

MEETING MINUTES
WATAUGA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
TUESDAY, AUGUST 5, 2025

The Watauga County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Tuesday, August 5, 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
 Andrea 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 July 15, 2025, regular and closed session meeting minutes.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the July 15, 2025, regular meeting minutes as presented.

VOTE: Aye – 5
 Nay – 0

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the July 15, 2025, closed session minutes as presented.

VOTE: Aye – 5
 Nay – 0

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairman Eggers called for additions or corrections to the August 5, 2025, agenda.

County Manager Geouque requested the following additions:

- Agenda Item 13 to include the following:
 - C. Howard Knob Park Proposal for Construction Materials Testing Services

D. Announcements

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to approve the August 5, 2025, agenda as amended.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

- **Cindy Darcy**, a resident of Powder Horn Mountain and former special education teacher, expressed concern about the County's construction of an emergency services communications tower in her community. She cited issues with the scope and placement of the project, potential health effects on residents due to its proximity, and possible impacts on the environment and property values.
- **Jill Williams**, a resident of Powder Horn Mountain, also expressed concern about the tower's construction. She stated that when their POA Board met with the Stewart Simmons Volunteer Fire Department, it was indicated that the tower would be a "small tower" not exceeding 40 feet. She noted that the current plan for a 180-foot tower is significantly different from her understanding of the original proposal. She requested that the Board halt construction of the tower.
- **Mark Laughlin**, a member of the Powder Horn Mountain POA Board, said he was present at the initial meeting with Doug Barry regarding the tower's construction. He stated that the POA Board was initially supportive of the project, but concerns arose after the County began clearing the lot. He also requested that the Board halt construction, but if that was not possible, he asked that measures be taken to ensure the tower is adequately screened from view.

5. LUCKY DOG VINTAGE MARKET – USE OF HUMAN SERVICES LOT

Trevor Shue, organizer of the Lucky Dog Vintage Market, submitted a request to use the grassy area and parking lot at the Human Services Center for market events on select dates from August 2025 through August 2026. The proposed dates did not conflict with Appalachian State University football schedules or the Watauga County Farmers' Market. The rental rate remains \$200 per event, consistent with previous use. Mr. Shue stated that vendor participation has increased from approximately 15 to 25 vendors. Market hours are planned from 11:00 AM to 6:00 PM, with vendors setting up from 9:30 AM to 7:00 PM.

County Manager Geouque informed the Board that Ms. Mary McKinney of Just Love requested use of the same space on August 31, 2025, for an International Overdose Awareness Event.

Chairman Eggers was in support of the 2025 dates for the Lucky Dog Vintage Market but deferred approval of 2026 dates at this time.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Greene, made a motion to approve the 2025 dates for the Lucky Dog Vintage Market and to approve the August 31, 2025, date for Ms. McKinney's event.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

[Clerk's Note: Due to a scheduling conflict, the Lucky Dog Vintage Market date originally set for August 23, 2025, was changed to August 24, 2025, and the November 21, 2025 date was changed to November 23, 2025.]

6. BLUE RIDGE RISING RESOLUTION

Mr. Ryan Robinson, Head of Corporate Responsibility and Community Partnerships for Mast General Store, requested the Board's consideration of a resolution of support from the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation. The Foundation is seeking endorsement from the 29 counties along the Parkway corridor as part of a regional effort to advocate for funding supporting unified county interests and Helene Recovery initiatives. To date, 23 of the 29 counties have adopted the resolution.

Mr. Robinson explained that the resolution aims to demonstrate regional support and unity. He noted that adoption assists the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation in lobbying efforts at the state level in Raleigh, North Carolina, and at the national level in Washington, D.C. He emphasized that the resolution requires no funding and is intended solely to raise awareness and show support.

Chairman Eggers remarked that the resolution's current language references "...including the towns of Buchanan, Fincastle, and Troutville in Botetourt County," which he believed was a holdover from Virginia. He requested that the language be amended to "...including the towns of Boone, Blowing Rock, Seven Devils, and Beech Mountain in Watauga County."

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, made a motion to approve the resolution pending the requested changes.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

7. SDR FINAL DEBRIS REMOVAL COST

Southern Disaster Recovery (SDR) completed all final punch list and quality control items. Mr. Chip Patterson of SDR reported that the company has removed approximately 130,000 cubic yards of material, with the final debris removal completed on June 19, 2025. Due to the volume of debris processed from the 2,000-item punch list and data lag in reporting, SDR requested that the final Not to Exceed (NTE) amount be set at \$7,200,000, which is \$750,000 more than the previously approved amount of \$6,450,000.

