Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency

MEMORANDUM

TO: Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency Board of Directors

FROM: Ashley Featherstone, Director

RE: Minutes for March 26, 2026

DATE: May 7, 2026

Enclosed, please find the Minutes for the Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency Board meeting held on **Thursday March 26, 2026 at 4:00pm**. The next meeting is scheduled for **Thursday May 14, 2026 at 4:00pm** in the meeting room located at 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.

The Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency Board of Directors met on Thursday, March 26, 2026, in the board meeting room at the at 35 Woodfin Street, Asheville, N.C.

The attendance of the Board members was as follows:

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

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

Others Present: *Suzanne Avett, County Attorney; Samantha Kirk, CAPE; Drew West, CIBO*

Suzanne Avett called the meeting of the Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency Board of Directors to order on March 26, 2026, at 4:08 pm.

The order of business was as follows:

Suzanne Avett stated that we are without our Board chair and Board vice chair, therefore the board members will need to elect a chair for today's board meeting.

A. Ned Guttman made the motion to elect Garry Whisnant.
B. Caitlin Cook seconded the motion.
C. All present – yes
D. The motion passed 3-0

1. Public Comment Protocol Announcement

E. Garry Whisnant read the public comment protocol.

2. Adjustment and Approval of Agenda

A. Revised agenda approval – item A
B. Ned Guttman made the motion to approve the agenda.
C. Caitlin Cook seconded the motion.
D. All present – yes
E. The motion passed 3-0

3. Consent Agenda

A. Approval of minutes from February 3, 2026
B. Ned Guttman made the motion to approve the minutes.
C. Catlin Cook seconded the motion.
D. All present – yes
E. The motion passed 3-0

4. Unfinished Business

A. Buncombe County Reduce to Rebuild Program

i. Ashey Featherstone said we have completed a public notice period of 30 days for this program fee change. We did not receive any public comments. Staff are recommending that we adopt that change. In this latest version, we did reference the Reduce to Rebuild Program, rather than putting a sunset date, so we will not have to go through rulemaking if the county decides to extend the program again.

ii. Ned Guttman made the motion to adopt the rule change to reduce certain permit fees related to Hurricane Helene, in line with Buncombe County's Reduce to Rebuild Program.

iii. Catlin Cook seconded the motion.

iv. All present – yes

v. The motion passed 3-0.

5. Director's Report

A. Buncombe County Budget Retreat Recommendation and Next Steps

i. Ashley Featherstone said the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners (BOC) had a budget retreat on Tuesday, March 24th, 2026. During the budget retreat, county staff presented their recommendation to bring the Air program under the county. The recommendation was received favorably by the BOC. There was no final action. The next step is there will be additional budget retreats. The Public Hearing on the budget will be on May 19th. The BOC will vote on the budget on June 2nd, and it will be determined then if we are officially included in the county budget.

ii. Ned Guttman asked, if the county moves forward with this and includes us in their budget, will we have any say in the budget?

1) Ashley Featherstone said that this is actually something that will be further determined in the transition process. Part of the transition process is that the current Governing Board will become an Advisory Board or Air Quality Commission, and as a part of that, members could make recommendations to the BOC for the Air Quality Program's budget. Staff were told to present our "first pass" budget to our current Board with the understanding that things could change. But even if the Board is reformed and the Air Program goes under the governance of the county BOC, staff would still be presenting the budget to the Advisory Board every year.

iii. Ashely Featherstone expects that, by the time our budget approval process is supposed to start in May, the process may look different.

iv. For next steps, we could have to be recertified as an air quality program by the North Carolina Environmental Management Commission (NC EMC). We are currently in talks with them as far as whether or not we have to get recertified and, if so, what exactly will be required of us.

1) We will probably have to be recertified, which the timeline for that will revolve around their scheduled meetings in May and July. They might want us to present our plans in May and come back in July with final actions. It is still to be determined.

