

MINUTES
WATAUGA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
TUESDAY, JANUARY 21, 2025

The Watauga County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting, as scheduled, on Tuesday, January 21, 2025, at 5:30 P.M. in the Commissioners' Board Room located in the Watauga County Administration Building, Boone, North Carolina.

Chairman Eggers called the meeting to order at 5:30 P.M. The following were present:

PRESENT:	Braxton Eggers, Chairman Todd Castle, Vice-Chairman Tim Hodges, Commissioner Ronnie Marsh, Commissioner Nathan Miller, County Attorney Deron Geouque, County Manager Anita J. Fogle, Clerk to the Board
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[Clerk's Note: Commissioner Greene was not in attendance due to a prior engagement.]

Vice-Chairman Castle opened with a prayer and Commissioner Marsh, led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Eggers presented a correction to the December 2, 2024, regular meeting minutes and called for additions and/or corrections to the December 17, 2024, regular meeting and closed session minutes.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the December 2, 2024, regular meeting minutes as corrected.

VOTE: Aye-4(Eggers, Castle, Hodges, Marsh)
Nay-0
Absent-1(Greene)

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the December 17, 2024, regular meeting minutes as presented.

VOTE: Aye-4(Eggers, Castle, Hodges, Marsh)
Nay-0
Absent-1(Greene)

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the December 17, 2024, closed session minutes as presented.

VOTE: Aye-4(Eggers, Castle, Hodges, Marsh)
Nay-0
Absent-1(Greene)

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairman Eggers called for additions and/or corrections to the January 21, 2025, agenda.

Commissioner Marsh requested to add a special announcement under announcements. County Attorney Miller stated that Attorney/Client matters in closed session would include discussion on pending litigation as follows: 24 CVM 198 Brandy Boyles and Keller vs. North America.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to approve the January 21, 2025, agenda as amended.

VOTE: Aye-4(Eggers, Castle, Hodges, Marsh)
Nay-0
Absent-1(Greene)

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

PROPOSED RESOLUTION SUPPORTING FUNDING FOR REPAIRS AND STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION OF BLUE RIDGE RISING ALONG THE BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY

No one was in attendance to present the proposed resolution.

REQUEST TO ESTABLISH CAPITAL RESERVE FUND FOR TRANSFER STATION

Mr. Chris Marriott, Operations Services Director, requested the adoption of a proposed resolution to establish and maintain a reserve fund in the amount of \$66,445. The fund was required by State Law and the Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) rules. The fund would be used for post closure of the transfer station. The funds would be designated from the retained earnings of the Sanitation Department. Mr. Marriott stated that an annual escalator would be used to determine the amount required to be in the fund and additional funds would be added to reach that amount.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to adopt the resolution as presented and to authorize the designation of \$66,445 from retained earnings to establish the reserve account.

VOTE: Aye-4(Eggers, Castle, Hodges, Marsh)
Nay-0
Absent-1(Greene)

TAX MATTERS

A. Monthly Collections Report

County Manager Geouque, on behalf of Mr. Tyler Rash, Tax Administrator, who was out due to a death in his family, presented the Tax Collections Report for the month of December 2024. The report was presented for information only and, therefore, no action was required.

B. Refunds and Releases

County Manager Geouque, on behalf of Mr. Tyler Rash, Tax Administrator, presented the Refunds and Releases Report for December 2024 for Board approval:

TO BE TYPED IN MINUTE BOOK

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the Refunds and Releases Report for December 2024 as presented.

VOTE: Aye-4(Eggers, Castle, Hodges, Marsh)
Nay-0
Absent-1(Greene)

C. Proposed Resolution to Terminate/Appoint Plat Review Officers

County Manager Geouque, on behalf of Mr. Tyler Rash, Tax Administrator, presented a resolution which would remove Mr. Larry Warren (recently retired) and Eric Saule (recently left employment), as Plat Review Officers and appoint Mr. Tyler Rash and Laramie Ward as Plat Review Officers. Adopting the proposed resolution would give Mr. Rash and Ms. Ward the authority to review plats prior to recording, and to determine if the plats meet statutory requirements for recording.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to adopt the resolution to terminate/appoint plat review officers as presented.

