

**MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'**  
**BRIEFING MEETING ON JUNE 2, 2026.**

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Briefing Meeting on June 2, 2026, in the 1<sup>st</sup> 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. Policy Updates: Overtime Pay; Sustainable Fleet; PCI Compliance**

Heather Parkinson provided background information. She explained an overview of three County policies: Overtime Pay, Sustainable Fleet, and PCI Compliance. Each policy included key concepts and revisions, with all three proposed to shift from Board approved to County Manager approved since they govern internal administrative functions and are not required by statute to receive Board approval. The overview also highlighted that six existing Board approved policies similarly lack statutory requirements for Board approval, and there is a staff recommendation to consider reassigning them to the County Manager. The goal of these changes is to streamline policy approval processes and allow the Board to focus on strategic governance and oversight responsibilities.

The board discussed whether certain county policies should continue requiring commissioner approval or be delegated to the county manager to streamline operations. Several commissioners emphasized the importance of maintaining oversight, especially for items like the capital improvement plan and major budget impacts such as overtime costs, which had not been previously tracked or discussed in depth. Staff explained efforts to better categorize and monitor overtime and comp time payouts and noted that many policies involve operational matters governed by federal or procedural requirements already under the manager's purview. Commissioners reflected on the balance between governance and day-to-day management, expressing concerns about getting bogged down in operational details versus ensuring accountability. The discussion also touched on the intent behind policies such as the sustainable fleet policy and grant-seeking procedures, which still require board involvement at key financial decision points. The Commissioner's consented to the three policies coming back to the June 19 regular meeting for continued discussion.

**2. FY27 Salary Schedule Update**

Shauna Shepherd, Human Resources Director, provided background information. She outlined updates to the FY27 Salary Schedule, including a 3% increase to the top of each salary grade to support the proposed 2.71% COLA. She also introduced new classifications added to the FY27 plan, such as Lead HVAC Specialist, Library Social Worker, Risk Analyst, Senior Budget Analyst, and Senior General Services Project Manager. The FY27 Class and Compensation Plan and the updated salary schedule were provided as a handout for reference.

The Commissioners asked about class and compensation studies. Shepherd noted that the County is in the process of conducting a new study to reset the markers. The goal is to have the study complete this fall for adjustments to be considered in the next budget cycle.

### **3. FY27 AB Tech Advisory Committee & School Capital Fund Commission Recommendations**

Matt Evans, Finance, provided background information. He outlined the FY27 capital project recommendations from both the A-B Tech Joint Capital Advisory Committee and the School Capital Fund Commission. AB Tech's recommended FY27 projects total \$13,125,000, including major investments in the Enka building envelope and emergency water valve connections. Buncombe County Schools projects total \$28,000,000, primarily for renovations at W.D. Williams Elementary, while Asheville City Schools projects total \$2,146,500 for security design, facility improvements, and design work at multiple campuses. Combined, the total FY27 recommended amount for budget adoption is \$30,146,500, funded through applicable Article 46 and Article 39 sales tax sources.

### **4. Justice Services Update 15 mins Regenia Herring**

Regenia Herring, Justice Services Director, provided background information. She gave an update on Justice Services, including a bylaws revision that renames the Justice Resource Advisory Committee to the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council and updates membership categories. It also outlined a two year strategic plan with goals focused on courts, behavioral health, domestic and sexual violence, and law enforcement, emphasizing data driven recommendations and improved cross agency collaboration.

Lee Crayton provided extensive data. He said that he jails population update showed the facility operating above both operational and design capacity due to factors such as House Bill 307, increased bookings, and longer lengths of stay. Additional data highlighted rising misdemeanor bookings, longer average stays for both misdemeanors and felonies, and changes in release patterns following legislative and programmatic shifts. Crayton highlighted that the operational capacity for the detention is 470 and is currently at 530 and concluded with strategies to reduce the jail population through reduce bookings, reduce length of stay and moving individuals to other facilities. It was noted that increasing bookings is a population driver, specifically misdemeanor bookings are up 25%, whereas felony books 2% lower. Length of stay has been and continues to be a population driver. On average, people with felonies are staying more than a week longer than they did prior to the pandemic.