2) The County did provide notice to the City of Asheville prior to March 1, 2026, that they did not want to renew their interlocal agreement for a full year. With that, another option that was talked about was to potentially edit the agreement and extend it by a shorter period of time. That would give us more time for the transition.

v. Suzanne Avett said a lot depends on the NC EMC and their guidance on what they would like us to provide. For example, can the county manager write a letter of intent based on the BOC budget retreat, or do they want a formal resolution that has been approved before moving forward with a recertification?

vi. Garry Whisnant said the NC EMC likely does not have a history of how to do this.
   1) Suzanne Avett confirmed and said the closest example was from us reforming after coming out of the previous agreement with Haywood County.

vii. Ned Guttman asked if the county will still operate within the City or if the City would have its own air program.
   1) Ashley Featherstone said that if the Air Program included Buncombe County, that would include all the municipalities, including the City of Asheville. She did say that we have things to work out with the City, such as coordinating demolition and asbestos permits.

viii. Ashely Featherstone said we have created a historical timeline with what was done previously back in 2000. We can use it as a guide, but that doesn't mean it will go exactly the same way.

ix. Ashely Featherstone said that one of the things our agency was doing to prepare back in 2000 was to make sure the rules are updated to align with the State's rules. She said we will talk about that at a different agenda item. We are looking to try to get the rules updated prior to July so, when we are trying to get recertified, we will have updated rules.

x. Ashely Featherstone said we have put together a lengthy timeline, but once we meet with the state next week, we will have a better idea of the timing and how we think things will go.

B. Budget Year FY26 Expenditure Reduction Plan

i. Ashley Feathersone said, per our last meeting in January where we talked about restricted funds vs unrestricted funds, and how our unrestricted funds were quite lower than what we were calling our fund balance, staff have put together an Expenditure Reduction Plan to make sure we do not spend over that $27K that is available for our fund balance. Items included in the reduction plan include:
   1) We have contingency funds that we do not plan to use
   2) Not filling the vacant position this fiscal year will save us $35K
   3) The biggest item we are putting off is the ozone site. We are putting that off until this summer, after the new fiscal year begins. We were planning to spend around $35K on the site this year.
   4) Other items were things we likely weren't going to spend anyway. For example, Credit Card Processing fees are now paid for by the client, and the File Digitization Project we are not ready to complete.

ii. Even with the Expenditure Reduction Plan, we have enough money for office supplies and other items like that.

iii. We also usually underestimate revenues, so we increased those amounts to more realistic numbers in our estimates.

iv. Garry Whisnant asked what the driver was behind the new ozone monitoring site.

1) Ashley Featherstone explained that Haywood County was removed from the MSA, and that meant that suddenly we would have to add another ozone site based on our population.
2) Steve Ensley confirmed this and said that it is an EPA requirement.

v. Garry Whisnant asked if we cover our entire MSA, or if the North Carolina Department of Air Quality (DAQ) also has some of it.
1) Ashley Featherstone said that DAQ does have some of it.

vi. Ned Guttman asked if we are pushing the ozone site off until FY27.
1) Ashley Feathersone confirmed this and said that there is restricted cash that will be going to the county to help offset that cost.

C. Draft Budget FY27 and Proposed Title V CPI Adjustment
i. Ashley Feathersone said our draft budget for FY27 is $72K more than FY26. A lot of that is us pushing the ozone site over to FY27, as well as some health insurance increases.
ii. Ashley Featherstone said that this budget does include filling that 7th vacant position. We are still in a holding pattern, but hopeful we can fill that position.
iii. The file digitization project is included, however we recognize that while it would be nice to scan the historical files, it is expensive to do that, so we will see if we are financially able to move forward with that according to our budget.
iv. There were some increases in the training budget to pay for asbestos training.
v. Some one-time EPA funds that were included in the FY26 budget will drop out for FY27. That increases the amount we would plan to take out of budget reserves.
vi. We do have a CPI adjustment for Title V fees.
1) We are proposing an increase in Title V fees from $64 to $65 per ton.
2) This adjustment would mean an additional 4K in revenue for next year.
3) Ashley Featehrstone said the Board does not have to vote on this at this time.

D. Air Quality Rule Amendments Update
i. Ashley Featherstone invited Allison Glass up to go over the rule amendment updates.
ii. Allison Glass said that she started working on the rule amendment updates in 2024, and that it has been a very big project.
iii. North Carolina requires readoption of these rules every 10 years. This most recent update started with the 2018 rule adoption. There were 320 rules divided into 6 groups. It took about 6 months to get through all of them. Allison Glass also noted all amendments. She got clean copies of the rules from the state, the draft version from the state, and our current rules, and would make sure all the rules matched.
iv. We are going to submit the rules to the state of North Carolina. It does have to go through a public comment period. The state is looking to do another readoption in November, so we will have to restart the process after that.
v. Garry Whisnant asked where we are in the process and if the board needs to approve them at this point.
1) Ashely Featherstone confirmed that yes, the board does need to vote at this point.
2) Ashely Featherstone said that the board will need to vote to allow us to go to public comment. We will submit the rules to the state, EPA, and county legal, and those parties would like a month to go through them, before it goes to public notice.

