will be submitted by May 15.

Commissioner Wells asked staff about the timeline. Rachael Nygard provided the proposed timeline if the Board were to move forward.

6. County Manager's FY2027 Recommended Budget

County Manager Avril Pinder presented her budget message and recommended fiscal year 2027 budget. She explained that the proposed budget for fiscal year 2027 reflects numerous economic factors stemming from the continued recovery from Tropical Storm Helene, inflation, economic uncertainty related to the Iran War, state legislation, and more. She noted that this will also be the first budget after the 2026 Property reappraisal, which saw Buncombe County's tax base grow by 43%. Based on all of those and other factors, the County Manager's recommended budget include:

- Prioritizing the continued rebuilding and recovery efforts from Helene.
- Investing in the Commissioners' 2030 Strategic Plan priorities.
- 32 new County positions to help with continued growth and demand for services.
- A 2.71% cost-of-living-adjustment for County employees.
- A proposed tax rate of 43.52 cents per \$100 of assessed property value, which would be an increase of 4.3 cents above the revenue-neutral rate of 39.22 cents.

Expenditures

The proposed budget would have \$485.1 million in expenditures with education, public safety, and human services being the largest three areas of spending. Here is a breakdown of the proposed spending:

- Education, \$137.3 million (28%)

- Public safety, \$106.5 million (22%)
- Human services, \$100.3 million (21%)
- General government, \$72.6 million (15%)
- Debt, \$28.4 million (6%)
- Interfund transfers, \$15.4 million (3%)
- Cultural and recreational, \$12.9 million (3%)
- Economic and physical development, \$11.7 million (2%)

Some highlights of that spending include:

- \$2.3 million for affordable housing service programs.
- \$1.8 million for economic development incentives.
- \$11.1 million for K-12 funding.
- \$693,000 investment in new public safety positions.
- \$750,000 for conservation easements.

Revenue

The proposed fiscal year 2027 budget projects \$483.2 million in revenue, with the largest sources being property tax, local option sales tax, and intergovernmental funds. The following shows a breakdown of the proposed revenue:

- Property tax, \$336.7 million (70%)
- Local option sales tax, \$49.5 million (10%)
- Intergovernmental funds, \$46.3 million (10%)
- Sales and services, \$24.7 million (5%)
- Permits and fees, \$7.5 million (2%)
- Other taxes and licenses, \$6.9 million (1%)
- Other revenue such as investment earnings, indirect cost recovery, and sales of assets, \$6.6 million (1%)
- Interfund transfers, \$5.1 million (1%)

Additionally, the recommended budget would have a \$1.9 million appropriation from the fund balance, bringing the total revenue to \$485.1 million.

Proposed Tax Rate

The recommended budget has a proposed property tax rate of 43.52 cents per \$100 of assessed property value, which is 4.3 cents above a revenue-neutral rate of 39.22 cents. The median home value in Buncombe County is \$446,500, and a revenue-neutral rate of 39.22 cents would cost that home \$1,751 for its yearly property tax bill. The County Manager's proposed rate of 43.52 cents would add \$192 to that total yearly bill, which is \$16 a month.

Debt and Pay-Go projects

The County Manager's recommended budget features \$38.3 million for debt projects and \$1.6 million for pay-go projects such as:

- \$16.6 million for construction of an EMS West regional base
- \$5.5 million for construction of an EMS base at 40 McCormick Place
- \$5.2 million for a Detention Center controls system upgrade
- \$1.2 million for repairs and renovations for the South Buncombe library branch
- \$482,000 for security upgrades at 40 Coxe Ave.
- \$164,000 for a Glen Bridge River Park boat launch replacement

Vehicles

The proposed budget also has \$4 million for replacement vehicles and \$429,000 for new vehicles such as:

- \$2.9 million for 38 replacement vehicles for the Sheriff's Office
- \$683,000 for three ambulance remounts
- \$219,000 for four new vehicles for General Services

Special district tax rates

The County Manager's recommended budget includes proposed tax rates for the Asheville City school district and the unified fire district. The following shows a breakdown of those proposed rates:

- Asheville City Schools
 - Revenue-neutral rate: 8.14 cents per \$100 of assessed value
 - Requested tax rate: 10 cents
 - County Manager recommended tax rate: 8.14 cents
- Buncombe County Fire District
 - Revenue-neutral rate: 9.19 cents per \$100 of assessed value

- Requested tax rate: 14.37
- County Manager recommended tax rate: 11.73

Pinder also noted there is potential for a proposed bill in the North Carolina legislature to affect Buncombe County's 2026 property reappraisal. Senate Bill 889 proposes counties that conducted a property reappraisal effective Jan. 1, 2026, would require a temporary adjustment in the values used for tax purposes. That would mean for the proposed fiscal year 2027 budget, Buncombe County would be required to use the schedule of values from the County's previous reappraisal rather than the newly updated 2026 values. She further explained that the proposed legislation would not limit the County's ability to raise property taxes, it would create a one-year delay for counties to implement updated property values.

Commissioner Wells requested clarification on the county's property reappraisal timeline. Pinder explained that state law mandates regular revaluations and that Buncombe County was required to complete its 2026 reappraisal due to sales ratio noncompliance, not by local choice. She further explained that a proposed Senate bill delaying implementation of the new reappraisal would force the county to use outdated property values, resulting in a significantly higher tax rate to balance the budget and shifting greater financial burden onto property owners, and that delaying revaluation further harms the county's revenue because public utility valuations fall even farther out of alignment, which would result in an estimated loss of more than \$4 million across county and municipal districts.

