Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency

MEMORANDUM

TO: Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency Board of Directors

FROM: Ashley Featherstone, Director

RE: Minutes for June 24, 2026

DATE: July 30, 2026

Enclosed, please find the Minutes for the Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency Board meeting held on **Wednesday, June 24, 2026 at 4:00pm**. The next meeting is scheduled for **Thursday August 6, 2026 at 4:00pm** in the board meeting room located at 35 Woodfin Street, Asheville, NC 28801.

This meeting will be live streamed on Engage Buncombe which can be accessed at https://engage.buncombecounty.org/s8486. The board meeting documents will also be available on the Engage Buncombe site. The meeting will be recorded and can be viewed later.

A reception will be held at 3:30 pm to recognize our WNC Post Helene Particulate Monitoring Project Participants recipients and former Advisory Committee members. The recognition will occur at 4:00 pm at the beginning of the Board Meeting. All Air Quality Advisory Council Members, former Advisory Committee Members, and others are welcome to attend the reception.

The Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency Board of Directors met on Wednesday, June 24, 2026, in the board meeting room located at 35 Woodfin Street, Asheville, NC 28801.

The attendance of the Board members was as follows:

Members Present:	**Members Absent:**
Ned Guttman	
Garry Whisnant	
Joel Storrow	
Karl Koon	
Caitlin Cook	

Staff Present: *Ashley Featherstone, Director; James Raiford, Permitting Program Manager; Steve Ensley, Air Quality Monitoring Coordinator; Alex Latta, Air Quality Specialist II; Allison Glass, Air Quality Specialist I; Hannah Rhodes, Air Quality Coordinator*

Others Present: *Suzanne Avett, County Attorney; Jason Rogers, Permits & Inspections Director; Mackenzie Koon, Resident*

Joel Storrow called the meeting of the Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency Board of Directors to order on June 24, 2026, at 4:00 pm.

The order of business was as follows:

1. **Public Comment Protocol Announcement**
   A. Joel Storrow read the public comment protocol.

2. **Adjustment and Approval of Agenda**
   A. Karl Koon made the motion to approve the agenda.
   B. Caitlin Cook seconded the motion.
   C. All present – yes
   D. The motion passed 5-0

3. **Special Presentation**
   A. Recognition of Karl Koon for 20 years of service to the WNC Regional/Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency
      i. Joel Storrow and Ashley Featherstone presented Karl Koon with an award to thank him for his 20 years of service on the board.
      ii. Jowl Storrow said that Karl Koon has been on the board for 20 years of service, and that he has been a rock for the board. Ashely Featherstone thanked Karl and said he had likely set the record for the longest serving board member. Ashley Featherstone said that Karl Koon always has very well thought out comments, and that we will miss him.

iii. Karl Koon thanked everyone and said that it has been a pleasure. He hopes that he has made a positive impact on not only Air Quality, but on the Agency operations.

4. Introduction

A. Jason Rogers, Director of Permits and Inspections

i. Joel Storrow introduced Jason Rogers.

ii. Jason Rogers said that he has been at Buncombe County for about ten and a half years and has been newly appointed as the Director of Permits and Inspections. He said that he has worked with our team for a long time and is looking forward to working together in a new way. Ashley Featherstone said that Jason Rogers has been a big help throughout the transition and that we are looking forward to working with him. He has also been helpful with the monitoring site and getting through the permits and inspections steps to start that build process.

5. Consent Agenda

A. Approval of minutes from May 14, 2026

B. Ned Guttman made the motion to approve the minutes.

C. Karl Koon seconded the motion.

D. All present – yes

E. The motion passed 5-0

6. Unfinished Business

A. Consideration of Rule Updates

i. Ashley Featherstone said that we have been through a pre-draft process that is required by the EPA. These rules will eventually be submitted to the State, and then they will become part of the State Implementation Plan (SIP). That is why the EPA requires a pre-draft to be submitted, which we submitted back in April. We did get some feedback from the EPA, which were not changes that needed to be made, but instead just unofficial comments on the final package submittal process. Specifically, there are certain rules that the EPA will approve in the State SIP, and certain rules that they won't. This is the same for the State of North Carolina and the other two locals in the state.

ii. We then went through the public notice period from May 22nd to June 21st. We received no public comments. We had a public hearing scheduled for June 22nd, but we were able to cancel it and not have a public hearing since none was requested.

iii. As the memo in the Board Packet states, we did have another meeting with the EPA because we submitted during what they call the pre-hearing draft, which is a second submittal as part of the 30-day public notice period, so it is called a prehearing submittal. We did get some feedback from them which was again, along the same lines as before, on what they will and will not ultimately expect to approve after the final submittal is made to North Carolina and then to EPA.