3) We are hoping to get direction from the board tonight to move forward to submit to the state and EPA. We would like to receive feedback on any potential issues now, before going to public notice.

vi. Ned Guttman asked if there are any additions from what was sent in the board packet
   1) Ashely Featherstone said no, there were not.

vii. Ashely Featherstone went on to review the groups of rules and the different sections which changes were made to.

viii. Ashley Featherstone noted that we are just updating chapter 4 and 17, but if we edit our governing board structure, we will need to make changes to Chapter 1 and Chapter 3.

ix. Ashley Featherstone shared slides on the rules that are different from the state. There are 4 rules we have that are different from the state, which were highlighted in yellow in the drafts that were shared.

x. Permit exemption rules is one of them, and the state changed these a few years ago. We still permit facilities with potential/actual emissions of 5 tons. The state exempts facilities if they have less than 10 tons of emissions/potential emissions. With the state, if they have emissions greater than 5 but less than 25 tons, they can register them. For us, that would mean that we would not have a small permitting program, but we wanted to continue that program. We believe there is benefit as we do get complaints on some of these facilities and they do have visual emissions and other air quality rules that they are subject to.
   1) Garry Whisnant asked if, under the DAQ model, small facilities would not have to have a permit, and Ashely Featherstone confirmed this.
   2) Ashley Featherstone said that one item to highlight is, with our permitted facilities, there is a permit condition that they must maintain their equipment in working condition to minimize emissions, and we see value in requiringthat.

xi. The fugitive dust rule is another difference between our rules and the State's. The State does not have a fugitive dust rule that applies to construction sites. This is an example of a more strict rule that we have compared to the state. With our rule, we can require reasonable precautions for prevention of the dust becoming airborne and leaving the property boundary.
   1) Ashley Featherstone said that we are proposing to keep this rule the same.

xii. Open burning is another area where some of the rules are different compared to the State's rules.
   1) Ashley Featherstone said that years ago we required a permit for land clearing. We wrote into our rule that a permit was required to open burn machine piled brush.
      a) We are asking to change this rule, as the state passed a law that we could not require a permit. We just have not updated our rule yet, but would like to do so to match the State's law.
      b) We are also proposing to take the machine-pile brush language out. Machine-piled brush was never defined in the rule. It was a tool used to do outreach with the public about when a permit was required, but it has caused problems for us because it is not defined.
   2) There are other open burning-related rules that we are proposing to keep the same. We are proposing to keep the same definition of a log, which is a 12-inch diameter limit, and to prohibit open burning when the County Fire Marshal restricts it due to safety concerns.

a) We would like to keep these rules the same as we find them helpful in reducing emissions.

xiii. For rules surrounding demolition/asbestos removal, we are proposing to keep them the same.
   1) Typically, a county's permits/inspections office issues demolition permits. We have talked with our County's Permits and Inspections Department about that potential. The County is also talking about merging us with the Permits and Inspections department.
   2) We do have more strict rules as we require a permit to remove asbestos from residential buildings. We would like to keep that, but we will change notification requirements from fax to email in the rules.

xiv. Ashley Featherstone said that whenever there is a rule that is more strict (for example, the State added a new air toxic rule), we as a local program are not allowed to have rules less strict than the state. So that is one of the things being updated. We did update the PM2.5 standard to the State's. We updated the Landfill NSPS emissions limit. Regarding mailing lists, we added that electronic email lists can be used, and not physical mail. We are putting in electronic permitting provisions where certain facilities can submit their reports via email. There are still some facilities that we have to get hard copies from and get signatures for. The State is not ready to accept everything electronically, and we certainly are not either, but they have written their rules so that when they are CROMERR compliant we will accept certain documents electronically. Therefore, we are proposing to make all of the same changes to our rules.

xv. Garry Whisnant asked what is required of the board at this point.
   1) Ashely Featherstone does not need a vote to submit pre-hearing drafts, however we do need a vote to post the rules for public comment in May.

xvi. Motion to move to public comment on or before May 15th.
   1) Ned Guttman made the motion to move to public comments on or before May 15th.
   2) Caitlin Cook seconded the motion.
   3) All present – yes
   4) The motion passed 3-0

xvii. It was noted that we will need to set a date for a June meeting.

xviii. Ashley Featherstone asked board members to call her if they have questions about the rule amendments.