The Sheriff and Major from the Sherrif's Office followed with additional information. They emphasized that rising lengths of stay, lack of state facility capacity, and the high number of individuals with mental health and substance-use disorders are overwhelming local detention resources, with 223 inmates experiencing mental health issues and 134 experiencing substance-use issues. Staff highlighted growing safety concerns, increased assaults, and unsustainable workloads, noting detention officers are not clinically trained to manage these populations. Commissioners discussed the broader system failures contributing to overcrowding, including slow case processing, limited diversion options, and inconsistent participation from law enforcement partners in programs like LEAD. Options such as regional bed sharing were explored, though neighboring counties face similar capacity and staffing challenges.

The Board concluded with acknowledgement that mental health infrastructure, state-level capacity, and coordinated local justice reforms must be prioritized, as these current trends are unsustainable.

**MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS’  
REGULAR MEETING ON JUNE 2, 2026.**

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Regular Meeting on June 2, 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 May 19, 2026 Combined Meeting Minutes
2. Approval of the April 2026 Tax Collection Report
3. Resolution Approving Pyrotechnic Experts for Firework Displays
4. Approval of an Easement Agreement with Duke Energy to Provide Lighting at Buncombe County Sports Park
5. Resolution Awarding Duty Weapon to Retiring Deputy
6. Approval of JCPC FY 2026-2027 Certification and Annual Plan
7. Budget Amendment and Approval of Safety and Justice Challenge Earned Interest

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

County Attorney Euler read the motion to go into closed session for the following reason: 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 Ball made the motion to go into closed session for the reason stated. Commissioner Sloan seconded the motion, and it was carried unanimously.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Casey Miller – Casey Miller, Executive Director of the Council on Aging of Buncombe County, thanked the Board for its continued funding support and highlighted how these

investments directly provide essential meals, community connection, and resource coordination services for local older adults.

Ken Buckner – expressed concerns about an incident involving two sheriff's deputies, stating that charges against him were dismissed, and urged accountability within law enforcement.

David Greenson – with the Government Accountability Project of Asheville thanked the County for its housing investments and urged commissioners to pair these efforts with anti-displacement analysis to ensure new developments benefit and protect existing residents.

Steve Senn – spoke on behalf of five displaced Swannanoa businesses, urged the County to adopt anti-displacement measures, consider temporary property tax relief, and provide direct support to help affected business owners return and rebuild.

Emily Bango – expressed support for the housing bond while urging the County to adopt a formal anti-displacement strategy to ensure housing investments help long-term residents remain in their homes amid rising costs and limited affordable options.

Pepi Acebo – with Asheville City Schools Board of Education thanked the commissioners and county staff for their continued support of public and early childhood education.

Castalin Tench – urged the County to adopt an anti-displacement analysis tool, emphasizing that it would help commissioners and staff better understand the impacts of their decisions on residents and prevent harmful displacement.

Browning Jeremiah – said the letters TAQIYYA and encouraged the Board to look it up.

## **PRESENTATIONS**

### **1. Dr. Suzanne Landis Day Proclamation**

Commissioner Moore read the Proclamation proclaiming June 11, 2026 as Dr. Suzanne Landis Day in Buncombe County, and encouraging community agencies, healthcare practices and providers, hospitals, and citizens to recognize the historic value and potential of this healthcare resource and its founder.

### **2. Gun Violence Prevention and Awareness Month Proclamation**

Chair Edwards read the Proclamation in recognition of June as Gun Violence Prevention and Awareness Month in Buncombe County.

### **3. Child Fatality Review Team 2025 Annual Report**

Dr. Ellis Mathes provided the report. She explained that N.C.G.S. 7B-1406 establishes a Child Fatality Review Team (CFRT) in each county. These teams review the records of child deaths from birth to age 18 that occurred in their county to understand the causes and

contributing factors of childhood deaths; identify any gaps or deficiencies in the delivery of services to children and their families; and make recommendations for changes to laws, rules, and policies that will support the safe and healthy development of children and prevent future child abuse, neglect, and death. The CFRT is to submit a report annually to the board of county commissioners with their findings and any recommendations for system improvements and needed resources where gaps and deficiencies may exist.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### **1. FY27 Budget Adoption**

John Hudson, Budget Director, provided the background information. He outlined the budget development process, including a retreat, four work sessions, and public hearing leading to a final adopted general fund budget of \$484.4 million at a tax rate of 43.20 cents, which is 3.98 cents above revenue neutral.

