Caldwell County
North Carolina
Board of Commissioners Meeting

June 9, 2025 at 6:00 PM
City-County Chambers
905 West Avenue NW, Lenoir

MINUTES

Attendance:

Randy T. Church, Chairman
Mike LaBrose, Vice Chairman
Jeff Branch, Commissioner
Donnie Potter, Commissioner
Patrick Starnes, Commissioner
Destin Hall, County Attorney
Wayne Rash, Interim County Manager
Abby Rich, County Clerk

Call to Order
Chairman Church called the June 9, 2025, Board of Commissioners Meeting to order at 6:04 PM.

Public Comment Period
Patrick Aritzia was the first to come to the podium. He discussed that he and his family operate "His Helping Hands". He claimed the Caldwell County Emergency Services took donations for Hurricane Helene victims that were meant for his organization.

Tyler Sanders was the next individual to come to the podium. Mr. Sanders spoke with the Board about the tax rate for Caldwell County. Mr. Sanders said 47 cent is revenue neutral. He also spoke about inflation be a financial burden. Mr. Sanders continued by saying there are people on fixed income and even a small increase in property tax amounts can be burden to those individuals. Mr. Sanders indicated that he would like for the tax rate to be revenue neutral. He concluded his comments by noting that it's becoming increasingly hard for people to buy housing.

Invocation
Chairman Church resumed regular session at 6:16 PM.

Dr. Marty Jacumin with Mountain Grove Baptist Church led the invocation for those in attendance.

Pledge of Allegiance
Commissioner Donnie Potter led the Pledge of Allegiance for those in attendance.

Agenda Amendments from the Board, Manager & Public
Interim County Manager Wayne Rash informed the Board of two amendments to the agenda. The first was the addition of Item 36- One Time Funding Allocation to CCC&TI. The second was Item 37- Termination of MOU with ICGH.

Vice Chairman LaBrose made the motion to adopt the agenda as presented.
The motion carried unanimously.

Agenda Items

1. **Supporting Involuntary Commitment Transportation with Foothills Medical Transit**
   Tommy Fite came to the podium to present an agreement between Caldwell County and Foothills Medical Transit for transportation of IVC patients.

   Commissioner Potter made the motion to approve the agreement contingent upon the County Manager and County Attorney's review.
   The motion carried unanimously.

2. **Contract Extension with HDR**
   Emily McNeil, Deputy Director of the Water Department came to the podium. Ms. McNeil told the Board this extension is to cover the remainder of the project. Phoenix, the company constructing the tank, is behind schedule because of Hurricane Helene related issues. Ms. McNeil said there is going to be a recoup of the cost at a per diem of $500 per day. The new projected completion date is in August and the original set date was May 4th.

   Commissioner Starnes made the motion to extend the contract with HDR until completion of the tank.
   The motion carried unanimously.

3. **2025-2026 Fiscal Year Budget**
   Interim County Manager Wayne Rash provided highlights of the 2025-2026 Fiscal Year budget. These highlight included increased funding for public safety, investment in education, a tax rate reduction to $0.4975, lower vehicle taxes, continuation of the employee merit program, $2,000,000 in capital investments, new ambulances, new patrol cars, new poll machines, a fund for landfill costs, and continued funding for economic development efforts.

4. **2025-2026 Fiscal Year Budget**
   Chairman Church declared the public hearing open.

   There was only one individual signed up for public comment. Mr. Patrick Aritizia came to the podium. Mr. Patrick expressed concern with the increase of taxes even with a lowered tax rate, potential contaminated debris being taken to the County landfill, and the purchasing of new patrol cars.

   With there being no more individuals signed up to speak, the public hearing was declared closed.

5. 2025-2026 Fiscal Year Budget

Chairman Church read a statement he wrote noting the extensive amount of effort put forth by all staff in preparing the proposed budget.

Commissioner Starnes noted that the budget has been reviewed thoroughly and there have been cuts made where it was possible. Commissioner Starnes also said he does not want to cut service to the citizens by cutting items from the budget.

Commissioner Starnes made the motion to set the tax rate at $0.4975.

Vice Chairman LaBrose said he believes this is a good budget, that addresses a lot of needs, and he is pleased with lower vehicle taxes. Vice Chairman said, although there is good, he believes the Board could propose a better tax rate.