Commissioner Marsh recalled that SDR had previously submitted multiple requests to increase the NTE amount, and that during the last increase, Mr. Randy Thompson, Government Services

Director at SDR, stated the NTE would not exceed approximately \$6 million. He expressed concern that an additional increase is now being requested and asked how much of the \$750,000 increase would go to DebrisTech.

Mr. Patterson explained that SDR's invoices are based on DebrisTech's monitoring records, but significant delays in the reporting process make it difficult to provide precise cost estimates for disaster debris removal. He emphasized that disaster debris cannot be estimated with complete accuracy.

County Manager Geouque stated that 14 remaining sites have been identified and stressed the importance of ensuring all debris is cleared, noting that some sites initially thought to be complete were not.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, made a motion to table the request until SDR can confirm that the \$7.2 million NTE amount will be final and that all remaining sites have been identified and cleared.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

Following the vote, Vice-Chairman Castle expressed his appreciation for SDR's professionalism and work.

8. WATAUGA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION – PROPOSED COUNTY VEHICLE PURCHASE

Mr. Jim Hamilton, County Extension Director, requested the purchase of a county-owned vehicle to support Extension staff travel for farm visits, workshops, meetings, and programming. He explained that Watauga County Extension (WCE) is a partnership between the County and NC State University, with funding from both sources. WCE currently leases a state-owned van at a cost that has increased from \$307 to \$460 per month (approximately \$6,000 annually). Due to this increase and anticipated reductions in state travel funding, continuing the state lease is no longer cost-effective.

Mr. Hamilton proposed using unencumbered funds from a currently vacant 4-H agent position to offset the cost of purchasing a vehicle, with a preference for a Toyota Sienna. He noted this was his first vehicle request since joining WCE in 2002 and that Watauga County is one of four counties still utilizing state-leased vehicles.

Chairman Eggers asked whether an existing county vehicle could be used instead. County Manager Geouque suggested reviewing the county's vehicle inventory before purchasing a new vehicle. Mr. Hamilton expressed concern that the extensive travel required to Raleigh and Buncombe County would be better served by a minivan rather than a small passenger van. Commissioner Marsh supported searching the county's inventory first, while Vice-Chairman Castle noted that few, if any, vehicles in the inventory could handle that travel demand. County Manager Geouque mentioned two vans in Parks and Recreation that might be suitable. Commissioner Marsh

expressed support for approving the purchase, and Vice-Chairman Castle suggested obtaining a quote from Modern Toyota before proceeding.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the purchase of a vehicle using unencumbered funds from the vacant 4-H agent position, with any portion of the purchase price that exceeds those funds to be provided from the Administrative Contingency account.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

9. MAINTENANCE MATTERS

A. Utility Vehicle Purchase Request

Mr. Robert Marsh, Maintenance Director, presented a request to purchase a Bobcat UW56 utility vehicle equipped with a 72" snowplow and 68" angle broom. The equipment will be used by the Maintenance Department for snow removal at the Courthouse parking lots and parking deck during the winter months, and for general utility work throughout the year.

He recommended awarding the bid to Bobcat of Charlotte, the lowest responsive bidder. Mr. Marsh explained that the initial quote of \$77,230.50 included a 66" brush attachment rather than the specified 68" angle broom. After correcting the quotes, Bobcat of Charlotte remained the lowest bidder, with a revised price of \$75,343.75. Adequate funds are available in the current budget to cover the expense.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to approve the purchase of the Bobcat UW56 with the 72" snowplow and 68" angle broom at the revised cost of \$75,343.75.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

B. Contract Renewal for Recreation Center HVAC Monitoring

Mr. Marsh presented a request for a contract renewal with Johnson Controls for HVAC monitoring and control at the Recreation Center. He explained that the current contract expired on July 31, 2025, and due to the nature of the system, the service cannot be competitively bid. Johnson Controls proposed a three-year renewal at a total cost of \$57,200, reflecting a \$4,200 decrease from the previous contract.

Chairman Eggers asked Mr. Marsh to explain the services provided by Johnson Controls. Mr. Marsh stated that Johnson Controls manages a system of devices, ensures proper calibration, provides software upgrades, and services components.

Vice-Chairman Castle inquired about the possibility of eventually bringing the service in-house. Mr. Marsh responded that the County's size may not justify that, and qualified

personnel might be difficult to find. Vice-Chairman Castle suggested consulting Appalachian State University, which had successfully brought its system in-house.

