

MINUTES
WATAUGA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
TUESDAY, MARCH 4, 2025

The Watauga County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting, as scheduled, on Tuesday, March 4, 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
	Emily Greene, Commissioner
	Tim Hodges, Commissioner
	Ronnie Marsh, Commissioner
	Nathan Miller, County Attorney
	Deron Geouque, County Manager
	Anita J. Fogle, Clerk to the Board

Commissioner Hodges opened with a prayer and Commissioner Marsh led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Eggers presented the February 18, 2025, regular meeting and closed session minutes.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to approve the February 18, 2025, regular meeting minutes as presented.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to approve the February 18, 2025, closed session minutes as presented.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairman Eggers called for additions and/or corrections to the February 18, 2025, agenda.

County Manager Geouque requested to add the following items after public comment:

- A Proposed Letter Welcoming Chancellor Heather Norris to Appalachian State University.

- Economic Development Matters including the following:
 - A. Proposed Resolution Requesting the United States Congress and the North Carolina General Assembly Continue to Provide Financial and Administrative Support for Small Businesses in Watauga County and All Western NC Counties Impacted by Hurricane Helene
 - B. Proposed Local Bill for Housing to be Entitled An Act To Authorize The Town of Blowing Rock, The Town of Boone, and The Watauga County Board of Education To Construct and Provide Affordable Housing for Town Employees and for Public School Teachers

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Vice-Commissioner Castle, moved to approve the March 4, 2025, agenda as amended.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

REVISED BID FOR SHERIFF'S OFFICE VEHICLE PURCHASE

Captain Preston Russell, with the Sheriff's Office, requested the Board rescind the offer of acceptance to McNeil Chevrolet of Wilkesboro in the amount of \$48,744.36 for one (1) 2025 Chevrolet Silverado 1500 Truck that was approved at the February 18, 2025, meeting and accept an offer from Elevation Chevrolet of Boone in the amount of \$46,356 for one (1) 2024 Chevrolet Silverado 1500 Truck. County Attorney Miller recommended the Board discuss the request in closed session prior to consideration.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to add a "Possible Action After Closed Session" to the agenda.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

LETTER TO THE CHANCELLOR OF APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Chairman Eggers shared a letter that would be sent to the newly appointed Chancellor of Appalachian State University, Dr. Heather Norris. Dr. Norris, who has recently served as Interim Chancellor, had both the interests of the University and community as a whole at heart and the Board looks forward to working with the University through her leadership.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MATTERS

A. Proposed Resolution Requesting the United States Congress and the North Carolina General Assembly Continue to Provide Financial and Administrative Support for Small Businesses in Watauga County and All Western NC Counties Impacted by Hurricane Helene

Mr. Joe Furman, Director of Economic Development with the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce, presented a proposed resolution requesting the United States Congress and the North Carolina General Assembly continue to provide financial and administrative support for small businesses in Watauga County and all Western NC counties impacted by Hurricane Helene. Mr. Furman read the resolution.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to adopt the resolution as presented by Mr. Furman.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MATTERS

B. Proposed Local Bill for Housing to be Entitled An Act To Authorize The Town of Blowing Rock, The Town of Boone, and The Watauga County Board of Education To Construct and Provide Affordable Housing for Town Employees and for Public School Teachers

Mr. Joe Furman, Director of Economic Development with the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce, stated that discussions were held over the past year with the North Carolina State Employees Credit Union Foundation for public employees housing assistance. Approximately one year ago, the UNC School of Government made staff aware that a Local Bill would be needed for such a project.

Mr. Furman presented a draft of a Local Bill for the Towns of Boone and Blowing Rock along with the Watauga Education Foundation, for such a project for teachers and other public employees. The deadline to introduce the Local Bill was rapidly approaching. Through the project, housing would not be subsidized but would rather be assisted in the form of a 0% loan. The County's involvement could be the sale or lease of County-owned land across from the Brookshire Road soccer fields which has long been considered for affordable housing. The Education Foundation would be the applicant. The Local Bill would not commit the County to anything but would allow the project to happen. If not introduced at this time, it would be one year before a Local Bill could be introduced.

The Local Bill would allow for the County, if the County so chose, to lease or sell the land without following Statutory laws. Mr. Furman requested to have Watauga County's name included in the Local Bill.

