MEETING MINUTES

WATAUGA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Tuesday, December 16, 2025

The Watauga County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Tuesday, December 16, 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

Vice-Chairman Castle offered the prayer and Commissioner Greene led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Additionally, Chairman Eggers congratulated the Watauga High School football team, noting that the County is now the "Home of the 6A State Champions."

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Eggers presented the December 2, 2025, regular and closed session meeting minutes.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the December 2, 2025, regular meeting minutes as presented.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the December 2, 2025, closed session minutes as presented.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairman Eggers called for additions or corrections to the December 16, 2025, agenda.

County Manager Geouque requested the following additions:

- Agenda Item 9B1: Consideration of Letter of Support for Cooperative Extension
- Closed Session Item: Personnel Matters pursuant to G.S. § 143-318.11(a)(6)

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to approve the December 16, 2025, agenda as amended.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

- **Misty Mayfield**, a resident of Vilas, stated that she has lived in Watauga County for 26 years. She thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak and noted that she and others have attended meetings for several months in support of fair electoral maps. Ms. Mayfield expressed concern that voting maps had been altered or manipulated and that the results of a referendum were disregarded. She stated that 71% of Watauga County voters should not be ignored and indicated that she and others would continue to attend meetings to voice these concerns.

- **Maria Stegall** spoke regarding a proposed development across from Food Lion on U.S. 421. She expressed concern about the use and placement of septic systems for a 48-unit apartment project, particularly regarding potential impacts to adjoining properties. Ms. Stegall also questioned whether adequate planning and traffic considerations were being addressed and expressed concern about whether the project would provide local economic benefits.

  [Clerk's Note: The following public comments were received after Commissioners' Comments.]

- **Heather Reeves**, a Boone resident, spoke regarding a Landmark Properties development. She expressed concern about the scale of the project, the use of septic systems and wells, and potential impacts to water resources, wildlife, surrounding neighborhoods, and public services. Ms. Reeves requested a thorough review of environmental and development plans and provided a handout to the Board.

- **Robert Rochell** expressed concern regarding the proposed development and questioned whether Wild Cherry Lane would be connected to the project. He stated that such a connection could increase traffic on Browns Chapel Road and create additional issues for the area.

- The Board received a public comment from **Jill Holmes**, a resident of Tom Shook Road, via email, as she was unable to attend the meeting. **Chairman Eggers read the comment aloud.** In her correspondence, Ms. Holmes requested that no action be taken regarding the proposed annexation of property into the Valle Crucis Planning Area until all affected property owners are notified and given an opportunity to express questions and concerns to the Valle Crucis Community Council, the Valle Crucis Planning Board, and the Watauga County Board of Commissioners.

5. 2022 WRDG GRANT BUDGET AMENDMENT – BOONE GORGE PARK

Wendy Patoprsty, Blue Ridge Conservancy, requested a budget amendment to the 2022 WRDG grant for Boone Gorge Park in the Middle Fork Greenway project. The $25,000 originally allocated for Construction Administration (CEI) would be reallocated to construction to maximize grant use. The project includes a pavilion, sculpture art walk, benches, interpretive signage, wetlands, stream stabilization, riparian buffers, bridges, a 10-foot-wide asphalt loop trail, and a boardwalk, with a natural surface trail to be developed separately.

Ms. Patoprsty noted that approximately two miles of the Greenway will be under construction next year. Additionally, she stated that construction is currently on hold due to wet conditions, bridges are on order, and the pavilion is provided at no cost. She explained that the interpretive signage will provide information on archaeology, local history, and environmental features.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to authorize the County Manager to submit the attached letter to the Division of Water Resources requesting the budget amendment.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

6. GENERATOR REPLACEMENT FOR MEDIC BASE 3

Will Holt, Emergency Services Director, presented a request to replace the generator at Medic Base 3 following a comprehensive review of all medic bases after the transition of Emergency Medical Services from Watauga Medics, Inc. to the County. The assessment determined that the existing generator requires extensive repairs, and staff recommended replacement with Option 4 from Jared Munday Electric, Inc., at a cost of $26,193.13, noting that repairing the current unit would be substantially more expensive. The replacement would convert the generator to diesel.