The proposed budget includes 28 new positions, a 2.71% cost-of-living adjustment for employees, and major investments in education, public safety, and human services, with education receiving over \$137 million. He noted that significant discretionary community investments totaling \$11.75 million support early childhood education, affordable housing, behavioral health, and various grant programs. Capital improvement projects totaling \$38.3 million in debt-funded initiatives and \$1.6 million in pay-go projects, along with \$4.3 million allocated for 64 vehicles across County departments. He also provided updated revenue projections, fee schedule changes—including disaster-related permit waivers—and changes in special tax district rates for Asheville City Schools and the Fire District. Additionally, he summarized non-general fund budgets totaling \$698 million and highlights school and AB Tech capital projects planned for FY27.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to recuse Chair Edwards from voting on the Economic Development Coalition appropriation in the FY 2027 Budget due to the conflict of interest of being a board member of the EDC. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Sloan and carried unanimously.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to approve the EDC Appropriation as set forth in the 2027 Budget. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Moore and carried unanimously.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to recuse Commissioner Moore from voting on the Pisgah Legal Services appropriation in the FY 2027 Budget due to the conflict of interest of being a board member of Pisgah Legal Services. Commissioner Ball seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

Commissioner Wells moved to approve the Pisgah Legal Services Appropriation as set forth in the 2027 Budget. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ball and carried unanimously.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to recuse Commissioner Moore from voting on the Arts AVL appropriation in the FY 2026 Budget due to the conflict of interest of being a board member of Arts AVL. Chair Edwards seconded the motion and it was carried unanimously.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to approve the Arts AVL appropriation as set forth in the 2027 Budget. Chair Edwards seconded the motion and it was carried unanimously.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to recuse Commissioner Sloan from voting on the Vaya Health appropriation in the FY 2026 Budget due to the conflict of interest of being a board member of Vaya Health. Commissioner Horton seconded the motion and it was carried unanimously.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to approve the Vaya Health appropriation as set forth in the 2027 Budget. Commissioner Horton seconded the motion and the Board proceeded with individual comments before the unanimous vote.

Commissioner Wells made a motion to approve the two ordinances and the resolutions as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Horton and carried unanimously.

Commissioner Wells thanked staff and fellow commissioners for their extensive work over the seven-month budget process and addressed ongoing community misinformation related to the 2025 reappraisal, noting it was legally required and did not equate to a 43% budget or tax increase. She emphasized that last year's budget had been significantly reduced due to Helen, creating the need to begin rebuilding while maintaining a responsible fund balance. The recommended budget restored prior cuts, invested in community recovery, and increased funding for public schools, housing, early childhood education, and behavioral health. She also highlighted investments in public safety, emergency response, and essential services. She concluded that the budget balanced community needs, supported long-term recovery, and strengthened Buncombe County's future.

Commissioner Sloan reflected on the budget drivers presented that were presented early in April, and noted that many cost impacts stemmed from inflation, the restoration of Helen-related cuts, rising healthcare expenses, and funding shortfalls from both the state and federal levels. He highlighted specific impacts, including reduced federal support for Health and Human Services, increased local school funding due to inadequate state investment, and significant growth in employee and jail healthcare costs.

Commissioner Ball thanked staff for their work on the budget and highlighted key investments that reflected community priorities, including public safety, parks, schools, housing, and recovery efforts. He noted that the school funding formula had provided stable, predictable increases, resulting in an additional 11.3 million for public schools. He emphasized significant support for fire departments, including higher starting pay, more firefighters on duty, and improved response times. He also noted the financial pressures created by inflation, rising healthcare and utility costs, and unfunded state and federal mandates and the increased jail population. He concluded that the budget maintained a healthy fund balance, protected the county's bond rating, and continued to prepare the community for future needs and disasters.

