

MEETING MINUTES

WATAUGA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Tuesday, May 5, 2026

The Watauga County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Tuesday, May 5, 2026, 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
- Madison Mathis, Clerk to the Board

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

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Eggers presented a correction to the December 17, 2024, regular meeting minutes and called for additions and/or corrections to the April 21, 2026, regular meeting and closed session minutes.

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the December 17, 2024, regular meeting minutes as corrected.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the April 21, 2026, regular meeting minutes as presented.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the April 21, 2026, closed session minutes as presented.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairman Eggers called for additions or corrections to the May 5, 2026, agenda.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to amend the May 5, 2026, agenda to include Possible Action After Closed Session per County Attorney Miller.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

The following people spoke during public comment:

- **Diane Nilan** – addressed the issue of homelessness, calling attention to its impact and sharing statistics specific to Watauga County.
- **Rick Woods** – resident of Watauga County since 1984, spoke regarding community growth and change, the university's impact on economic and political matters, student voting, voting precincts, and district-based elections.

5. FRIENDS OF WATAUGA COUNTY LIBRARY RENOVATION GRANT SUPPORT REQUEST

Ms. Barbara Perry-Sheldon, Friends of the Watauga County Library Board Member, requested the Board endorse a grant application to the Cannon Foundation in the amount of \$100,000 for the Library Renovation Project. The Foundation has invited submission of a full proposal, which is due at the end of May 2026.

As part of the application process, the Foundation requested a formal endorsement from the Board of Commissioners, along with a letter of support from the County Manager confirming that the County will not be submitting a competing proposal for funding during this cycle.

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the endorsement of the application and authorization for County Manager Geouque to provide the requested letter of support.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

6. MISCELLANEOUS ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

A. Presentation of the FY 2027 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

County Manager Geouque presented the FY 2026-2027 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for review prior to discussion during the upcoming budget work sessions.

B. Presentation of the Manager's FY 2027 Recommended Budget

County Manager Geouque presented his recommended FY 2027 Budget at the meeting and reviewed the following highlights:

- Maintains the property tax rate at \$0.318, seventh lowest in the State.
- School funding levels:
 - \$557,239 increase in current operations expenses.
 - \$130,000 for 2 nurse's positions.
 - \$130,000 for Final Phase of teacher supplements.
 - \$950,000 for current capital.
 - \$5,260,800 in CIP set-aside.
- The Emergency Services Center construction is scheduled for completion in June 2026.
- \$50,000 for future Library Expansion.
- \$50,000 for the Heritage Museum.
- Balanced budget with \$3,604,222.
- General Fund balance appropriation for EMS services and property tax sales ratio adjustment for public utilities.

The budget work sessions are scheduled on Thursday, May 7, 2026 beginning at 12:00 P.M. and Friday, May 8, 2026 at 9:00 A.M.

The recommended Budget would be available for public inspection on the County's website and at the County Manager's Office.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to schedule a public hearing on May 19, 2026, at 5:30 P.M. to allow citizen comment on the proposed budget.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

C. Budget Amendments

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

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

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

D. Board of Elections Delivery Truck Purchase Request

The Watauga County Board of Elections requested the Board approve the purchase of a 2024 Isuzu FTR box truck, to be reimbursed through North Carolina State Board of Elections Helene funds.

Staff have located an 18-foot box truck with a large platform lift gate, low mileage, and remaining warranty coverage at a cost of \$87,000 plus applicable taxes and tags. The larger lift gate is expected to provide increased stability and functionality for equipment transport in various weather conditions.

In response to questions from Commissioners regarding staffing, County Manager Geouque clarified that Board of Elections would be responsible for staffing the vehicle.

County Attorney Miller requested clarification regarding any restrictions or concerns associated with the Helene reimbursement funds. County Manager Geouque confirmed there were no additional concerns, conflicts, or conditions associated with the reimbursement funding.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to approve the purchase of the 2024 Isuzu FTR box truck, and any costs associated with the delivery of the vehicle to Watauga County not to exceed \$800. The county will be reimbursed through the North Carolina State Board of Elections Helene funds.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

E. Announcements

The Board of Commissioners has been invited to attend the Valle Crucis School Dedication Ceremony to be held on May 16, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. The Watauga County

community will gather on the new school campus to celebrate the completion of the project.

Scheduled events include guest speakers, a ribbon cutting ceremony, unveiling of the school plaque, and campus tours.

7. COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

- **Commissioner Marsh** commended staff for their efforts in preparing a balanced budget and keeping the tax rate as low as possible. He noted the County's responsibilities related to tax administration and revaluation and stated that while property taxes are mandated and largely outside of local control, staff continue to do their best to minimize tax impacts on citizens. He also noted that repairs to the Cove Creek Ruritan facility had been completed.
- **Commissioner Hodges** commended staff for their work in balancing the budget and for their management during challenging circumstances, including disaster response related to Hurricane Helene, noting the effective use of available funds.
- **Vice-Chairman Castle** commended staff for their hard work and dedication in the budget process.
- **Chairman Eggers** noted that property taxes are mandated by the State of North Carolina. He provided an update on the Old Cove Creek project, stating that authorization had been given to proceed with Greene Construction on phases 1-5 and 7, and that equipment placement had begun with construction anticipated to begin around the 18th.

8. BREAK

9. CLOSED SESSION

At 5:57 p.m., 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 7:40 p.m., Commissioner Greene, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to resume the open meeting.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

10. POSSIBLE ACTION AFTER CLOSED SESSION

Hidden Pond Tower Site

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to condemn the property regarding Hidden Pond Tower site in connection with the County's efforts to improve the emergency communications system.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

11. ADJOURN

At 7:43 p.m., Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to adjourn the meeting.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

Braxton Eggers, Chairman

ATTEST: Madison Mathis, Clerk to the Board