

**MINUTES**  
**WATAUGA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**TUESDAY, MARCH 18, 2025**

The Watauga County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting, as scheduled, on Tuesday, March 18, 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

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

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Chairman Eggers presented the February 27 & 28, 2025, special meeting minutes as well as the March 4, 2025, regular meeting and closed session minutes.

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the February 27 & 28, 2025, special meeting minutes as presented.

VOTE: Aye-5  
Nay-0

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the March 4, 2025, regular meeting minutes as presented.

VOTE: Aye-5  
Nay-0

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the March 4, 2025, closed session minutes as presented.

VOTE: Aye-5  
Nay-0

## **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

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

Chairman Eggers requested to add a review of County ordinances to Miscellaneous Administrative Matters.

County Attorney Miller stated that the Opioid lawsuit would be discussed under Attorney/Client Matters in closed session. Mr. Miller also requested to add Land Acquisition to the closed session per, G. S. 143-318.11(a)(5)(i).

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the March 18, 2025, agenda as amended.

VOTE: Aye-5  
Nay-0

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

The following spoke during public comment:

Ms. Breanna Meehan shares how a distant neighbor had issues with her dog.

Ms. Kathy Parham gave an update on the Children's Playhouse and thanked the Board for support over the years.

Mr. Riley Oates, Public Affairs Specialist, with the Small Business Administration (SBA) Office of Disaster Recovery & Resilience, shared opportunities for business owners, homeowners, renters, and non-profits to receive help due to storm damage from Hurricane Helene.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to close public comment.

VOTE: Aye-5  
Nay-0

## **PROPOSED RESOLUTION EXPRESSING THE APPRECIATION OF THE WATAUGA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS FOR THE ASSISTANCE RENDERED TO WATAUGA COUNTY ON SEPTEMBER 27, 2024, AND THE WEEKS FOLLOWING**

Chairman Eggers presented and read a resolution expressing the Board's appreciation for all of the assistance received during, after, and currently from Hurricane Helene.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to adopt the resolution as presented.

VOTE: Aye-5  
Nay-0

## **LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR FIRE ASSOCIATION**

Mr. Seth Norris, Chair of the Watauga County Fire Commission, presented a joint letter from the Watauga County Fire Commission and the Watauga County Firefighters Association, to Senator Hise and Representative Pickett requesting support by fully funding the North Carolina Forest Service's budget request. The full list of NC Forest Service Needs was presented. The support would assist in the mitigation of wildfire risks for our County and the western counties of the state.

Mr. Andrew Harsey, Watauga County Ranger with the North Carolina Forest Service, was also present. Commissioner Castle asked if there was a way for companies to log the timber left from Hurricane Helene as it was after Hurricane Hugo. Mr. Harsey stated that there was a Federal program for that; however, there was a shortage of contractors as the timber was not that valuable. He did state that there were a few contractors doing that in Watauga County. Mr. Harsey also stated that Watauga County had roughly 30% of timber down due to Hurricane Helene and recent wind storms.

Chairman Eggers shared a draft letter addressed to Senator Hise, Representative Hall, and Representative Pickett, which also requested support by fully funding the North Carolina Forest Service's budget request.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to adopt the letter of support as presented.

VOTE: Aye-5  
Nay-0

## **WATAUGA HERITAGE MUSEUM REPORT**

Ms. Diane Deal, Chairman of the Watauga Heritage Museum, presented an update on the progress of the future Watauga Heritage Museum. Ms. Deal gave a recap to update new Board members and stated that they are working toward their set goals. Mr. Aaron Burleson was developing a website for the Museum ([www.wataugacountyheritagemuseum.org](http://www.wataugacountyheritagemuseum.org)) which was currently under construction. A social media page would be developed as well. A total of \$23,161 in donations have been collected. The Museum Site Committee was searching for a place to house the museum. Ms. Deal stated that the Museum Board wanted to be on the radar for future financial support from the County and they were also applying for grants. The report was given for information only and, therefore, no action was required.

## **MIDDLE FORK GREENWAY EASEMENT REQUEST**

Ms. Wendy Patoprsty, Middle Fork Greenway, requested the termination of an easement between Appalachian Regional and Watauga County which was filed in 2016 with the Register of Deeds Office. The plan was for the County to terminate the easement and the Town of Blowing Rock would secure a similar easement from Appalachian Regional and construction would begin for that portion of the Middle Fork Greenway. The easement was for land at the Foley Center which has since been annexed into the Town of Blowing Rock.

County Attorney Miller stated that the easement could not be swapped to a Town but could be swapped to a trust or non-profit. To ensure the easement goes to the Town of Blowing Rock, Mr. Miller proposed the Board terminate the current easement with Appalachian Regional Healthcare System, (ARHS) Inc., and donate the land back to ARHS so long as ARHS has donated the easement to the Town of Blowing Rock.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to terminate the current easement with Appalachian Regional Healthcare System, (ARHS) Inc., and donate the land back to ARHS contingent on ARHS donating the easement to the Town of Blowing Rock.