VOTE: Aye-4(Eggers, Castle, Hodges, Marsh)
Nay-0
Absent-1(Greene)

D. Settlement Through December 2024

Per G. S. 105-373 (d) and with the retirement of Larry Warren, County Manager Geouque presented a settlement of the Tax Collector through December 2024. Mr. Warren had prepared the settlement to close out records through his tenure with the County.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to approve the Tax Collectors Settlement through December 2024 as presented.

VOTE: Aye-4(Eggers, Castle, Hodges, Marsh)
Nay-0
Absent-1(Greene)

FINANCE MATTERS

A. Budget Amendments

County Manager Geouque, who also serves as Finance Director, presented the following budget amendments:

Account #	Description	Debit	Credit
213991-399101	Fund Balance Appropriation		\$12,337,307
219800-498050	Transfer to Emergency 911 Project	\$12,337,307	
273980-398121	Transfer from Capital Projects Fund		\$12,337,307
506120-458000	Capital Outlay	\$12,337,307	

The amendment moved funds from CIP – Future County Buildings to the Emergency 911 Project fund.

103991-399100	Fund Balance		\$6,575,583
109800-498021	Transfer to Capital Projects Fund	\$6,575,583	
213980-398100	Transfer from General Fund		\$6,575,583
219930-461100	Emergency Communications	\$6,575,583	

The amendment transferred funds to Capital Reserve from unassigned fund balance from the FY 2024 audit as approved at the December 17, 2024, Board meeting.

105911-499100	Additional Appropriation – Watauga County Schools	\$1,800,000	
213991-399101	Fund Balance Appropriation		\$1,800,000
219800-498010	Transfer to General Fund	\$1,800,000	
103980-398121	Transfer from Capital Projects Fund		\$1,800,000

The amendment transferred funds from Capital Reserve for Watauga County Schools long-term needs for funding of current expenses.

105911-471000	Lottery Funds		\$300,000
103300-349909	Lottery Funds Revenue		\$1,005,000
105911-470045	Carpet and Tile	\$45,000	
105911-470043	Roof Renovations	\$80,000	
105911-470078	Fire Alarm Replacements	\$140,000	
105911-470018	Door Access Controls	\$60,000	
105911-470020	Parkway Addition	\$500,000	
105911-470038	Cafeteria Equipment	\$75,000	
105911-470037	Gym Floors	\$25,000	
105911-470019	Doors/Windows Replacements	\$20,000	
105911-470041	Pavement and Sidewalk Repairs	\$80,000	
105911-470077	Softball/Baseball Field Lighting	\$180,000	
105911-470079	Fencing Replacements	\$100,000	

The amendment recognized lottery funds requested and approved at the October 15, 2024, Board meeting.

103300-332006	SHIIP Grant	\$4,878
105550-449901	SHIIP Grant Expenses	\$4,878

The amendment recognized the acceptance of the State Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP) grant funds as approved at the November 19, 2024, Board meeting. No local match was required.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to approve the amendments as presented.

VOTE: Aye-4(Eggers, Castle, Hodges, Marsh)
Nay-0
Absent-1(Greene)

B. 2024 Carry-Forward Purchase Orders

Mr. Deron Geouque, County Manager/Finance Director, presented carry-forward purchase orders for 2024 as follows:

Account	Description	Purpose	Amount
104130-439500	Employee Training	Finance Training	\$6,915.00
104141-469500	Vincent Valuations	Tax Revaluation	\$172,468.00
104199-469103	Clark Nexsen	Facilities Study	\$3,750.00
104199-499100	Contingency	Hurricane Helene Damages	\$525,000.00
104210-429000	IT	Election Printers	\$2,500.00
104261-435100	Muter Construction	Roof Replacement at Courthouse	\$30,925.42
104261-435100	Courthouse Repairs	Tile and Floor Replacement	\$17,000.00
104261-435200	HVAC/Chiller Replacement at Courthouse	HVAC/Chiller Replacement at Courthouse	\$90,191.69
104265-435101	Tri-County Paving	Paving at Hannah Building	\$353,509.58
104267-435200	HVAC	Health Dept HVAC	\$50,000.00
104269-435200	HVAC	Finishing Replacing HVAC at Library	\$25,574.00
104269-435200	Alpha Energy Solutions	Replace Air Conditioning at Library and Floor Scrubber	\$80,491.09
104273-435101	Signage for Parking	Parking Lots Signage	\$1,000.00
104273-458000	Parking Deck	Finish County Parking Deck	\$864,824.24
104274-435100	West Annex Upgrades	Ceiling Tiles and LED Lighting, Equipment at West Annex	\$39,020.00
104275-435100	Human Services	Finish Interior Renovations and Upgrade Access Controls	\$289,621.00
104275-435100	Custom Coatings	Exterior Stucco Repair	\$6,980.00
104275-435101	Tri-County Paving	Paving Human Services Building	\$73,769.00
104277-435100	LEC Repairs	Tile Work and Pods, Painting, Floor Replacement And Roof Replacement at LEC	\$244,342.17
104283-XXXXXX	Hoffman Materials	Infield Mix for Fields	\$13,310.00

104283-XXXXX	Field Renovations	Field Renovations	\$95,476.00
104285-435101	Tri-County Paving	Paving Brookshire	\$185,361.26
104287-435100	Soccer Complex Repairs	Replace Gutters, Netting and Downspouts	\$16,417.00
104310-451001	Flock Group Inc	Leo Camera System	\$3,769.89
104310-454000	Dana Safety	Upfitting Police Vehicles	\$32,082.10
104311-451XXX	Emergency Management	EM Communications Expansion	\$4,333,000.00
104311-451000	Motorola Solutions	Astro Technical Assistance Path Surveys	\$84,000.00
104320-422000	Watauga Medical Center	Detention Meals	\$30,581.65
104320-469102	Competent Correctional Care	Medical Services	\$21,573.00
104350-426000	Planning and Inspections Code Books	Planning and Inspections Code Books	\$4,000.00
104920-463300	Child Care Study	Child Care Study	\$45,000.00
104920-463300	Workforce Housing	Workforce Housing	\$24,845.00
104960-449902	Soil and Water	Bill Edmisten Fund	\$2,340.00
104960-449919	Soil and Water	Stream Restoration Grant	\$28,245.00
105550-XXXXX	POA	SHIIP, Exxon, ARPA And Senior Center Grants	\$46,200.56
105890-463340	WAMY Rental Housing Program	WAMY Rental Housing Program	\$86,250.00
105911-470049	Watauga County School Roof Replacement	Watauga County School Roof Replacement	\$2,000,000.00
106120-XXXXX	Parks and Rec	Contracted Services for Camp and Programs, Camp Supplies, Senior Games	\$37,900.00
145310-449902	Foster Care Discretionary Funds	Foster Care Discretionary Funds	\$592.00
145310-449903	Adult Protective Services	Adult Protective Services	\$1,514.00
145410-440006	Adoption Promotion Grant	Adoption Promotion Grant	\$156,062.00
145310-449904	CPS Discretionary Funds	CPS Discretionary Funds	\$2,292.00
264330-425000	Motorola	E-911 Radios	\$49,985.34
667420-455002	Charlotte Scale Company	Truck Scales	\$86,095.87
667420-457000	Carolina Grading and Utilities	Scale House Improvements	\$24,485.00
667420-457001	JW Hampton	Sediment Basin Improvements	\$4,957.72
667420-457001	Transfer Station Improvements	Transfer Station Improvements	\$1,004,314.14
667420-457001	McGill	Convenience Center Improvements	\$14,236.00
667420-457001	Freedom Electric	Materials for Scale House	\$5,055.60
667420-457003	PADCO Excavating	Storage Improvements	\$4,242.08

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to approve the 2024 purchase order carry-forwards as presented by County Manager/Finance Director Geouque.