Commissioner Potter discussed employee salaries and noted that he believes implementing a COLA would assist in wage discrepancies when compared to other agencies. Commissioner Potter also noted that he would be voting against the budget because he believes the tax rate could be lower.

Commissioner Starnes' motion passed by a vote of 3 to 2 with Vice Chairman LaBrose and Commissioner Potter voting in opposition.

6. 2025-2026 Fiscal Year Fee Schedule

Chairman Church made the motion to approve the Fee Schedule as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

Consent

Chairman Church turned the meeting to Interim County Manager Wayne Rash to present the Consent Agenda.

7. Establish Capital Project Ordinance for Landfill Gas Revenue

This project ordinance sets aside the revenue generated by the conversion of landfill gas to electricity to be used for future landfill-related needs.

8. Fire Department Revenues

This budget revision increases the flow through line items for the fire departments that have collections totals greater than anticipated for the current fiscal year. The estimated increase amounts are as follows:

Gamewell Fire: $15,000
North Catawba Fire: $50,000
Valmead Fire: $50,000
Sawmills Fire: $20,000
Grace Chapel Fire: $30,000
Collettsville Fire: $15,000

Actual amounts paid to the fire departments will be based on actual collection totals.

9. Foothills Regional Airport Property Taxes

The amount of property taxes collected on aircraft stored at the Foothills Regional Airport was higher than initially anticipated. The amount of this revision is $23,184.00.

10. Communications- Salary, Overtime, and Fringe Benefits

A budget revision in the amount of $228,000 is needed to prevent this line from overdrawing.

11. Medical Examiner Funding

Due to several expensive cases, additional funds in the amount of $30,000 were needed for Medical Examiner funding.

~~12. Emergency Services- Overtime Funding~~

This item, originally Item 12, was removed from the Consent Agenda and relocated to a regular agenda item.

13. Facilities Services- Mowing Equipment Purchase

Facilities Services is transferring $40,490 from contractual expenses to equipment to purchase new mowers in order to bring mowing services in-house.

14. Sheriff's Office- Inmate Medical Expense

Inmate medical expenses were greater than anticipated for the year. A budget revision of $150,000 is needed to prevent this line from overdrawing.

15. Sheriff's Office- UC Vehicle Trade- In

The Sheriff's Office is trading in a compromised undercover vehicle. $5,500 of asset seizure funds will be used to cover the remainder of the cost not covered by the trade-in.

16. Veteran's Services- Salaries

This budget revision in the amount of $9,112 is needed to cover costs associated with raises given out this year.

17. Sheriff's Office- Approval to Apply for GCC Edward Byrne Grant

The Sheriff's Office is requesting approval to submit an application for the GCC Edward Byrne Grant.

18. SMART Program Debris Removal Agreement

Emegency Services is requesting the approval of the SMART Program agreement for debris removal.

19. Debris Removal

This budget revision in the amount of $4,058,700 assists with additional costs related to debris removal post Hurricane Helene. These funds should be reimbursed to the County by FEMA.

20. Revised MOU for Opioid Settlement Funds

This resolution authorizes spending to pay the salary of the Recovery Court Coordinator out of Opioid Settlement Funds.

21. Economic Development Advisory Committee Appointments

The EDAC Committee has requested to reappoint Ronnie Setzer, Jimmy Harrison, Mark Transou, Janet Aiken, and Jon Blair. In addition, they have requested to appoint Charles Shell and Jason Wingate as industry representatives.

22. **Lift Hiring Freeze**
A Resolution was presented to lift the hiring freeze.

23. **Approval to Sell 2 EZ-Carts to Watauga County Board of Elections**
The Board of Elections requested to sell two EZ carts to Watagua County.

24. **Approval to Advertise Water Department Vacant Positions**
The Water Department requested permission to advertise vacant positions.

25. **Approval to Advertise Full-Time and Part-Time Library Positions**
The Library requested permission to advertise vacant positions.

26. **Approval to Fill Vacant Full-Time Paramedic Positions**
Emergency Services requested permission to advertise vacant positions.

27. **Approval of Village of Cedar Rock Fireworks Display**
The Village of Cedar Rock requested permission for a fireworks display.

28. **Approval of Town of Rhodhiss Fireworks Display**
The Town of Rhodhiss requested permission for a fireworks display.

29. **Approval of Tri County Fireworks Display**
Tri-County Motor Speedway requested permission for a fireworks display.