VOTE: Aye-5  
Nay-0

### **BID AWARD REQUEST FOR GUY FORD ROAD RIVER ACCESS STORM DAMAGE REPAIRS**

Mr. Robert Marsh, Maintenance Director, requested approval to award the bid for repairs at the Guy Ford Road River Access to Estate Maintenance Company in the amount of \$54,625. Mr. Marsh stated that staff advertised the repair project in a Request for Bids, which was published on the County website. It was reposted after enough bids were not received. The following three bids, all from Boone, NC, companies were then received on March 11, 2025:

<b>BIDDER</b>	<b>AMOUNT</b>
Estate Maintenance Company	\$54,625
Darren Moretz Backhoe Service	\$61,595
Greene Construction, Inc.	\$69,845

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to accept the bid from Estate Maintenance Company in the amount of \$54,625 for repairs at the Guy Ford Road River Access.

VOTE: Aye-5  
Nay-0

### **HUMAN SERVICES ACCESS CONTROL SYSTEM REQUEST**

Mr. Drew Eggers, IT Director, requested approval of a quote from Freedom ElecTech in the amount of \$27,709 for upgrading the access control (security system for doors) at the Human Services Building. Freedom ElecTech provides access control to other County facilities.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to approve the quote from Freedom ElecTech in the amount of \$27,709 for upgrading the access control (security system for doors) at the Human Services Building.

VOTE: Aye-5  
Nay-0

## **TAX MATTERS**

### ***A. Monthly Collections Report***

County Manager Geouque, on behalf of Mr. Tyler Rash, Tax Administrator, presented the Tax Collections Report for the month of February 2025. 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 February 2025 for Board approval:

TO BE TYPED IN MINUTE BOOK

County Attorney Miller stated that American Towers, Inc., on the releases list was a carrier for Verizon and AT&T and there were questions about whether it was a utility. County Manager Geouque stated that they could be removed and added to a future refund and releases list, if appropriate.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the Refunds and Releases Report for February 2025 excluding all American Towers, Inc. listings.

VOTE: Aye-5  
Nay-0

## **MISCELLANEOUS ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS**

### ***A. Boards and Commissions***

County Manager presented the following:

#### **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 the second reading.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to reappoint Ms. Tara Brossa for a two-year term, ending on June 30, 2027, to the High Country Council of Governments Workforce Development Board.

VOTE: Aye-5  
Nay-0

### *Social Services Advisory Board*

The Social Services Advisory Board has recommended the appointment of Ms. Tiffany Williams who will fill the seat held by Ms. Mary Smalling. The term is for four years. This was the second reading.

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to appoint Ms. Tiffany Williams to the Social Services Advisory Board for a four-year term.

VOTE: Aye-5  
Nay-0

### ***B. County Ordinance Review***

Chairman Eggers and Vice-Chairman Castle suggested directing the Planning Board to review all County Ordinances to ensure continuity and equitability for residential housing.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Chairman Eggers, moved to direct the Planning Board to review all County Ordinances to ensure continuity and equitability for residential housing.

VOTE: Aye-5  
Nay-0

### ***C. Announcements***

County Manager Geouque announced the following:

- The UNC School of Government will present an Ethics for Elected Officials course via Zoom on Thursday, May 22, 2025, from 10:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M. The course will be live and will be broadcast in the Commissioners' Board Room. The course is required to be taken by all Commissioners by December 2025. A group registration will be done for those who plan to attend in the Board Room and separate registrations will be done for those who will need to view it from a different location. Please let Anita know if you can attend.
- 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. The deadline to RSVP is April 1, 2025. Please let Anita know if you plan to attend and she will assist with registration.
- At the April 1, 2025, meeting consideration will be given to cancel the second meeting in April.

Chairman Eggers asked if there were Commissioner Comments.

Vice-Chairman Castle stated that a meeting was held at the old Valle Crucis School earlier in the day with Senator Ted Budd who toured the Hurricane Helene damaged school. Mr. Castle encouraged other elected officials to see Hurricane damage in person. Commissioner Greene

asked how many schools in the state were a complete loss and the answer was that Valle Crucis was the only one. Commissioner Marsh thanked past Commissioners for the foresight to construct a new Valle Crucis School.

Chairman Eggers stated that Senate Bill 220, "A Bill to be Entitled An Act to Revise the Laws Pertaining to Trespass Upon Property to Hunt, Fish, or Trap, as Recommended by the Wildlife Resources Commission" has been filed. Mr. Eggers stated that Section 4 "Any person who willfully launches any motorized or unmotorized watercraft from the right-of-way of a public highway or street into a body of water adjacent to the right-of-way, except in public areas designated for boating access, is guilty of a Class 3 misdemeanor." would not be good in Watauga County. Chairman Eggers encouraged conversations and calls that would help have Watauga County removed from the Bill.

### **CLOSED SESSION**

At 6:27 P.M., Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to enter Closed Session to discuss Attorney/Client Matters, per G. S. 143-318.11(a)(3), Land Acquisition, per G. S. 143-318.11(a)(5)(i), and Personnel Matters, per G. S. 143-318.11(a)(6).

VOTE: Aye-5  
Nay-0

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to resume the open meeting at 8:50 P.M.

VOTE: Aye-5  
Nay-0

### **ADJOURN**

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Chairman Eggers, moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:50 P.M.

VOTE: Aye-5  
Nay-0

Braxton Eggers, Chairman

ATTEST: Anita J. Fogle, Clerk to the Board