VOTE: Aye-4(Eggers, Castle, Hodges, Marsh)
Nay-0
Absent-1(Greene)

C. Proposed Audit Contract for Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2025

Mr. Deron Geouque, Finance Director, will request the Board approve the Fiscal Year 2024-25 audit contract and engagement letter with C. Randolph, CPA, PLLC. The contract amount of \$50,600 covers the annual audit. Adequate funds are available to cover the expenditure.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to accept the contract with C. Randolph, CPA, PLLC for the County's FY 2025 audit in the amount of \$50,600.

VOTE: Aye-4(Eggers, Castle, Hodges, Marsh)
Nay-0
Absent-1(Greene)

MISCELLANEOUS ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

A. State of Emergency Termination

On behalf of Mr. Will Holt, Emergency Services Director, County Manager Geouque stated that the Hurricane Helene mission was fully in the recovery stage and no longer required the need to exercise local emergency powers to deal with the incident (i.e. curfews, etc. local procurement flexibilities, etc.). Staff contacted the North Carolina Emergency Management Western Division to ensure lifting of the State of Emergency would not impact FEMA eligibility/reimbursement or the status of the disaster declaration since we are one of the 39 declared counties.

Mr. Will Polk, Deputy General Counsel, provided guidance that it is the local jurisdiction's policy call based on the status of the county as to whether they need the declaration to remain in place to exercise their local emergency powers to deal with the incident. As far as the impact on FEMA eligibility/reimbursement, if it is one of the 39 declared counties or ECBI in 4827-DR, standing down the SOE will not impact its status in the disaster declaration.

The County Manager stated that staff, in concurrence with the County Attorney, recommended the State of Emergency be lifted. County Attorney Miller stated that was correct, he did agree.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to terminate the State of Emergency as presented by the County Manager.

VOTE: Aye-4(Eggers, Castle, Hodges, Marsh)
Nay-0
Absent-1(Greene)

B. Hurricane Helene Update

On behalf of Mr. Will Holt, Emergency Services Director, County Manager Geouque shared the following update on current recovery efforts from Hurricane Helene.

“I would like to offer a brief update on the status of recovery in Watauga County from the Emergency Services perspective. Before going any further, I would like to personally express my deep gratitude to the multitude of individuals and organizations that have stepped up to lead the way in various aspects of recovery including rebuilding of our citizen’s personal property and businesses. A few key points:

- County staff continue to work with our insurance provider on coverage limits and settlements. We have requested the insurance company to send settlement letters as determinations are made to increase speed we can submit to FEMA for any gaps.*
- Right-of-way debris removal continues. Due to weather and other factors, we have requested and NCEM is in the process of completing an extension on the allowable work period for debris removal in the right of way. At time of writing this extension is still being processed.*
- Waterway and private property debris removal operations with the Corps of Engineers (USACE) has been approved with our project contract to be completed within the next 2-3 weeks and then a 45 day permitting process review will begin. An initial round of assessments has been completed by USACE and reviewed by FEMA for eligibility. Staff now has a solid contact person within USACE who will take Watauga County debris removal “from cradle to grave” for waterway and private property. Representative Foxx’s office has been very active on this issue and we appreciate her support.*
- Staff is conducting rapid assessments on waterways to give multiple State and federal partners access to raw data to determine eligibility for Category A (USACE debris removal), EWP, or other potential programs being discussed.*
- Governor Stein has signed an Executive Order directing NCEM and OSBM to establish a private road and bridge program. Staff has been in contact with the Assistant Director of that division of OSBM and initial planning has begun on how to implement that Executive Order. This program is designed to duplicate the success seen in the southwest part of the State during the 2022 TS Fred floods.*
- Staff has worked with the County Attorney and regional partners to develop an RFP for technical assistance with recovery. The specific focus of this RFP is for assistance in the financial recovery surrounding public assistance, hazard mitigation, and other complex federal programs. This RFP closes January 21st.*
- As a point of success, DSA teams have completed their work in Watauga County but will have staff available for any issues that arise. Teams registered thousands of individuals and helped put more than \$13M at time of report into the hands of our citizens to begin their recovery.*
- The deadline for organizations to apply for Public Assistance (PA) and individuals to apply for assistance (IA) have both been extended to February 6th, 2025*
- Transitional Sheltering Assistance (TSA) has been extended until January 25th. Senator Budd’s office has been very active in this area and we appreciate his efforts on this issue.*