E. EPA Rule Updates
   i. Ashley Featherstone said that there is a table from the regional planning organization in the board packet. This table includes updates to rules the EPA is making right now.
   ii. The Greenhouse Gas Endangerment finding is in the table. North Carolina did an assessment of that, and it affects greenhouse gas standards for vehicles. With this change, we do expect to see higher-emitting cars on the road, and that will impact air quality.
   iii. There was also a letter in the board packet regarding Air Curtain Incinerators (ACI's). The rule that ACI's could operate without a permit if they were just burning storm debris was challenged in the court. Therefore, the state is asking for a No Action Assurance. We have already issued two permits and have one more on the agenda for tonight, so this may not impact us that much. However, we have had inquiries about ACI's to burn storm debris, so

that could impact us in the future as we expect to receive more requests to process storm debris from Helene.

F. Electronic payments for facilities
   i. Ashely Featherstone said that the Agency has been taking electronic payments for asbestos and demolition permits for some time. We now have a new process in Accela that we can start taking electronic payments from our other facilities as well. We have had facilities that don't write checks anymore, and so not taking electronic payments for these facilities has been an issue. We have issued all of the Stage I permits for 2026 with the ability to pay electronically, and now we are starting to do that with the industrial facilities. After this, the next step is trying to get our facilities into Accela so we can manage them electronically, instead of in our old Access database.

G. Monitoring Update
   i. Steve Ensley said that, following Hurricane Helene we deployed many Purple Airs monitors throughout the area, in conjunction with the State.
      1) We have decided we are going to recognize those host sites for their contribution. Steve Ensley showed an example of the certification of appreciation they will be receiving. We thought it would be a good way to thank them for their assistance and contribution. We do call these sites from time to time when we see spikes and ask for information, and it's been a good partnership.
      2) Ashely Featherstone said we could present these certificates at the Clean Air Excellence Award reception in July. We got an extension from the State and EPA to keep these low cost sensors for another year, so we will see how long it goes.
   ii. Steve Ensley went over monitoring data completeness.
      1) PM2.5 data completeness: 99.19%
      2) Ozone data completeness: 95.6%
   iii. We were contacted this week by the EPA, who plans to come out and conduct an inspection of our monitoring equipment and the data it is producing.
   iv. Steven Ensley gave an update on the AB Tech monitoring site. The building was delayed because of supply chain issues. They are now nearing completion and expecting delivery as soon as late April, but we now don't plan to pour the concrete pad until July. We also are in limbo about the permitting for the concrete pad and waiting for some action on that. Ideally, we are planning to get all of these items done in July and to get started with taking data in August, but we will see how things progress. The State has said they are looking for data starting mid-season.

H. Facility Permit Renewals

Facility Name	Type of Facility	Facility Classification	Location	Changes from Existing Permit
Amcor Flexibles, Inc.	Manufacturer of Flexible Packaging Products	Title V	Sweeten Creek Road, Arden	Removal of control devices that have been replaced with new equipment,

				minor change to monitoring requirements to align with similar equipment, updates to the insignificant activity list
Glatfelter	Non-woven fiber manufacturing facility	Synthetic Minor	Sand Hill Road, Enka	Ownership Change

v. Amcor
   1) Alex Latta said they haven't used the control device that they are removing in years. They used to have a two-stage system, but they have updated that and they just need one system now.
   2) Ned Guttman made the motion to approve the above permit renewal for Amcor.
   3) Catilin Cook seconded the motion.
   4) All present – yes
   5) The motion passed 3-0

vi. Glatfelter
   1) Ashley Featherstone said this is a simple renewal, and the ownership change is the only change.
   2) Ned Guttman made the motion to approve the above permit renewal for Glatfelter.
   3) Catilin Cook seconded the motion.
   4) All present – yes
   5) The motion passed 3-0

