

MEETING MINUTES
WATAUGA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
TUESDAY, JULY 15, 2025

The Watauga County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Tuesday, July 15, 2025, at 5:30 P.M. in the Commissioners' Board Room located in the Watauga County Administration Building in Boone, North Carolina.

1. CALL REGULAR MEETING TO ORDER

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
 Katie Hancock, Clerk to the Board

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

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Eggers presented the June 17, 2025, regular and closed session meeting minutes.

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to approve the June 17, 2025, regular meeting minutes as presented.

VOTE: Aye – 5
 Nay – 0

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to approve the June 17, 2025, closed session minutes as presented.

VOTE: Aye – 5
 Nay – 0

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairman Eggers called for additions or corrections to the July 15, 2025, agenda.

County Manager Geouque requested the following addition:

- Agenda Item 6 to include the following:

B. Consideration of New Projects for the North Carolina Department of Transportation State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP 8.0)

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the July 15, 2025, agenda as amended.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

5. APPOINTMENT OF CLERK TO THE BOARD

Chairman Eggers reported that Katherine “Katie” Hancock had been hired to fill the vacancy created by the retirement of long-serving Clerk to the Board, Anita Fogle. He proposed that Ms. Hancock be appointed as Clerk to the Board/Administrative Assistant.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to approve the appointment of Katie Hancock as Clerk to the Board/Administrative Assistant.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

6. PLANNING AND INSPECTIONS MATTERS

A. High Country Rural Planning Organization (RPO) and Watauga County Transportation Projects Overview

Mr. David Graham, Transportation Planner with the High Country Council of Governments, presented an overview of the Rural Planning Organization (RPO) Comprehensive Transportation Plan and Watauga County projects in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

This presentation was for informational purposes only; therefore, no action was required.

B. Consideration of New Projects for the North Carolina Department of Transportation State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP 8.0)

Mr. Jason Walker, Planning and Inspections Director, along with Mr. David Graham, Transportation Planner with the High Country Council of Governments, requested that Watauga County submit three highway projects and three bicycle/pedestrian projects from the Holding Tank List for consideration in the upcoming State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP 8.0). Mr. Walker presented a list of all current projects on the Holding Tank List, along with the top three ranked projects in each category based on a community survey. The following projects received the highest rankings and were recommended for submission.

Highway Projects	Bicycle/Pedestrian Projects
1. H230697: NC-194 from US-221/421 to Castle Ford Road <u>Description:</u> Modernize roadway, including construction of center turn lane and sidewalks	1. B230730: Middle Fork Greenway, Section 5B <u>Description:</u> From south of Jordan Cook Road to Watauga Medical Center
2. H090163-A: US-421 from Tennessee state line to US-321/421 junction near Vilas <u>Description:</u> Widen to multiple lanes	2. B230735: Middle Fork Greenway, Section 5C <u>Description:</u> From Payne Branch Park to Goldmine Brank Park
3. H111013: NC-105 Bypass from NC-105 to US-321/421 <u>Description:</u> Widen roadway to three lanes with 5-foot paved shoulders to accommodate bicycles	3. B230668: Middle Fork Greenway, Section 1B <u>Description:</u> From South of the Blue Ridge Parkway to Chestnut Ridge Parkway

The Board agreed to select the top three highway and bicycle/pedestrian projects as ranked by the community survey.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to approve the submission of the selected projects for consideration in the upcoming State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP 8.0).

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

7. PROPOSED FINAL REVISION TO HOME & COMMUNITY CARE BLOCK GRANT (H&CCBG) FY 2025 ALLOCATION

Ms. Angie Boitnotte, Project on Aging Director, requested that the Board approve a final revision to the FY 2025 Home and Community Care Block Grant (H&CCBG) allocation. The revision involved moving \$649 from In-Home Aide Level II to In-Home Aide Level I services. The overall allocation and required local match remained unchanged.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the final revision to the FY 2025 Home and Community Care Block Grant (H&CCBG) allocation as presented.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

8. NORTH CAROLINA AMATEUR SPORTS GRANT ACCEPTANCE REQUEST

Ms. Keron Poteat, Parks and Recreation Director, requested that the Board accept a \$20,000 grant awarded through North Carolina Amateur Sports.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to accept the \$20,000 grant from North Carolina Amateur Sports

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

9. K-9 PURCHASE REQUEST

Captain Carolynn Johnson, Watauga County Sheriff's Office, reported that the department recently hired a K-9 Deputy from Avery County to fill a deputy vacancy. Avery County would not release his K-9 unless Watauga County paid \$20,000. Captain Johnson stated that the Sheriff's Office secured a private donor willing to contribute the full amount.