The Emergency Services Department is grateful for the partnership with our local, State, and federal partners specifically as they focus efforts to get money flowing into our community to restore what was lost and also build an even more resilient future.”

County Manager Geouque stated that two proposals were received for recovery management earlier in the day and they would be reviewed and presented at a future meeting.

County Manager Geouque stated that the contract for debris pickup ends on March 31, 2025; however, staff has asked the State for an extension. The State is looking at doing a blanket extension for all 39 affected counties.

The report was for information only; therefore, no action was required at this time.

C. Proposed Dates for Annual Pre-Budget Retreat

County Manager Geouque stated that the proposed dates for the Annual Pre-Budget Retreat were February 27 and 28, 2025, with times proposed from 12–7 P.M. for Thursday and 9 A.M.–1 P.M. for Friday. Two days were required for the Retreat and times and dates could be adjusted accordingly.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to schedule the Annual Pre-Budget Retreat for Thursday, February 27, 2025, beginning at 12:00 P.M. and Friday, February 28, 2025, beginning at 9:00 A.M.

VOTE: Aye-4(Eggers, Castle, Hodges, Marsh)
Nay-0
Absent-1(Greene)

D. Proposed Dates for Budget Work Sessions

County Manager Geouque stated that two budget work sessions are held each year. The work sessions were scheduled after the Manager’s proposed budget was presented at the first meeting in May. The proposed dates for the budget work sessions were May 8 and 9, with times proposed from 12–8 P.M. for the first day and 9 A.M.–1 P.M. for the second day. Times and dates could be adjusted accordingly.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to schedule the budget work sessions on Thursday, May 8, 2025, beginning at 12:00 P.M. and Friday, May 9, 2025, beginning at 9:00 A.M..

VOTE: Aye-4(Eggers, Castle, Hodges, Marsh)
Nay-0
Absent-1(Greene)

E. Proposed Resolution Authorizing the Advertisement of A Lease Renewal with Daymark Recovery System, Inc.

County Manager Geouque stated that the lease with Daymark Recovery Services has expired. Daymark Recovery Services would like to renew the lease with the same terms and conditions as the current lease. The space to be leased was at the County's Human Service Building and included 13,775 square feet. Daymark agreed to lease the space at the rate of \$10 per square foot (\$137,750 per year) in monthly installments of \$11,479.17. The new lease term would be March 1, 2025, to February 29, 2028. Included in the lease under Section 10 was an additional fee in the amount of \$67,718 per year, to be paid in monthly installments of \$5,643, which was to cover utilities and janitorial services.

Prior to approving the lease, County Manager Geouque presented an attached resolution that, once adopted, would need to be advertised in the Watauga Democrat for ten (10) days as required by the general statutes prior to the lease being brought back to the Board for action.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to adopt the resolution and authorize the advertisement of the resolution for ten days as presented by the County Manager.