Commissioner Moore noted that creating a perfect budget was impossible given rising costs, ongoing state underfunding of schools, and increasing burdens shifted onto local governments. He emphasized that despite these challenges, staff remained committed to collaboration, transparency, and continual improvement. He noted that essential services, such as public safety, emergency response, justice, health and human services, elections, and education, all require public investment. He highlighted ongoing efforts to support affordable

housing, early childhood education, and school needs, along with the dedication of staff who delivered critical services despite limited resources. He concluded that the county had made meaningful progress over the past two and a half years and encouraged continued community engagement to further strengthen outcomes.

Commissioner Whitesides noted this was his 10<sup>th</sup> budget with Buncombe County. He said that despite obstacles from state and federal levels, the county had remained focused on improving quality of life for residents and providing strong services for the tax dollars collected. He highlighted the county's progress over the past decade, including moving long-delayed programs forward and maintaining a commitment to schools, affordable housing, and essential services. He concluded that the board consistently worked toward what was best for Buncombe County and that he remained dedicated to serving the community.

Commissioner Horton noted how difficult the budget was to craft while the county was still recovering from Hurricane Helen, which include the sacrifices made in the prior year. She highlighted increased behavioral health funding for Asheville City Schools in response to rising youth mental-health concerns, as well as support for adult day programs and K–12 education. She emphasized that her priority was ensuring the budget served all residents while protecting essential services and strengthening public trust. She reaffirmed her commitment to holding funded partners accountable and thanked staff for their transparency and dedication. She concluded by saying it was an honor to serve and that she felt confident in the budget the board adopted.

Chair Edwards thanked staff, partners, and commissioners for their diligent work throughout the long budget process, noting that the vote reflected months of listening to residents and reviewing the budget line by line. She emphasized that the evening's decision represented confidence in Buncombe County's future and a shared belief that the county's best days were ahead. She acknowledged the many services and partners supported through the budget and expressed appreciation for their contributions to the community. She noted that commissioners had taken residents' concerns seriously and worked thoughtfully to address them. She concluded by thanking everyone involved for their commitment and collaboration.

Following discussion, the Commissioners unanimously voted to approve the Annual Funds Ordinance, the Capital Funds Ordinance and the Opioid Settlement Funds Resolution.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **1. 2026 General Obligation Bond Referendum**

Melissa Moore provided background information and provided the introduction of bond orders. She stated that the County is pursuing the issuance of two General Obligation (GO) bonds: 1) bond order authorization the issuance of \$30 million general obligation open space bonds of the County of Buncombe, North Carolina; and 2) bond order authorizing the issuance of the \$40 million of general obligation housing bonds of the County of Buncombe, North Carolina.

She explained that the \$30 million of open space bonds are to fund the acquisition and improvement of land or interests therein for conservation purposes, including the protection of

natural resources and the preservation of farms and scenic landscapes, and the development of parks, greenways, trails, and other outdoor recreational opportunities; and that the \$40 million of housing bonds are to pay the capital costs of housing the benefit of persons of low or moderate income, including construction of related infrastructure improvements and acquisition of related land and rights-of-way. She further explained that the next steps in the process are to introduce the bond orders and approve a resolution setting public hearings on the bond orders and directing publication of notices of said public hearings.

Commissioner Moore made the motion to Introduce the Bond Orders authorizing the issuance of General Obligation bonds for: \$30 Million for Open Space, and \$40 Million for Housing and to Approve Resolution Setting Public Hearings on Bond Orders and Directing Publication of Notices. Commissioner Wells seconded the motions and they carried unanimously.

## **2. COVID Recovery Funding Reallocation**

Rachael Sawyer, Strategic Partnership Director, provided background information. She explained that in 2021, Buncombe County was awarded a total of \$50,733,290 in Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds ("COVID Recovery Funding") via the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to invest toward recovery from COVID-19 and its negative economic impacts. These funds were awarded on a rolling basis by Commissioners and fully obligated by the federal deadline of December 31, 2024. Funds must be fully spent by December 31, 2026. Several projects have balances available for reallocation, totaling \$3,816,708. Funds may be transferred to other open projects, and staff is recommending the following reallocation:

- \$32,000 to Community Paramedic Collaborative: Funds to cover a purchase of radios for Community Paramedic program
- \$3,784,708 to Operational Costs for Helene Response: Funds to cover emergency costs from Tropical Storm Helene that aren't covered through insurance, FEMA Public Assistance or other disaster programs

This includes previous transfers that were made during the Helene emergency:

- \$50,000 to Ferry Road Infrastructure
- \$46,904 to Operational Costs for Helene Response.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to approve the reallocations as recommended. Commissioner Moore seconded the motion, and it was carried unanimously.

