**MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'**

**BRIEFING MEETING OF JUNE 3, 2025.**

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Briefing Meeting on June 3, 2025, in the Commission Chamber at 200 College Street in downtown Asheville, North Carolina at 3:00 p.m.

Present: Chair Amanda Edwards; Commissioner Terri Wells, Commissioner Al Whitesides; Commissioner Parker Sloan; Commissioner Jennifer Horton; Commissioner Drew Ball.

Absent: Vice-Chair Moore.

The following items were reviewed.

- Economic Update

Dan Gerlach, a Raleigh-based consultant presented findings from a business loss assessment commissioned by the Economic Development Partnership of NC following the storm Helen. He emphasized that Buncombe County was at the heart of the damage, with approximately 95% of the state's economic loss concentrated in 15 counties and highlighted three key impact areas: physical capital loss, revenue decline, and human capital disruption. The study used state sales tax data to estimate the economic impact, particularly in Q4 2024. Gerlach highlighted that over half of North Carolina's total economic loss in Q4 2024 occurred in Buncombe County and presented labor force and employment data showing that while the labor force remained stable, employment dropped sharply after the storm, with about 3,000 fewer jobs (a 2.5% decline) compared to the previous year. Though some recovery is evident, the county has not yet returned to pre-storm employment levels. Gerlach noted that while employment briefly rebounded during the winter, job recovery has stalled, with continued losses concentrated in the leisure and hospitality sector, down approximately 2,400 jobs year-over-year, or 8%. He emphasized the importance of economic diversification, as other sectors like education, health, and professional services have seen growth. Unemployment insurance claims surged from 262 in September to over 5,200 by November.

Investment Policy Update

Melissa Moore, Finance Director, provided an update on the proposed investment policy update. She advised that the proposed changes are to make language clearer throughout policy. For example, "Scope" throughout the policy will be referred to as purpose and removed procedural language from Delegation of Authority. More substantive adjustments include removing 5-year limit on investment types, covered under the Maximum Maturity section. Removed total portfolio percentage threshold from obligations under state of North Carolina, and deposits, savings, CD's; removed Bankers' Acceptance and added prohibited investments to include added stocks and cryptocurrencies. Removed Investment Pool section, governed by State Treasurer's office and Local Government Commission. Additionally, removed 5% total portfolio in any single issuer, this is covered by each investment type and Removed downgrade of security language as well as removed Performance Standards related to setting index as market benchmark. Moore advised that the next step would be for Board adoption at the June 17, 2025, meeting.

- Ferry Road Recommendation

E.B. Oddersol, Economic Development and Sarah Odio with DFI provided background information, including the timeline for the Ferry Rd. project. Odderstol provided guiding public interest for the property, the evaluation process, and the guidelines for the proposed MOU, noting that the proposals received provide important information on the development team, how they think, and what kind of partner they may be. The proposals help hold developers accountable prior to the development agreement and are inherently marketing documents. Proposals are NOT final designs or estimates and the development agreement will be with the master developer. Two proposals were in the final round for consideration and interviewed by County staff: 1) Lansing Melbourne Group; and 2) Urban Atlantic. Upon review, staff is recommended to enter an MOU based on qualifications and experience of the Master Development Partner; experience qualifying low-income households for homeownership Positive references from local governments and the ability to deliver the type and scale of development proposed. Odderstol explained that at the next meeting, the Board will vote on authorizing the County Manager to enter negotiations with the selected developer to develop a Memorandum of Understanding and noted the MOU is a nonbinding agreement outlining each party's responsibilities and establishing milestones before a Development Agreement can be executed.

- Continuum of Care Update

Lacy Hoyle, Homelessness Coordinator, provided the CoC update. She explained that the point in time (PIT) Count was conducted on January 28-29 in Buncombe County and all its municipalities. She said that in both 2025 and 2024 there were 270 emergencies sheltered accounted for in the PIT count. Hoyle also provided an update on the CoC activities, noting that the application process is currently underway to fill 4 Vacant CoC Board seats and has established new Workgroups including: Healthcare Workgroup and the Shelter Planning Workgroup CoC Board Actions. The CoC has also adopted a plan for Compensation of People with Lived & Living Experience of Homelessness, although funding sources have not been secured. Additionally, the CoC selected Goodwill Industries as Fiscal Agent. Lastly, Hoyle explained the strategic plan, which is structured around 4 objectives: 1. Decrease unsheltered homelessness 2. Increase exits from homelessness to permanent housing 3. Coordinate and expand homelessness prevention, diversion, and rapid rehousing 4. Build housing focused system capacity.