In response to questions, staff explained that Bases 1 and 2 currently lose power during outages, whereas the new generator at Base 3 would ensure uninterrupted service.

Commissioner Greene , seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to authorize the replacement of the Base 3 generator using Option 4 from Jared Munday Electric, Inc., in the amount of $26,193.13.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

7. PLANNING AND INSPECTION MATTERS

A. Valle Crucis Planning Area - Annexation

Jason Walker, Planning and Inspections Director, presented a request to add ten parcels to the Valle Crucis Planning Area, established under the County's Community Planning Guidelines. The petition received consent from the Valle Crucis Community Council at their November 20, 2025 meeting and met the requirement of support from at least 33% of affected property owners. Of the ten parcels, nine owners consented, while one property owner expressed a desire not to be included.

Chairman Eggers expressed concern about including a property owner without their consent. Commissioner Marsh noted the need for additional conversations with property owners. Mr. Walker agreed to schedule a meeting with the Valle Crucis Community Council and affected property owners, to be attended by Chairman Eggers and Vice-Chairman Castle, to address concerns.

The Board agreed to table the item for further discussion; no motion or vote was required.

B. Planning and Development Ordinance Changes

Mr. Walker presented proposed updates to Watauga County's development ordinances, including Soil Erosion, Flood Damage Prevention, and Watershed Protection, as well as a new Chapter 24 – Administration to clarify development permit procedures. The Planning Board and staff reviewed the ordinances and approved the proposed amendments and a Statement of Plan Consistency on November 17, 2025. A formal public hearing and adoption of the plan-consistency statement are required before final action.

Mr. Walker noted that some changes are mandated by the state, while others consolidate procedures, clarify language, and reorganize information to improve clarity and usability. Commissioner Marsh requested additional time to review the amendments and present questions. County Manager Geouque suggested the Board consider the item during the annual retreat at the end of February to allow dialogue with staff.

The Board agreed to table the item for further discussion at the annual retreat ; no motion or vote was required.

C. Comprehensiv e Land Use Plan

Mr. Walker presented the updated Comprehensive Land Use Plan, which was prepared with assistance from the High Country Council of Governments and in coordination with the Planning Board. Public surveys and a community meeting were conducted to gather resident input and identify priorities. The draft plan was provided for Board review, and staff noted that adoption would require a formal public hearing with notice published in accordance with state law.

Mr. Walker explained that the plan updates the original Citizen Plan from 2008–2010 with new census data, projections, and minor corrections, while maintaining the overall structure and content of the previous plan.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to set a public hearing for January 13th for the Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

8. TAX MATTERS

A. Monthly Collections Report

Mr. Tyler Rash, Tax Administrator, presented the November 2025 Monthly Collections Report . Copies are attached for reference (see *Attachment A*).

The report was presented for informational purposes only, and no Board action was required.

B. Refunds and Releases

Mr. Rash also presented the November 2025 Refunds and Releases Report for Board approval . Copies are attached for reference (see *Attachment B*).

Chairman Eggers noted that certain items repeatedly appear on the report and suggested exploring coding or software changes to prevent recurring issues. Mr. Rash indicated that similar issues have occurred in other counties, and County Manager Geouque asked whether the reports are proofed before issuance. Chairman Eggers recommended reviewing software options moving forward.

Vice-Chairman Castle , seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to accept the November 2025 Refunds and Releases Report.

VOTE: Aye – 5

Nay – 0

9. MISCELLANEOUS ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

A. Amendment to Audit Contract

The County's auditors requested approval of an amendment to the FY 2025 audit contract due to the delayed release of the 2025 OMB Compliance Supplement. The amendment provides additional time and a modest contract adjustment to complete required Single Audit compliance testing. County Manager Geouque noted that the delay was beyond the control of both the County and the auditors, likely resulting from the federal government shutdown. Commissioner Marsh inquired whether the audit would be completed by the extended deadline, and County Manager Geouque confirmed it would.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to authorize the amendment to the FY 2025 audit contract.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

B. Franchise Request from Appalachian Regional Healthcare System

Staff presented a request from Appalachian Regional Healthcare System (ARHS) for a one-year ambulance franchise agreement to provide patient transport services. Watauga County Emergency Services would retain first right of refusal for all interfacility transports, with exceptions for transports originating outside of the County and for critical-care transports, such as ventilator or IABP support, consistent with NCOEMS definitions of Specialty Care. Staff noted that these exceptions would not impact the County system and could relieve EMS crews from long-duration transports. The proposed franchise term is one year to allow evaluation of impacts on County EMS.