County Attorney Miller noted that contract revisions would be necessary before the County signs the renewal.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the contract renewal contingent upon the County Attorney's recommended revisions.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

10. EMERGENCY SERVICES MATTERS

A. Tower Construction and Site Modifications Contract

Mr. Will Holt, Emergency Services Director, presented information regarding the Request for Proposals issued for the construction of a communications tower at the Rich Mountain site and the necessary modifications at the Aho and Buckeye sites to accommodate additional microwave dishes. Three proposals were received and reviewed.

Mr. Holt recommended awarding the contract to K-Co Enterprises, Inc., the lowest responsive bidder, at a total cost of \$396,909. He noted that both the County's radio system consultant and the primary site contractor have prior experience with K-Co and expressed no concerns. Funding for this work is included in the overall project budget.

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, motioned to approve the contract award to K-Co Enterprises, Inc. in the amount of \$396,909 for tower construction and site modifications.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

B. Emergency Services Facility Tower Engineering Contract

Mr. Holt also presented information regarding the communications tower needed for the new Emergency Services Facility to connect with the public safety radio system.

He reported that Engineered Tower Solutions (ETS), a vendor under State contract, provided a quote of \$45,000 for engineering services and management of the administrative approval process. ETS has already completed a preliminary site walk and coordinated with Greene Construction, Inc. on the project.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, made a motion to authorize the agreement with Engineered Tower Solutions for engineering services and administrative approval management in the amount of \$45,000.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

C. Radio System Maintenance Contract Renewal

Mr. Holt also presented information regarding the annual maintenance contracts for the County's public safety radio systems, which are due for renewal.

He reported that Mobile Communications America submitted a renewal quote totaling \$111,512.31. The amount covers maintenance for the communications center systems (\$65,412.99), tower site equipment (\$38,260.68), and mobile radio units (\$7,838.64). This renewal continues the existing contract, with funds available in the budget for the expense.

County Attorney Miller noted that a few contract revisions would be necessary prior to the County signing the renewal.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to approve the contract renewal contingent upon the County Attorney's final approval.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

Other Business - Powder Horn Mountain Tower

At the conclusion of Mr. Holt's presentation, Chairman Eggers asked questions regarding the communications tower at Powder Horn Mountain. Mr. Holt explained that initial discussions with Chief Barry of the Stewart Simmons Volunteer Fire Department established the tower height would be kept under 200 feet to avoid federal lighting requirements. He further detailed that environmental assessments (including endangered species checks and a microwave study) were completed as part of the approval process. Chairman Eggers also inquired about landscaping plans around the tower, to which Mr. Holt responded that landscaping is included in the project budget.

11. APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO FIRE APPENDICES COMMITTEE

Mr. Jason Walker, Planning and Inspections Director, presented an update regarding the Fire Appendices Committee appointments. At the Board's request during the previous meeting, Mr. Walker followed up with nominees from the Planning Board representing the surveyor, engineer, developer, and at-large categories. All nominees have confirmed their willingness to serve. A final list of recommended individuals was provided to the Board.

The Board chose to make one change to the structure of the committee and appointed two at-large members instead of one. Upon appointment, staff will notify the selected individuals accordingly.

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, made a motion to appoint the individuals listed in the table below.

Role	Members
Two Commissioners	1. Braxton Eggers 2. Ronnie Marsh
Two Fire Chiefs	1. Chief Matt Aldridge, Foscoe Fire Dept. 2. Chief Steve Marks, Cove Creek Fire Dept.
County Manager	Deron Geouque
Fire Marshal	Shane Garland
Planning Director	Jason Walker
One Surveyor	Donald McNeil
One Engineer	Mike Trew
One Developer	Bill Aceto
Two At-Large Members	1. Jeff Fisher 2. George Bartholomew

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

12. SANITATION DEPARTMENT TRAILER PURCHASE REQUEST

Operations Services Director Chris Marriott presented a request to purchase a 2026 Clement Monstar trailer for the Sanitation Department to use in hauling scrap metal and other materials. The trailer will replace an older, homemade unit that has become structurally unsound and unsafe for road use.

