

MINUTES
WATAUGA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
TUESDAY, MAY 20, 2025

The Watauga County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting, as scheduled, on Tuesday, May 20, 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 5:31 P.M. The following were present:

PRESENT:	Braxton Eggers, Chairman
	Todd Castle, Vice-Chairman
	Emily Greene, Commissioner (arrived at 6:21 P.M.)
	Tim Hodges, Commissioner
	Ronnie Marsh, Commissioner
	Nathan Miller, County Attorney
	Deron Geouque, County Manager
	Anita J. Fogle, Clerk to the Board

Chairman Eggers stated that Commissioner Greene was at a prior obligation and would join the meeting upon her arrival.

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Eggers presented the May 6, 2025, regular meeting and closed session minutes as well as the May 8 and May 9, 2025, special meeting minutes.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the May 6, 2025, 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 May 6, 2025, closed session 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 May 8, 2025, special 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 May 9, 2025, special meeting 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 May 20, 2025, agenda.

County Attorney Miller requested to add that 25 CVS 117 (Lisa Miller vs. Ellis and Russell) would be discussed under Attorney/Client matters.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to approve the May 20, 2025, agenda as amended.

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

The following spoke during public comment:

- AnnMarie Connery/Kris Bromberger – concerning sanctuary counties
- Ben Henderson – concerning Hospitality House
- Donna Lisenby – concerning taxation without representation

PUBLIC HEARING TO ALLOW CITIZEN COMMENT ON THE FY 2026 PROPOSED BUDGET

Chairman Eggers stated that a public hearing was scheduled to allow citizen comment on the Manager's Recommended Budget for Fiscal Year 2026. County Manager Geouque presented changes to the proposed budget made by the Board and staff during recent budget work sessions.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to open the public hearing at 5:45 P.M.

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

The following spoke:

Tina Krause, advocating for Hospitality House
Matt Webb, advocating for Hospitality House
Diane Nilan, advocating for Hospitality House
Mary Stolberg, advocating for Library
Donna Breitenstein, advocating for Library
Donna Lisenby, advocating for Hospitality House, Library, Emergency Services
Marrena Greer, advocating for Southern Appalachian Historical Society
David Stapleton, sharing concern affecting neighborhood near Hospitality House

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Chairman Eggers, moved to close the public hearing at 6:15 P.M.

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

Commissioner Marsh and Vice-Chairman Castle also shared concerns regarding Hospitality House and the areas nearby. Mr. Marsh shared the following calls were made to the area for police/fire/rescue combined: 144 calls were made to the Hannah Building, 103 to the Health and Hunger coalition, and 673 to the Hospitality House.

APPALCART CONTRACTS FOR FY 2026

Mr. Craig Hughes, AppalCART Director, presented contracts for transportation services for the Project on Aging and Social Services Departments for FY 2026. The proposed rate for the Project on Aging (POA), Department of Social Services, and other County functions remained the same at \$2.85 per direct mile. Mr. Hughes also presented a contract for POA meal delivery and that rate remained the same at \$2.00 per direct mile.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to approve the AppalCART contracts as presented by Mr. Hughes.

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

Commissioner Greene arrived at the meeting at 6:21 P.M.

VAYA UPDATE

Mr. Dustin Burleson with Vaya gave an update on the following: Vaya Total Care, Child and Family Specialty Plan, and Hurricane Helene Recovery including the Hope 4 NC Grant Program. Mr. Burleson stated that, in regards to kids who occasionally have to sleep on DSS couches, it is a struggle throughout the state and unfortunately the difficult kids don't always get beds. A fast track team was working on those issues in all counties. The report was for information only and, therefore, no action was required at this time.

BOARD OF ELECTIONS EQUIPMENT PURCHASE REQUEST

Mr. Matt Snyder, Board of Elections Director, requested approval of the purchase of 31 DS300 and 28 Express Votes from ES&S/Printelect for \$313,535.25; 19 VC EZ Carts from Printelect and 2 VC EZ Carts from Caldwell County Board of Elections for \$38,825; and 12 Balotars from ES&S/Printelect for \$71,570. Shipping was not included and Mr. Snyder would provide the total cost for shipping at a later date. If the amount for shipping exceeds \$15,000, Mr. Snyder will bring the amount back to the Board for approval unless authorization was given to the County Manager to pay shipping costs not to exceed \$50,000.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the \$423,930.25 for the following:

1. 31 DS300 and 28 Express Votes from ES&S/Printelect for \$313,535.25
2. 19 VC EZ Carts from Printelect and 2 VC EZ Carts from Caldwell County Board of Elections for \$38,825
3. 12 Balotars from ES&S/Printelect for \$71,570
4. Authorize the County Manager to pay the shipping cost once determined not to exceed \$50,000