30. **Approval of Meeting Minutes from April 14, 2025**
Approval of the April 14, 2025, Meeting Minutes is requested.

31. **Approval of Meeting Minutes from April 16, 2025**
Approval of the April 16, 2025, Meeting Minutes is requested.

32. **Approval of Meeting Minutes from April 17, 2025**
Approval of the April 17, 2025, Meeting Minutes is requested.

33. **Approval of Meeting Minutes from May 12, 2025**
Approval of the May 12, 2025, Meeting Minutes is requested.

34. **Reappointment of Felicia Wood to Regional Aging Advisory Committee**
Felicia Wood is requesting reappointment to the Regional Aging Advisory Committee.

35. **Appointment of Mike LaBrose as NCACC Voting Delegate**
Vice Chairman Mike LaBrose has offered to be the voting delegate for the NCACC.

36. **One Time Funding Allocation to CCC&TI**
A one-time funding allocation in the amount of $150,000 will be provided to CCC&TI.

37. **Termination of MOU with ICGH.**
Due to a lack of service from ICGH, the Board of Commissioners will be terminating the

agreement.

After Manager Rash concluded the summarization of the Consent Agenda, Commissioner Branch expressed discontent with the overtime expenditures with Emergency Services and concerns regarding the department's management of the budget.

Commissioner Branch made the motion to remove $300,000 out of the Emergency Services budget and make Emergency Services Director Trevor Key only oversee Emergency Medical Services.

There was a brief discussion about separating these two items into individual motions.

Chairman Church made the motion to remove Item 12- Emergency Services Overtime Funding from consent agenda and approve the remainder of the consent agenda. The motion carried unanimously.

Item 12- Emergency Services- Overtime Funding

Commissioner Branch restated his motion to remove $300,000 from the EMS budget for this fiscal year.

After a question posed by Vice Chairman LaBrose, the Interim County Manager provided remarks expressing his willingness to work with all departments in assuring there are no large overages compared to overtime budgetary requests in the future.

CFO Tony Helton came to the podium to state that if this budget revision is not approved, the County will overspend as this overtime expense is related to the current budget year. A conversation between the CFO and the County Attorney regarding whether or not a budget could be amended this soon after adoption.

Commissioner Potter expressed concerns about taking funds away, which would cause trucks to have to come out of service.

CFO Helton provided the Board with some factors which were attributed to the overtime spending being high. He also noted the Emergency Services budget was created by the previous director.

Commissioner Starnes expressed that he not personally upset with any individuals regarding this matter, but he does feel this is an issue that needs to be addressed.

Commissioner Branch expressed concerns with Director Key managing all of Emergency Services.

Chairman Church echoed concerns about the amount of money for overtime spending and said it may benefit Director Key more to only be over EMS.

There was a discussion about putting some administrative policies in place to reduce the overtime accumulations.

Chairman Church made the motion to approve Item 12 from the consent agenda in the amount of $425,000 for the overtime funding.
The motion carried unanimously.

There was a discussion about the structure of Emergency Services and if a change to this structure would need to be made at the Board level or if it could be handled by the Manager.

Dr. Garrett Snyder, Medical Director for Caldwell County came to the podium to express concerns with taking money from the Emergency Services budget.

Logistics Chief Jeff Cardwell came to the podium to provide some information from an Emergency Services standpoint. He suggested for the Board to reinstate the EMS Director position to relieve some of the work load from Director Key.

There was continued lengthy discussion between the Board, CFO Helton, Chief Cardwell, and Dr. Snyder.

Commissioner Potter said he does not want to cut the budget, instead, he would like for Director Key and others to come back to the Board in September or sooner with a plan to reduce overtime.

There was a discussion about forming a committee to oversee EMS and collaborate together for solutions to issues. This committee would be composed of administrative staff, EMS staff, and two Commissioners.

Commissioner Branch amended his motion to remove $300,000 from the EMS budget, but reinstate these funds if deemed necessary.
The motion carried by a vote of 4 to 1 with Commissioner Potter voting in opposition.

Closed Session-Pursuant to § 143-318.11.a(5)
Chairman Church made the motion to enter into closed session pursuant to § 143-318.11.a(5) to discuss a matter relating to the acquisition of real property.
The motion carried unanimously.

Adjourn

With there being no more business to attend to, Commissioner Starnes made the motion to adjourn at 9:05 PM.

The motion carried unanimously.