Staff also requested temporary authorization for ARHS to provide two services currently unavailable to Watauga County EMS due to legal or regulatory restrictions: (1) transports from outside the County to Watauga Medical Center, and (2) transports from Watauga Medical Center to a higher level of care under NCAC 10A 13P for Specialty Care Transport. This temporary authorization would be effective December 16, 2025, for 60 days while the franchise application is reviewed and would terminate immediately if the franchise is denied.

Staff noted that a public hearing is required for the franchise agreement, that the hospital requested "non-profit" be added to its name in the agreement, and that the County Attorney needs to review and approve any changes.

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to schedule a public hearing for January 13, 2026, to receive public comment on the proposed one-year franchise agreement, contingent upon County Attorney changes.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to authorize temporary 60-day approval, effective December 16, 2025, pending County Attorney review, for ARHS to provide specialty-care and out-of-county patient transports while the franchise application is under review, with the authorization terminating immediately if the franchise is denied.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

B1. Letter of Support for Cooperative Extension

Staff presented a request to authorize execution of a letter of support for Watauga County Cooperative Extension's *Shared Use Equipment for Continued Recovery from Tropical Storm Helene* project. The project provides critical equipment to farmers across multiple counties to support ongoing recovery efforts and improve resilience to future extreme weather events. Watauga County will serve as fiscal agent for the project, providing a financial match and in-kind support, including employee time and county property for equipment storage.

Staff noted that a certified copy of the minutes from the approval to serve as fiscal agent and provide the $5,000 match will be submitted with the letter. Staff also clarified that, as a State agency project, the shared equipment will be available for use by surrounding counties.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to authorize execution of the attached letter of support for Cooperative Extension.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

C. Announcements

County Manager Geouque informed the Board that Rick Mattar, a long-time At-Large member of the Watauga County Planning Board, has submitted his letter of resignation. He noted that Mr. Mattar has been a valued member of the Planning Board and expressed regret at his departure.

January 6, 2026 Board Meeting

Mr. Geouque recommended canceling the January 6, 2026 Board of Commissioners meeting due to the holiday schedule and rescheduling the January 20, 2026 meeting

to January 13, 2026. This change would result in a single meeting for the month of January.
Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to cancel the January 6, 2026 meeting and reschedule the January 20, 2026 meeting to January 13, 2026.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

10. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

- **Vice-Chairman Castle** commented on the rollout of new ambulances, noting the importance of cooperation rather than competition. He expressed appreciation for the collaborative efforts of the hospital and staff and expressed hope that patient care will improve.

- **Commissioner Hodges** thanked Emergency Services Director Will Holt and staff for their efforts in making the ambulance rollout possible.

- **Commissioner Marsh** noted the extensive preparation involved in the rollout, highlighting the dedicated work of the Human Resources Department, and expressed appreciation for Watauga Medics Inc. Director Craig Sullivan's years of service. He hopes to see significant improvements as the program progresses.

- **Chairman Eggers** recognized the passing of Barbara Kinsey and asked that her family be kept in prayers. He wished everyone a Merry Christmas, encouraged support for those in need, and expressed appreciation for the Board, County Manager, and citizens who enable effective decision-making.

11. CLOSED SESSION

At 6:25 PM, Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to enter Closed Session pursuant to G.S. § 143-318.11(a)(3) to discuss matters protected by attorney–client privilege, including Case No. 5:25-cv-157; pursuant to G.S. § 143-318.11(a)(5) to consider matters related to the acquisition of real property; and pursuant to G.S. § 143-318.11(a)(6) to discuss personnel matters.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

At 8:16 PM, Chairman Eggers, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to resume the open meeting.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

12 ADJOURN

At 8:17 PM, Chairman Eggers, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to adjourn the meeting.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

Braxton Eggers, Chairman

ATTEST: Katie Hancock, Clerk to the Board