After discussion, Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to add Watauga County's name to the Local Bill authorizing the County, Town of Blowing Rock, Town of Boone, and the Watauga County Board of Education to construct and provide affordable housing for public employees and public school teachers.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

HURRICANE HELENE UPDATE

Mr. Will Holt, Emergency Services Director, provided an update on the recovery from Hurricane Helene. Mr. Holt stated that PPDR and Waterway removal was underway with Rights-of-Entry ongoing. The information to register is on the County's website. Site are set up at the Western Watauga Community Center and the Poplar Grove Connector Site where in person help can be obtained. Flyers will soon be placed at all of the County's Container Sites and other public buildings. County Manager Geouque stated that billboards and temporary electronic roadside signs may also be used.

Mr. Holt state that waterway removal was underway on Hwy 421 and several other areas earlier in the day. Soil and Water and NCRS would be going to the removal locations when removal was done to see what remained. Mr. Holt stated that the registration deadline for individual assistance was March 8, 2025. If it were extended again, Mr. Holt stated that it would be requested for the in person sites to remain open as well.

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

MISCELLANEOUS ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

C. Kill/Chill Project

The County Manager stated that the County Attorney had an update on the Kill/Chill project.

County Attorney Miller stated that the Fair Market Value (FMV) for the lease was determined to be between \$9 to \$11 dollars by Appraiser Mike Sweeting. Piedmont Meats wanted to obtain their own FMV. Mr. Miller stated that a \$500,000 grant for the project had been decommitted and that due to Hurricane Helene, the space designated for the facility at the old landfill site was being utilized by the Sanitation Department. When asked the costs of not being able to utilize the site, County Manager Geouque stated that it would costs approximately \$75,000 per year to haul the materials currently being stored on the site. Over time that would add up to approximately \$1.7 million which would be considered money lost due to not being able to use that site. No action was taken at this time.

[Clerk's Note: Action was taken after Closed Session.]

D. Boards and Commissions

County Manager Geouque presented the following:

Tourism Development Authority (TDA)

The terms of Ms. Kim Rogers and Mr. Tony Gray on the Watauga County TDA Board expired at the end of February 2025. Ms. Rogers serves in one of three seats required to be filled by an owner or operator of a taxable lodging business with properties in Watauga County District U. Mr. Gray retired from Appalachian State University years ago having served as the Director of Conference and Institutes. He was also a Christmas tree grower for many years. The TDA has requested the reappointment of both Ms. Rogers and Mr. Gray each for a three-year term.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to reappoint Ms. Kim Rogers and Mr. Tony Gray to three-year terms on the Watauga County Tourism Development Authority (TDA) as presented.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

Workforce Development Board

Ms. Misty Bishop-Price, Director of High Country Council of Governments Workforce Development Board, has requested the reappointment of Ms. Tara Brossa for a two-year term ending on June 30, 2027. This was a first reading and, therefore, no action was required at this time.

Social Services Advisory Board

The Social Services Advisory Board recommends the appointment of Ms. Tiffany Williams who will fill the seat held by Ms. Mary Smalling. The term is for four years. This was a first reading and, therefore, no action was required at this time.

E. Announcements

County Manager Geouque announced the following:

- 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.
- A Groundbreaking Ceremony will be held for the new EMS Facility off of Innovation Drive on Friday, March 14, 2025, at 1:00 P.M.
- The North Carolina Association of County Commissioners will hold a District 14 Meeting on April 24, 2025, from 5:30 P.M. to 7:30 P.M. at the Avery Community Center. Commissioners are invited to attend.

CLOSED SESSION

At 6:03 P.M., Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to enter Closed Session to discuss Attorney/Client Matters, per G. S. 143-318.11(a)(3).

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to resume the open meeting at 7:13 P.M.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

POSSIBLE ACTION AFTER CLOSED SESSION

Sheriff's Office

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to reject the offer from Elevation Chevrolet of Boone in the amount of \$46,356 for one (1) 2024 Chevrolet Silverado 1500 Truck and honor offer of acceptance to McNeil Chevrolet of Wilkesboro in the amount of \$48,744.36 for one (1) 2025 Chevrolet Silverado 1500 Truck that was approved at the February 18, 2025, meeting.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

Kill/Chill Project

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to rescind the RFP awarded to Piedmont Meats for the operation of the Kill/Chill on August 20, 2024, and rescind the award of the design build of the Kill/Chill facility to DH Griffin based on the fact the Appalachian Regional Commission decommitted a \$500,000 grant so that we don't have the funds to construct the facility and the damage to the community caused by Hurricane Helene that has necessitated the need for more space at the landfill site.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

ADJOURN

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:16 P.M.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

Braxton Eggers, Chairman

ATTEST: Anita J. Fogle, Clerk to the Board