Captain Johnson requested that the Board accept the \$20,000 donation to purchase the K-9 from Avery County.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to accept the \$20,000 donation for the purchase of the Avery County K-9.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

Upon purchasing the K-9, the County would need to declare the animal as surplus property and approve a private sale to the deputy. This action is authorized under G.S. § 160A-266 and § 160A-267 and was necessary as all existing K-9 positions were filled, and no funds were budgeted for an additional K-9 deputy.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to declare the K-9 as surplus property.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to adopt the Resolution Authorizing the Sale of Personal Property Worth Less Than \$30,000 (G.S. § 160A-266; 267) to approve the private sale of the surplus K-9 to the deputy.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

10. EMERGENCY SERVICES MATTERS

A. Hurricane Helene Update

Mr. Will Holt, Emergency Services Director, shared a brief update on Hurricane Helene recovery efforts.

- Most insurance claims have been processed and submitted to FEMA.
- Debris removal is ongoing, with over 400,000 cubic yards cleared from waterways.
- The Private Property Debris Removal program is set to begin soon.
- Initial watershed repair projects have been approved, and over 475 private roads and bridges have been inspected.
- To date, over \$540,000 in FEMA reimbursements have been secured.
- The Multi-Agency Resource Center remains open Friday mornings, though usage is low and under review.

Mr. Holt expressed appreciation for the continued partnership with local, state, and federal agencies supporting recovery and resilience efforts.

This update was for informational purposes only; no action was required.

B. Emergency Services Vehicle Purchase

Mr. Holt requested Board approval for one (1) new 2025 F-150 to replace a 2019 model. The total cost, including vehicle and upfit, is \$93,499.80.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to approve the purchase of the 2025 F-150 and upfit in the amount of \$93,499.80.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

C. EMS Third-Party Billing Service Agreement

Mr. Holt requested Board approval for a contract with EMS Management & Consultants, Inc. to provide third-party billing services and electronic patient care reporting for the County's new ambulance service. The cost of the service is 7.5% of net collections billed.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to approve the contract with EMS Management & Consultants, Inc. for third-party billing and patient care reporting services at a rate of 7.5% of net collections.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

D. Request to Purchase EMS Ambulance Mobiles and Portable Radio Equipment

Mr. Holt requested formal Board approval for the purchase of 16 portable radios and 10 mobile radios for use in both existing and incoming EMS vehicles. The total cost of the equipment is \$236,182.86.

To avoid a scheduled 7% price increase (\$16,532.80), staff placed the order in advance of the meeting.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to approve the purchase of portable and mobile radios from Motorola in the amount of \$236,182.86.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

11. WATAUGA COUNTY PLANNING BOARD’S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FIRE APPENDICES COMMITTEE

Mr. Jason Walker, Planning and Inspections Director, presented the Planning Board’s recommendations for the Fire Appendices Committee. A public hearing was held on May 6, 2025, to allow citizen comment regarding the potential repeal of the fire appendices. Following the hearing, a Fire Appendices Committee was formed to review the matter and develop recommendations. Below are the Planning Board’s recommendations for committee composition.

Role	Recommended Members
Two Fire Chiefs	Recommendation to come from the Fire Board
Two Commissioners	Internally decided by the Board of Commissioners
County Manager	Deron Geouque
Fire Marshal	Shane Garland
Planning Director	Jason Walker
One Surveyor	1. Alex Crowe 2. Donald McNeil 3. Rick Snider
One Engineer	1. Patrick Warren 2. Derrick Goddard 3. Mike Trew
One Developer	1. Patrick Warren 2. Jeff Fisher 3. Todd Rice 4. Bill Aceto 5. Jay Harrill*
One At-Large Member	1. Mike Wilson 2. Joseph Greer 3. Chuck Campbell 4. George Bartholomew*

** The two individuals marked with an asterisk were recommended after the Planning Board meeting.*
The Planning Board recommended that two commissioners serve on the committee. Chairman Eggers and Commissioner Marsh volunteered to fill those seats.

The Board requested that Mr. Walker contact the individuals recommended for the surveyor, engineer, developer, and at-large positions to confirm their willingness to serve. Once confirmations are received, Mr. Walker will present the finalized list for the Board's review and approval at the next meeting.