B. Facility Permit Modifications

Facility Name	**Type of Facility**	**Facility Classification**	**Location**	**Changes from Existing Permit**
Buncombe County Landfill II	Landfill	Title V	Panther Branch Road, Alexander	Modify the permit since the facility is now subject to 40 CFR Part 60, Subpart XXX and updating General Conditions.
Duke Energy	Electric Generating Utility	Title V	46 Duke Energy Lane, Arden	Updating PAL Limit After Recent Update of Emission Factors

i. Buncombe County Landfill II

1) Ashley Featherstone said that the County Landfill triggered a new source performance standard when they increased the size of the landfill. That triggered a different rule, and the requirements for that rule are essentially the same, so we just had to update the permit to adjust the rule citations and check the requirements. The only change was the references to the different rules.
2) Ned Guttman made the motion to approve the above permit modification for the Buncombe County Landfill.
3) Catilin Cook seconded the motion.
4) All present – yes
5) The motion passed 3-0

ii. Duke Energy
1) Alex Latta said this is a limit that they have to re-evaluate every 5 years, and just need to update their permit with the new numbers.
2) Ned Guttman made the motion to approve the above permit modification for Duke Energy.
3) Catilin Cook seconded the motion.
4) All present – yes
5) The motion passed 3-0

C. New Permits

Facility Name	Type of Facility	Facility Classification	Location	Proposed Equipment
North End Stump & Brush Recycling	Wood waste yard	Small	New Stock Road, Weaverville	Air Curtain Incinerator

i. Ashely Featherstone said this one is a smaller ACI. It is the only one of the 3 in the County that does not require a federal Title V permit because it is less than 35 tons per day capacity. They are going to have a small source operating permit.
ii. Ned Guttman asked where on New Stock Road it is, and if it is by any neighborhoods.
iii. Ashely Featherstone said that they have had permission from us to run for a year already due to initially burning storm debris, but they haven't operated it a whole lot. She was not sure how close it is to neighborhoods, but we have not had any complaints. It is a pretty large piece of property, and the people that own the Stump & Brush company also own several acres of land right there, so she thinks they have a pretty good buffer.
iv. The group looked at the address on Google Maps and stated it did not look like there was much out in that area.
v. Alex Latta said that if the ACI is operating properly, the neighbors should not notice that it is even there.
vi. Ashley Featherstone said that the ACI cannot be above 10% opacity. Staff actually went to the Biltmore Estate to look at their ACI on the property. They were not operating it at the

time, but we talked about the fact that, when it is running correctly, it really just has heat waves coming off of it for visible emissions.

vii. Ned Guttman made the motion to approve the above new permit for North End Stump & Brush Recycling.

viii. Caitlin Cook seconded the motion.

ix. All present – yes

x. The motion passed 3-0

6. New Business

A. None

7. Other Business

A. Legal Counsel Report

i. Suzanne Avett said that she is working with Ashely Featherstone and County leadership for the potential transition. They are currently working with NC EMC for our next steps. She hopes to have more updates at the next meeting.

B. Advisory Committee Report

i. Committee has not met since the last meeting

ii. The next meeting is on April 30, 2026.

C. Calendar

i. Board Meeting Schedule & Time

ii. The next meeting is May 14, 2026.

iii. Ashley Featherstone said that having the next meeting on May 14th is still the plan. We will find out from the state if they want us to come to the May EMC meeting. The EMC meets on May 14th, so we may decide to push this board's meeting back so we can report on what happened at that meeting.

iv. There will be a special meeting in June to adopt the rule updates.

1) The board decided to have the meeting on Wednesday, June 24th at 4:00pm.

2) Ashley Featherstone will draft a public notice that says we're going to public notice on a certain date, and that the board is planning to meet on June 24th to have a public hearing.

v. Ashely Featherstone asked if board members would be available at 3pm for some future meetings, depending on board meeting room availability. They said they would be.

D. Announcements

i. Ashley Featherstone said we are taking nominations for the Clean Air Excellence Awards.

8. Public Comment

A. None

9. Adjournment

A. Catilin Cook made the motion to adjourn the meeting.

B. Ned Guttman seconded the motion.

C. All present – yes
D. The motion passed 3-0
E. The meeting was adjourned at 5:13pm