VOTE: Aye-4(Eggers, Castle, Hodges, Marsh)
Nay-0
Absent-1(Greene)

F. Interior and Exterior Signage for New Valle Crucis Elementary School

County Manager Geouque presented the proposed interior and exterior signage for the new Valle Crucis Elementary School. The total cost from APCO Carolinas was \$85,436.17 and adequate funding was available in the current project budget to cover the expense.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to approve the contract with APCO Carolinas in the amount of \$85,436.17 for interior and exterior signage for the new Valle Crucis Elementary School.

VOTE: Aye-4(Eggers, Castle, Hodges, Marsh)
Nay-0
Absent-1(Greene)

G. Boards and Commissions

County Manager Geouque presented the following:

Commissioner Appointments to Boards & Commissions

Each Commissioner nominates a representative to the Watauga County Planning Board whose terms run concurrent with the term of the appointing Commissioner. Commissioner Marsh would like to appoint Neal Winebarger as his district representative on the Watauga County Planning Board. Action must be taken by the entire Board of Commissioners to make these appointments.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to waive the second reading and appoint Neal Winebarger as the district representative on the Watauga County Planning Board for Commissioner Marsh.

VOTE: Aye-4(Eggers, Castle, Hodges, Marsh)
Nay-0
Absent-1(Greene)

Watauga Medical Center Board of Trustees

The Watauga Medical Center Board of Trustees has recommended Lisa Cooper for reappointment and Matthew Vincent for appointment as Board Trustees. Each of their terms would be effective January 1, 2025, through December 31, 2027. These were first readings and, therefore, no action was taken.

Watauga County Board of Adjustment

The Board of Adjustment term of Ms. Sue Sweeting has expired. The revised NC General Statute 160D no longer makes any mention of appointments representing zoned areas of counties with partial-county zoning; therefore, it is not necessary to consider where appointees live. The term will be for three years. There are no recommendations from the Board of Adjustment at this time and no volunteer applications have been received.

Valle Crucis Historic Preservation Commission

The term of Erin Welsh has expired on the Valle Crucis Historic Preservation Commission. The member must live in the Historic District or be a current member representative of the Valle Crucis Community Council. The Preservation Commission has not made a recommendation at this time. A volunteer application has been received from Mr. Bryant Ward who is interested in serving. This is a first reading and, therefore, no action is required.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to waive the first reading the appoint Mr. Bryant Ward to the Valle Crucis Historic Preservation Commission as presented.

VOTE: Aye-4(Eggers, Castle, Hodges, Marsh)
Nay-0
Absent-1(Greene)

H. Announcements

County Manager Geouque announced that the High Country Council of Governments' 49th Annual Banquet was postponed due to Hurricane Helene and has been rescheduled for Friday, March 7, 2025, from 6:00 to 9:00 P.M. in the Grandview Ballroom at the Northwest End Zone Facility, Appalachian State University. The deadline to RSVP is February 21, 2025.

Commissioner Marsh announced that there would be an After Action Debrief with all Emergency Services in the area in regards to Hurricane Helene on Saturday February 22, 2025, at the Caldwell Community College Campus.

CLOSED SESSION

At 6:12 P.M., Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to enter Closed Session to discuss Attorney/Client Matters, per G. S. 143-318.11(a)(3) [including discussion on 24 CVM 198 Brandy Boyles and Keller vs. North America], Land Acquisition, per G. S. 143-318.11(a)(5)(i), and Personnel Matters, per G. S. 143-318.11(a)(6).

VOTE: Aye-4(Eggers, Castle, Hodges, Marsh)
Nay-0
Absent-1(Greene)

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to resume the open meeting at 9:09 P.M.

VOTE: Aye-4(Eggers, Castle, Hodges, Marsh)
Nay-0
Absent-1(Greene)

ADJOURN

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:10 P.M.

VOTE: Aye-4(Eggers, Castle, Hodges, Marsh)
Nay-0
Absent-1(Greene)

Braxton Eggers, Chairman

ATTEST: Anita J. Fogle, Clerk to the Board