This item was presented for the Board's information, and no formal action was required at this time.

12. TAX MATTERS

A. Monthly Collections Report

Mr. Deron Geouque, County Manager, presented the Monthly Collections Report from June 2025 on behalf of Mr. Tyler Rash.

The report was presented for informational purposes only; therefore, no action was required.

B. Refunds and Releases

Mr. Geouque presented the Refunds and Releases Report.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to accept the Refunds and Releases as presented.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

C. Annual Settlement of the Tax Collector

Pursuant to G.S. § 105-373, an annual settlement of the Tax Collector must be prepared and submitted to the Board of Commissioners for review and approval. Mr. Geouque, on behalf of Mr. Rash, presented the annual settlement.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to approve the Annual Settlement of the Tax Collector as presented by Mr. Geouque.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

D. Oath to Collect Taxes

Mr. Geouque stated that each year the Board of County Commissioners is required to authorize the Tax Administrator of Watauga County to collect taxes for the upcoming fiscal year.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to authorize the Tax Administrator to begin the process of tax collection.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

13. MISCELLANEOUS ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

A. Howard Knob Park Proposal for Construction Materials Testing

The Howard Knob Park project required construction materials testing services. Funds had been budgeted to cover the expense. The project required no County funding and was to be paid by the Watauga TDA and grant funds. Staff recommended that the Board, contingent upon County Attorney review, approve the contract with WSP for construction materials testing in the amount of \$37,500.

Mr. Nathan Miller, County Attorney, noted concerns with the contract, specifically with Paragraph 7 – “Limitation of Liability” and Paragraph 18 – “Disputes”, particularly the litigation clause requiring all disputes to be adjudicated in the state of New York.

Due to these concerns, Commissioner Greene, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to table the discussion to allow Mr. Miller time to contact WSP for clarification and possible revisions.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

B. Budget Amendments

Mr. Deron Geouque, Finance Director, presented the budget amendments for approval as included in the Board packet.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to approve the budget amendments as presented.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

C. Boards and Commissions

AppalCART Board

Appalachian State University recommended the appointment of Mr. Matt Dull, Deputy Chief Operating Officer, to the AppalCART Board, replacing Mr. John Adams, former Interim Chief Financial Officer.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to waive the first reading and appoint Mr. Dull to the AppalCART Board.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

CCC&TI Board

Mr. Lowell Younce's term on the Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute Board of Trustees expired on June 30, 2025. Mr. Younce expressed his willingness to continue serving, and the Board of Trustees requested his reappointment.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to waive the first reading and reappoint Mr. Younce to the Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute Board of Trustees.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

Jury Commission

Mr. Thomas Broadus Redmon was previously selected for the Jury Commission for the 2025 – 2026 term. Mr. Redmon was willing to continue to serve on the commission.

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to waive the first reading and reappoint Mr. Redmon to the Jury Commission.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

Parks and Recreation Commission

The Recreation Commission Board submitted the following reappointment recommendations and requested that the Board approve the names and waive the first reading requirement.

Name	Representing	Term
Ms. Brittany Bolick	Hardin Park School	Term expired 06/2025; reappointed through 06/2028
Mr. Sam Painter	Valle Crucis School	Term expired 06/2025; reappointed through 06/2028
Ms. Virginia Roseman	Boone Town Council	Annual appointment; serves through 12/2025
Mr. Doug Matheson	Blowing Rock Town Council	Annual appointment; new term through 06/2026
Mr. Ron Henries	WCS Board of Education	Annual appointment; new term through 06/2026

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to waive the first reading and approve the names submitted for the Recreation Commission Board.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

D. Announcements

AMOREM scheduled a private open house celebration for the Patient Care Unit of the High Country on Friday, July 25, 2025 from 1:00 PM until 1:45 PM at Archie Carroll Road in Boone, NC. Members of the Board were invited to attend.

14. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

There were no Commissioner comments.

15. CLOSED SESSION

At 6:57 PM, Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Greene, made a motion to go into Closed Session pursuant to G.S. § 143-318.11(a)(3) to discuss attorney-client privileged matters, § 143-318.11(a)(5) to consider matters related to land acquisition, and § 143-318.11(a)(1) to discuss personnel matters.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

At 9:33 PM, Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Chairman Eggers, moved to resume the open meeting.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

16. ADJOURN

At 9:34 PM, Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Chairman Eggers, moved to adjourn the meeting.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

Braxton Eggers, Chairman

ATTEST: Katie Hancock, Clerk to the Board