Commissioners discussed the challenges of preparing an alternative budget scenario if the bill passes and reflected on last year's lean budget.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Farmland Preservation Ordinance Revision

Ariel Zijp provided the background information. She explained that the Buncombe County Farmland Preservation Ordinance mandates the process and requirements for the Farmland Preservation Program, which includes the Agricultural Advisory Board, Voluntary Agricultural District, Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District, and Conservation Easement Program. She explained that in June 2025, House Bill 126 was signed into law requiring Farmland Preservation Ordinances to be updated with specific public hearing requirements for Voluntary Agricultural Districts. In addition to that, in February 2026, the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Farmland Preservation Division released their updated recommended Farmland Preservation Ordinance Model. She said that Agriculture and Land Resources staff and County Legal have revised and reviewed the Farmland Preservation Ordinance to ensure the ordinance aligns with the house bill and state recommendations.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to approve the updated version of the Farmland Preservation Ordinance. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Sloan and carried unanimously.

2. Budget Amendment for Helene Recovery Recycling Infrastructure (HRRI) Grant and Acceptance of Award for Buncombe County Solid Waste

Kristy Smith, Solid Waste Manager, provided the update. She explained that the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality's (NCDEQ) Division of Environmental Assistance and Customer Service (DEACS) is administering the Helene Recovery Recycling Infrastructure (HRRI) grant program through funding from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). She further explained that the grant objectives are to assist Hurricane Helene-impacted local governments with the implementation, expansion, recovery, and improvement of waste reduction programs in western North Carolina and to help western North Carolina communities build lasting capacity to divert materials from the waste stream and improve the resiliency of the region's waste reduction infrastructure. Buncombe County Solid Waste was awarded \$3.5 Million dollars in grant funding for a construction and demolition (C&D) infrastructure diversion project. She said that the grant funding will be used for construction, enhancement and investment in infrastructure and equipment that will expand the ability to sort, aggregate and market recyclable materials from incoming C&D waste. She noted that this project aligns with the Solid Waste Department 2030 strategic plan goal to increase diversion of C&D materials by 20%.

Commissioner Sloan made the motion to receive the grant, accept the terms and conditions and approve the budget amendment. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Wells and carried unanimously.

3. Budget Amendment for Health, Employment, Property & Casualty Fund

John Hudson, Budget Director provided background information. He explained that each year, the Budget Office waits until later in the year to bring an amendment to the Internal Service Fund Plan because of the unpredictable nature of claims costs. This amendment adjusts for current claims projections as much as \$5.8M above budget by adding \$7.2M through previously unbudgeted rebates and stop loss credits revenues while reconciling premium revenue and adding appropriated fund balance for the remainder. This is fund balance specific to Health, Employment, Property & Casualty Insurance Fund Reserves and not General Fund Balance.

Commissioner Moore made the motion to approve the budget amendment. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Whitesides and carried unanimously.

4. Budget Amendment for Woodfin PDF Transfer

John Hudson, Budget Director, provided background information. He explained that the Project Development Financing (PDF) Woodfin Special Revenue Fund accounts for Ad Valorem tax revenues pledged to meet the debt service requirements related to PDF Woodfin Downtown Project. The cost not covered by the revenues related to the project property must be covered by the County. This year's calculated transfer is \$533,079. Finance has the full plan of future transfers and Budget has built this transfer into the FY27 budget. However, for FY26, this

budget amendment allows the amount needed as a transfer from the General Fund to the Woodfin PDF Fund.

Commissioner Sloan made the motion to approve the budget amendment. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Moore and carried unanimously.

5. Budget Amendment - Special Projects Fund FY26 Project Closures and Reappropriations

John Hudson, Budget Director, provided background information. He explained that This amendment closes 14 projects in the Special Projects Fund (\$5.3M), of which there is \$1.8M in savings/unspent funds. There is a total of \$246,157 in savings resulting from unspent conservation easements. \$206,300 is being reappropriated for transaction costs for the following projects:

- Cedar Hill Farm - \$52,300
- Saddlebrook Farm - \$50,500
- Morgan Branch B - \$65,000
- Wilson Farm - \$38,500

He explained that these four projects already have established budgets for purchase costs in the Open Space Bond Fund as match for the Agricultural Growth Zone Grant. The remaining \$39,857 will go toward Future Conservation Easements. \$1.5M in savings from the Linamar Economic Incentive results from failure to meet specified targets. Those funds will go toward future economic incentives. Finally, \$69K of savings from Energy Initiatives will be transferred to the General Fund to offset other sustainability initiatives.

Commissioner Whitesides made the motion to approve the budget amendment. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Sloan and carried unanimously.

6. Resolution asking HCA CEO to Engage Directly with Stakeholders in WNC – added from May 5 Briefing meeting.

Commissioner Wells provided background information. She explained that the proposed resolution urges HCA CEO Sam Hazen to come to Western North Carolina and directly address ongoing concerns about deteriorating conditions, staffing shortages, and repeated federal citations at Mission Health facilities. The letter states that HCA's management has harmed Mission's long-standing tradition of care, reduced transparency, and failed to engage meaningfully with community stakeholders and that the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners calls for a collaborative, accountable dialogue to create a plan for long-term improvement in the Mission Health system.

The Commissioner's noted their strong support for the resolution and thanked Commissioner Wells for bringing the resolution forward.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to approve the resolution. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Horton and carried unanimously.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

Mountain Community Capital Fund – The Chair noted that Commissioners held interviews earlier in the day and that there were two excellent candidates. The board unanimously voted to appoint Matthew Corzine.

Meeting adjourned at 7:22 p.m.