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

TAX MATTERS

A. Monthly Collections Reports

County Manager Geouque, on behalf of Mr. Tyler Rash, Tax Administrator, presented the Tax Collections Reports for the months of March and April 2025. The reports were 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 March 2025 for Board approval:

TO BE TYPED IN MINUTE BOOK

There were no refunds and releases in April 2025.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to approve the Refunds and Releases Reports for March 2025.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

MISCELLANEOUS ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

A. Proposed Amendment to Loan Agreement with the North Carolina Department of State Treasurer

County Manager Geouque presented an amendment to the Cashflow Loan Agreement approved at a previous meeting which would permit the County to receive expedited public assistance from FEMA (the County received \$3.3 million in expedited funding for Right-of-Way debris removal) without triggering an obligation to repay the equivalent amount of loan proceeds immediately. The Cashflow Loan amount was \$895,477.60 and was interest free.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to adopt the amendment as presented.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

B. Valle Crucis Elementary School Change Order

County Manager Geouque requested approval of Change Order 6 for the Valle Crucis Elementary School in the amount of \$8,608.70 as detailed. The project still had a negative Change Order balance.

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to accept Change Order 6 in the amount of \$8,608.70

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

C. Assignment of Agreements for Valle Crucis Elementary School and the Emergency Management Services Facility

County Manager Geouque stated that Clark Nexsen (Architects for the Valle Crucis Elementary School and EMS Facility) had been acquired by Johnson, Mirmiran & Thompson, Inc., (JMT). The acquisition required the contracts with Clark Nexsen to be assigned to JMT. The County should see no change in the service provided and should be seamless on our side. The County Manager stated that the Board would need to approve the assignment of the contracts from Clark Nexsen to JMT.

County Attorney Miller stated that the County would still be working with the same people and billed under the name of Clark Nexsen. JMT was a holding company and the change was brought about due to Clark Nexsen being employee owned but all employees were not architects; therefore, there was the need for the merger.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to assign the contract agreements with Clark Nexsen to JMT for the Valle Crucis Elementary School and the EMS facility.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

D. Boards and Commissions

County Manager Geouque presented the following:

Recreation Commission

Ms. Elin Reuben, has resigned as the Mabel School representative on the Watauga County Recreation Commission, effective immediately, due to her obligations and responsibilities at the school. As Principal, she recommended Abby Bumgarner to fill her unexpired term which would end in June 2027. This was a first reading; however, Parks and Recreation Director, Ms. Keron Poteat requested the second reading be waived and an appointment be made.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to waive the second reading and appoint Ms. Abby Bumgarner to fill the unexpired term of Ms. Elin Reuben which would expire June 2027.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

E. Announcements

County Manager Geouque announced the following:

- The Trustees of Caldwell Community College & Technical Institute have invited the Board of Commissioners to a meeting on Wednesday, May 21, 2025, at 6:00 P.M. in the Instructional Building on the Watauga Campus.
- An Ethics for Elected Officials training course will be held via Zoom on Thursday, May 22, 2025, from 10:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M. in the Commissioners' Conference Room. The course is required to be taken by all Commissioners by December 2025. A quorum may be present for the training; however, no County business will be conducted.
- All county commissioners, managers, clerks, and county attorneys in Western North Carolina are invited to join colleagues for an evening of networking, sharing experiences, and building relationships with peers, NC Association of County Commissioners staff, and

School of Government faculty and staff. The event will be held in Asheville on Thursday, May 22, 2025, from 5:30 to 7:30 pm.

Chairman Eggers announced the following:

- The North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) will host its annual County Advocacy Days in Raleigh on June 10-11, 2025. This two-day event focuses on connecting county officials with legislators, fostering collaboration, and working toward shared priorities.

Chairman Eggers stated that he visited the Blue Ridge Parkway earlier in the day where discussions were held regarding when the Parkway would be reopening. The event was also attended by US Senator Ted Budd and US Representative Virginia Foxx. Mr. Eggers stated that he hoped for positive news soon.

CLOSED SESSION

At 7:13 P.M., Commissioner Greene, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to enter Closed Session to discuss Attorney/Client Matters, per G. S. 143-318.11(a)(3), including discussions of 25 CVS 117 (Lisa Miller vs. Ellis and Russell).

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to resume the open meeting at 7:50 P.M.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

At 7:51 P.M. Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to declare a brief recess.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

At 8:20 P.M. Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to reconvene the meeting.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

At 8:20 P.M., Commissioner Greene, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to re-enter Closed Session to continue to discuss Attorney/Client Matters, per G. S. 143-318.11(a)(3).

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to resume the open meeting at 8:44 P.M.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

ADJOURN

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:45 P.M.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

Braxton Eggers, Chairman

ATTEST: Anita J. Fogle, Clerk to the Board