## **3. Authorization to Acquire Real Property at 7 S. Tunnel Road**

Tim Love, Assistant County Manager, provided background information. He explained that Buncombe County Government is under contract to acquire approximately 6.24 acre parcel of land having an address of 7 S. Tunnel Rd, Asheville, NC 28805. The due diligence period ended on May 22, 2026 and the closing date for the transaction is June 8, 2026. He further explained that the approval of this resolution authorizes the County Manager to acquire the property for \$5 million or terminate if necessary. He said that the property would serve as a future Emergency Operations Center and Emergency Management

facility, addressing long-standing facility needs identified in the County's Comprehensive Facility Plan. He further explained that the need for a resilient and centralized EOC became even more critical following Tropical Storm Helene, and the site was prioritized in both the Helene Recovery Plan and the Preparedness Action Plan. The 6-acre, 130,500-sq-ft property offers existing infrastructure, ample parking, and proximity to major highways, making it well suited for public safety operations. The purchase price is \$5 million, supported by a completed appraisal and due-diligence work showing no environmental or title issues. Consolidating 911, Emergency Management, and EOC functions into this facility would reduce long-term costs and avoid more expensive new construction of comparable public-safety buildings. He said that existing CIP funding will cover the acquisition, with design and construction phases planned in future CIP cycles.

Commissioner Ball asked if anything was currently in the building, and if the deal was final. Love confirmed that the deal was not final, this was only one step closer and that the county does not have anything in the building currently.

Commissioner Wells and Love both confirmed that no additional funding was needed at this time and Commissioner Sloan noted that this could improve the workplace environment for staff and improve quality of life. Chair Edwards noted this is something she has focused on – the need for a disaster space and emphasized the importance of this step forward for the County to have more strategic approach to public safety.

Commissioner Horton made the motion to approve the resolution authorizing the County Manager to complete the purchase. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Sloan and carried unanimously.

#### **4. Budget Amendment for Multi-Purpose Facility Project Budget Increase**

John Hudson, Budget Director provided background information. He explained that this action is to increase the total project budget for the FY24 New Storage Facility - Design project by \$1,045,600 to cover property acquisition costs for the future facility site. This increase will be funded by reallocating \$500,000 of unused budget from the FY24 35 Woodfin Renovation for Forward Facing Facility project, reallocating \$300,000 of unused budget from the FY25 35 Woodfin 911 Backup Center Renovation project, and funding the remaining \$245,600 needed with future debt proceeds. The projects above are all debt funded projects and therefore there is no immediate General Fund impact.

The FY24 New Storage Facility - Design project is also requested to be reestablished as the FY24 New EOC/Multi-Purpose Facility - Land & Design project. This amendment would result in the FY24 New EOC/Multi-Purpose Facility - Land & Design project having a total budget of \$5,257,600

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

#### **5. Budget Amendment for the approval of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, EWP - Helene Grant**

Jennifer Harrison provided background information. She explained that this request is for approval to accept a \$36,991,382 Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) grant to support streambank recovery efforts as a result of the destruction left by Tropical Storm Helene in Buncombe County. She explained that funding will be used for stream debris removal, streambank restoration and stabilization, erosion control, streambank protection and associated technical assistance and engineering design services to help reduce flood risk, protect infrastructure, and restore impacted waterways throughout Buncombe County.

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

## **BOARD APPOINTMENTS**

Home & Community Care Block Grant Advisory Committee – Commissioner Whitesides made the motion to reappoint Debroah Oldt. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Sloan and carried unanimously.

Library Advisory Board – Commissioner Ball made the motion to reappoint Laina Stapleton. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Wells and carried unanimously.

Asheville Buncombe Technical CC Board of Trustees – Commissioner Wells made the motion to reappoint Joseph Barwick. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Whitesides and carried unanimously.

Greater Asheville Regional Airport Authority – Commissioner Whitesides made the motion to reappoint Gene Bell. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Sloan and carried unanimously.

Adjourned at 8:03 p.m.