iv. Ashley Featherstone said we are now asking for the Board to adopt these changes, which will bring us up to date with the current North Carolina air quality rules in Chapters 4 and 17.

v. Joel Storrow said that Ashley Featherstone has worked really hard on this and that it has not been an easy task. Staff have been very thorough with the whole process, and he appreciates the effort that was put into this project.
vi. Ashley Featherstone said that she has to give the credit to Allison Glass, as she did a phenomenal job working on these rules. It was over 500 pages of codes that needed to be reviewed and edited.
vii. Joel Storrow asked if there were any comments about the rules, which there were none.
viii. Garry Whisnant made the motion to approve the rule updates.
ix. Ned Guttman seconded the motion.
x. All present – yes
xi. The motion passed 5-0

7. Director's Report

A. Update on Program Transition

i. Ashley Featherstone said that today we submitted materials to the NC EMC staff to go to their July 9th board meeting. Last night the city of Asheville took action following Buncombe County's June 16th action, which is where they passed a resolution to create the Air Quality program under the Board of Commissioners (BOC). The resolution also formed the Air Quality Advisory Council and extended the interlocal agreement. That was necessary so that it did not expire July 1 while we work to have the BOC adopt the code that was just updated by our Board, and while we wait for that certification on July 9th. We also have a letter from the County to the City with the 30-day notice to terminate the interlocal agreement going out today, June 24th. At the end of the 30 days, July 24th will be the effective date of Buncombe County Air Quality taking over the duties of the current Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency.
ii. Joel Storrow asked what the official title of the council will be. Ashley Featherstone said that it will be "Buncombe County Air Quality Advisory Council," which we will be shortening that to the "Air Quality Council" or "AQC." And that is what we put in the resolution as well as in the Chapter 1 draft.
iii. Our code is organized into three chapters. Tonight the Board updated Chapters 4 and 17. Chapter 4 has all of the air quality standards in it. Chapter 17 is the air quality permitting procedures. Chapter 1 is our administrative code.
iv. Chapter 1 is where our current interlocal agreement with the City is, and that is where it covers things like powers and duties of the Director, powers and duties of the Board, enforcement of the rules, our governing structure, etc. So we have a draft of Chapter 1 changes where we took out the interlocal agreement and stated that the Air Quality Agency is under the governance of the Board of Commissioners. It also includes the Air Quality Advisory Council. We have a new section 1.0200 with the Advisory Council in it that states the Council will be responsible for hearing appeals and will advise on technical matters to the Board and Director, such as having a certified program.

v. Ashley Featherstone said that what will happen next, is after we go to the NC EMC on July 9th, we will then be on the BOC agenda on July 21st. That is the meeting where we will ask them to adopt the Air Quality Code. It will be a newly revised Chapter 1, and then there will be no updates to Chapters 4 and 17, they're just basically adopting the code we already have in place. The changes that are included were replacing "Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency" with "Buncombe County Air Quality." We also are replacing "Agency" with "Program" to match up with the language that we will no longer be a separate, stand-alone Agency. We will be a Division of Permits & Inspections, but still a program with separate cost structures and accounting, as it is important that we continue to maintain that.

vi. We will stress to the EMC that we are an existing air quality program that has been around since 1947. We have been approved by the EMC in 1972 and then again in the year 2000 when we reformed our governing structure the last time. We are not making any changes to our rules other than bringing them up to date and changing the governing structure. All of our positions, assets, etc. are going over to the new program.

vii. Ashley Featherstone said that since Karl Koon is stepping down and is not going to continue with the Council, Jim Neely, who was previously on our Advisory Committee, will be stepping into the 5th Air Quality Council member position starting at our August 6th meeting. Jim is retired and from Massachusetts. He worked for an Air Quality Agency there and has worked in different government jobs, so he is very familiar with the role we play in the air program.

B. EPA FY26 105 Grant Update

i. Ashley Featherstone said that we have a couple of updates on the EPA 105 grant.

ii. We were awarded about $213,000 in May. This is more than what we got last year, but is less than two years prior, which was about $222,000. We did, however, get more EPA 103 funds this year than prior years, so the total grant award amounts we have received this year from the EPA are roughly the same as two years prior.