Mr. Marriott explained that the Department hauls scrap metal weekly, including items such as refrigerators, dishwashers, and microwaves. Staff solicited and evaluated eight quotes from six vendors for both new and used trailers. Based on age, payload capacity, and overall value, staff recommended purchasing the 2026 Clement Monstar from Trailer Specialist, Inc. of Concord, NC, at a cost of \$88,953. The vendor agreed to hold the trailer until August 6, 2025, pending Board approval. Upon purchase, the old trailer will be sold to a scrapyard for recycling. Sufficient funds are available in the FY 2026 Sanitation Department budget.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the purchase of the 2026 Clement Monstar trailer from Trailer Specialist, Inc. in the amount of \$88,953.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

13. MISCELLANEOUS ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

A. Resolution to Approve Amendment No. 2

Finance Director Deron Geouque presented a request for Board approval of Amendment No. 2 to the North Carolina Cash Flow Loan Agreement and the accompanying resolution. Under the original agreement, any FEMA reimbursements received by the County were required to be remitted to the State within five business days.

Mr. Geouque explained that the proposed amendment modifies the repayment structure, allowing the County to repay the loan over a five-year period, rather than remitting funds immediately upon receipt. This change would allow the County to deposit FEMA reimbursements into an interest-bearing account until the repayment deadline, generating additional revenue. He further noted that the State may forgive the debt in the future, in which case retaining the funds until repayment is due would be beneficial; if funds were repaid early, they would be unlikely to be returned in the event of forgiveness.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to approve Amendment No. 2 to the North Carolina Cash Flow Loan Agreement and the associated resolution.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

B. Proposed Human Services Parking Lot and Parking Deck Agreement with Appalachian State University

County Manager Geouque presented a request from Appalachian State University to renew the use agreement for the parking lot at 132 Poplar Grove Road Connector and the parking deck at 140 N. Water Street to support pre- and postgame football operations. Two term options were proposed: a two-year agreement and a three-year agreement.

Under either option, the University would pay the County \$10,000 annually for the Human Services Lot and remit 50% of net revenue generated from game day parking at the parking deck. The University would be responsible for event security, towing unauthorized vehicles, providing portable restrooms, and returning the lots to their original or better condition after each event. The primary difference between the two options is the length of the term, with the University expressing interest in a longer arrangement.

Chairman Eggers requested the following changes to the proposed agreements:

- Remove the provision requiring the County to distribute parking passes, assigning distribution to the University.
- Require the University to update County parking signs to reflect event restrictions.
- Add a provision granting the County the right to audit the University's parking revenue records.

Commissioner Greene raised concerns regarding Thursday night football games, noting that the parking lots are used by County employees during the workweek. She suggested

that if usage on Thursdays is permitted, the County will need to identify alternative options for employees. This could potentially include designating the lots as non-tailgating areas.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the two-year agreement contingent upon the requested revisions and final review by the County Attorney.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

C. Howard Knob Park Proposal for Construction Materials Testing Services

During the Board meeting on July 15, 2025, the request to approve the WSP contract was postponed to allow the County Attorney to negotiate concerns with the vendor related to Paragraph 7 - “Limitation of Liability,” and Paragraph 18 - “Disputes,” specifically the requirement that all legal disputes be resolved in New York State. The County Attorney has since reviewed the updated contract and confirmed that the vendor’s revisions are acceptable.

County Manager Geouque presented the item and clarified that funding for the project will come from the Watauga Tourism Development Authority and grant sources, with no direct financial obligation for the County.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Commissioner Greene, made a motion to authorize the contract with WSP in the amount of \$37,500 for construction materials testing services for the Howard Knob project.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

D. Announcements

County Manager Geouque informed the Board of two upcoming events:

Middle Fork Greenway Ribbon Cutting

The Watauga Arts Council, in partnership with the Blue Ridge Conservancy, invited the Board and community to a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new section of the Middle Fork Greenway. The event is scheduled for Thursday, August 14, 2025, at 4:00 PM near Tweetsie Railroad at the underpass by the new split-rail fence. The ceremony will celebrate the trail’s newest segment and mural completion, with updates on corridor progress.

AppHealthCare Grand Opening and 10th Anniversary

AppHealthCare will hold a grand opening for their mobile health services and celebrate their 10th anniversary as a Community Health Center on Friday, August 8, 2025, from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM at the AppHealthCare Watauga Health Center, 126 Poplar Grove Connector, Boone. The event includes a ribbon-cutting, refreshments, a mobile unit tour, and remarks.

County Manager Geouque asked Board members to notify him if they wished to attend the Middle Fork Greenway event and he would RSVP accordingly.

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

14. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

There were no Commissioner comments.

15. CLOSED SESSION

At 7:04 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 7:49 PM, Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Chairman Eggers, moved to resume the open meeting.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

16. ADJOURN

At 7:50 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