iii. We also got a call from the EPA last week asking if we would like to take $90,000 of additional funding. We said yes. There's always a concern when you take on additional funding for the 105 grant because it has to be matched, and there's a maintenance of effort. And since we only have six positions, that's going to be challenging to meet. However, we are getting ready to spend $70,000 on a new Ozone site, so we are going to complete a budget amendment with the EPA to include that. And since that is a one-time cost, it won't count towards our maintenance of effort going forward. There will just be that additional $20,000 which we can relatively easily put towards salary and benefits on our programs without it being an issue. We always have to look at allocations for the programs and make sure that we're meeting the requirements, because we are required to spend the same amount if not more than the previous year for that maintenance of effort.

iv. We are working through the process with the County as they transition us over, and we're going to be handling our budget differently as we had previously talked about.

v. Ashley Featherstone said that the other grant update is the item that she sent out last night, which was a proposal by the Office of Management and Budget to codify some of the grant recommended guidance into rules. They are tightening down on these grants and putting in

provisions saying things such as, they can cancel the grant awards at any time. We don't know a lot about what will be finalized or how it will affect us, but there's a lot more scrutiny on grants, and they are becoming more uncertain as a result. This makes transitioning to the County especially beneficial and timely, as there is a lot of continued uncertainty at the federal level.

C. Monitoring Update-Purple Air Sensor Project
   i. Steve Ensley said that we are going to assume the Purple Air Sensor Project from the State. The last time we spoke with them, they said it wouldn't be a problem to transition the monitoring to us for the rest of the loan. If we wanted to continue the loan, the State said we would have to do our own application to the EPA. The State seemed very open to letting us use the monitors as long as we need them. Ashely Featherstone has also expressed interest in purchasing some Purple Air Monitors of our own.
   ii. Steve Ensley went over monitoring data completeness.
      1) PM2.5 data completeness: 95.2%
      2) Ozone data completeness: 98.7%
      3) We've had no exceedances this year.
      4) Our fourth highest value for this year is 61, which occurred on May 5th. Our highest value was 65 on Ozone, which occurred on April 3rd. There is a critical value for the year that Steve Ensley doesn't think we've ever hit, but it is 96 for the fourth highest value, which means we'd have to have a fourth highest 8-hour average of 96 to go over that standard, so that is nothing to worry about at this time. Based on what we have so far, they're projecting 59 parts per billion as the fourth highest value for this year. So everything looks good.
      5) We have not heard anything from the courts about the NAAQS (National Ambient Air Quality Standards). The State has not heard anything, and we don't know where that is going, so more information is to come. As it currently stands, the 2026 design value is 6.2, so we're in good shape if it stays at 9 or if it moves to 12.
      6) Steve Ensley asked if anyone had any questions.
      7) Joel Storrow asked how much a Purple Air Sensor costs. Steve Esnley said it depends on the model you get, but typically around $200-$300. He said meteorologists love them and the data they provide, and the State encourages putting out as many as possible, even though they are not a regulatory monitor. He said they're really good at showing change.
      8) Garry Whisnant asked what the origination of the Purple Air Monitor concept was. Steve Ensley said they've been talking about low-cost instruments for years. James Raiford said that Purple Air is a company that created low-cost sensors, and they were going to make their money by marketing to that. They're really good at covering a large area for a lot cheaper. They're also helpful for detecting wildfire smoke. And as people started using them more and realizing they were creating useful data, the Purple Air company started working with the EPA. The EPA has come up with a way of taking Purple Air data and running it through an equation to try to make it more closely match with the reference PM monitor data that we have. Steve Ensley said that their precision goes down at higher

concentrations. James Raiford said we deployed many of these Purple Air Monitors directly after Hurricane Helene, thinking that there would be an increase in burning and dust concerns.

9) Garry Whisnant asked for clarity on if the EPA was just going to turn over the Purple Air Monitors to us.
    a) James Raiford said that we would be partnering with the EPA on the project, but that technically the project was done by the State.
    b) Steve Ensley clarified that the EPA retains ownership of the devices and we report the data to them. At the end of every loan term, a report has to be given to the EPA on what was observed. The State will prepare the report for this cycle, and that would then be our responsibility if we go through with another loan application.
    c) Ashley Featherstone added that the EPA requires us to follow a quality assurance plan since we are borrowing their devices. She would like to buy our own Purple Air Monitors. We've had the ones on loan for two years now, but since we expect it's going to be several years that our community is going to be dealing with all of the Helene debris, there is an increased risk of wildfire and that's where we have seen they have been really helpful. We are also still getting requests from residents asking permission to burn storm debris. It would be nice to ultimately purchase some of these sensors to keep long term. For now we will continue to keep the loan program going.
    d) Steve Ensley said that these sensors do have a finite lifespan. They're not really repairable, and when you start having problems with one, the most cost effective option is to just take it out and put another one in. The ones that we borrowed we have had to replace two or three out of the eight or nine sites that we have had them at.
    e) James Raiford said that we have had at least one incident of a wildfire where we were able to see very specific Purple Air Monitors picking up the smoke from the fire, where other parts of the County were unaffected. And we would not have been able to tell that with just our one regulatory monitoring site for particulate matter.
    f) Ashley Featherstone said that we are trying to do more outreach with the public to let them know that they can go on the EPA Fire and Smoke Map and check the data if they think it smells smoky in their area. And they can check the air quality specifically near them.

       Steve Ensley said that the temporal resolution is better as well. So instead of reporting an hourly value, you can see it changing from minute to minute.

D. Recognition Ceremony for August Meeting
    i. Ashley Featherstone said that we are not having Clean Air Excellence Awards, which we have talked about, but we are instead going to present certificates that the State made for the Western North Carolina Post-Helene Sensor particulate Monitoring Project that Steve Ensley was just talking about. We've invited several schools, fire departments, and libraries to honor

them. We also invited the Edneyville Fire Department from Henderson County, as the State just had one Purple Air Monitor there.

ii. Ashley Featherstone said that we also talked about including recognition for DEQ's Air Quality IQ student program they do every year, but we found out that there were about 40 students which was a bit overwhelming for us, so we decided to save that for a future year when we could have more time to plan ahead. Keith Bamberger would like for us to have it earlier, in May, before kids are out on summer break.

iii. Ashely Featherstone would like to invite current Air Quality Advisory Committee Members and present them with a certificate of appreciation for their time on the Committee. She wanted to run the idea past the Board. The Committee has seven or eight people on it, and we expect three or four of them would come to the reception if invited.

iv. Garry Whisnant asked if it would be at 3:30pm. Ashely Featherstone confirmed that yes, that would be when the reception starts, with the award ceremony starting with the board meeting at 4pm.

v. Joel Storrow like the ideas and times proposed.

E. New Permits

i. Ashely Featherstone said that we did have one permit that we wanted to get approved by the Board tonight. She will be able to issue permits after July 24th, when we have transitioned to being under the County, but this is one that we have now and wanted to request approval to issue.

Facility Name	Type of Facility	Facility Classification	Location	Proposed Equipment
ELE Construction, LLC	Portable Concrete, Stone and Recycled Asphalt Paving Crusher	Small	Various sites with local zoning approval	Crusher, screen conveyor, belts, generator

ii. James Raiford said that this is a portable crushing operation. We have approved a couple of these in the past. APAC, which is an asphalt plant company, wants to get their scrap asphalt crushed up so that they can reuse that in their mix. They hire companies to do that work, and they just hire a different company to do it every year or so, so every new company has to get a permit from us. The latest company is local out of Leicester, ELE Construction, LLC. They applied for a permit at the three APAC sites. We do state that they can operate at other locations in the County, but they have to let us know before doing so.

iii. Garry Whisnant made the motion to approve the above new permit.

iv. Cailtin Cook seconded the motion.

v. All present – yes

vi. The motion passed 5-0

8. New Business

A. None

9. Other Business

A. Legal Counsel Report
   i. Suzanne Avett said that Ashely Featherstone has covered a lot of the Legal Counsel Report. We do have the EMC meeting in Raleigh in July, so she will go with Ashely Featherstone for that. We have commented on the draft resolution. We hope we will get it back quickly so we can have it to present at the Board of Commissioners meeting, when the rules will be adopted. So most of her work there is done, and she has switched more to working on the by-laws for the new Advisory Council. She hopes the Council will have draft by-laws for members to review soon, and then the Council can adopt them at the August 6th meeting.

B. Calendar
   i. Joel Storrow said that the next meeting will be on August 6th, 2026, which will be the first meeting as the Air Quality Council.
   ii. Ashley Featherstone said that we can talk about a schedule for future meetings at the August 6th meeting.

C. Announcements
   i. Joel Storrow said that he's been on the board since 2016, and has been chair for about 5 years. He is happy to stay on the Advisory Council, but would like to pass along the baton for the chair to someone else on the Council. That can be the first order of business at the next meeting.
   ii. Garry Whisnant asked what the process would be for that.
   iii. Suzanne Avett said that the process will be in the by-laws, but that it will just be a vote for chair and vice chair.
   iv. Ashley Featherstone thanked Joel Storrow and said that it has been a pleasure working with him and she appreciates his support, and for getting us through the transition.

10. Public Comment

A. None

11. Adjournment

A. Karl Koon made the motion to adjourn the meeting.
B. Ned Guttman seconded the motion.
C. All present – yes
D. The motion passed 5-0
E. The meeting was adjourned at 4:42pm