- Energy Conservation Grant

Jackie Hamstead provided background on the energy conservation grant for battery storage at 35 Woodfin. She explained that the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant is provided by the NC State Energy Office and the award is for $225,586 with no local match. The project includes design and installation of ~180 kWh BESS. She added that in the 2024 electrification feasibility study 35 Woodfin estimated a high ROI. The purpose of the project is to increase the County's energy use flexibility and minimize electricity demand charges. The lifetime estimate ~$589,000. The Board will vote on accepting the grant at the regular meeting and the project must be completed by December 2026.

**MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'**

**REGULAR MEETING OF JUNE 3, 2025.**

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Regular Meeting on June 3, 2025, in the Commission Chamber at 200 College Street in downtown Asheville, North Carolina at 3:00 p.m.

Present: Chair Amanda Edwards; Vice-Chair Martin Moore; Commissioner Terri Wells, Commissioner Al Whitesides; Commissioner Parker Sloan; Commissioner Jennifer Horton; Commissioner Drew Ball.

The following items were reviewed.

**Consent Agenda**

Commissioner Ball made the motion to amend the agenda to read the Proclamation after the Consent agenda and to approve the Consent agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Whitesides and carried unanimously.

1. Approval of the May 20, 2025, Combined Briefing and Regular Meeting Minutes
2. Approval of the April 2025 Tax Collection Report
3. Approval of Municipal Tax Collection Agreement Extensions
4. Resolution Approving Pyrotechnic Experts for Firework Displays
5. Budget Amendment for FY25 Soil and Water Conservation District Education Programs
6. Motion to Approve the FY2025-26 Juvenile Crime Prevention Council Annual Plan and Certification
7. Motion to accept the NC Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant

**Presentations**

1. Gun Violence Prevention Month Proclamation

Chair Edwards read the Proclamation to Regenia Herring, Hannah Legerton, Will Baxter, Tony Shivers, Deputy Secretary Lassiter and members of the PEACE team. They informed the Board that the Buncombe County Register of Deeds has recorded 44 death certificates that showed someone died by a gun in 2024, with the youngest decedent only 16 years old and the oldest 94 years old and encouraged everyone to recognize those impacted by gun violence, honor the lives lost to gun violence in Buncombe County, commit to reducing gun violence, and pledge to do all we can to keep firearms out of the wrong hands and encourage gun owners to commit to safely storing their guns.

**Public Comment**

Commissioner Moore made the motion to limit public comment to two minutes to allow for all signed up to have the opportunity to speak.

1. Sheriff Miller – requested the Board to consider public safety in the adoption of the budget
2. Pepi Acebo – requested to fund the BCS budget in full
3. Henry Wilson- support for school funding in full
4. April Wilson- support for school funding in full
5. Jim Fulton- support for school funding in full
6. Janet Burhoe-Jons- support for school funding in full
7. Lisa Pedersen- support for school funding in full
8. Carl Davis- support for school funding in full
9. Christina Mason- support for school funding in full
10. Mary Grandan= support for school funding in full
11. Claire Bailey- support for school funding in full
12. Maya McDermot- support for school funding in full
13. Kareryn Mclerea- support for school funding in full
14. Sadie Grogan- support for school funding in full
15. Kelly Spencer- support for school funding in full
16. Tommie Shimrock- support for school funding in full
17. Natalie Dorsey- support for school funding in full
18. Annie Wolfe- support for school funding in full
19. Brooke Schembri- support for school funding in full
20. Sammantha Aycock- support for school funding in full
21. Sonya Marcus – provided an update on I-26 coalition – thanked the Board for urging NCDOT to reconsider the I-26 plans.
22. LeeAnne Smith – NC school forum and support for school funding in full
23. Nathan Lesner- support for school funding in full
24. Andy Gardner - support for school funding in full
25. Katherine Harrison- support for school funding in full
26. Jason Gilmore- support for school funding in full
27. Kathleen Hurst- support for school funding in full
28. Michelle - support for school funding in full
29. Ms. Kelly- support for school funding in full
30. Amy- support for school funding in full

**Old Business**

**Consideration of the FY26 Budget Adoption**

John Hudson, Budget Director introduced Curt Euler, Interim County Attorney to guide the Board through General Statue 14-234.3 which states that "No public official shall knowingly participate in making or administering a contract, including the award of money in the form of a grant, loan, or other appropriation, with any nonprofit with which that public official is associated." Euler stated that staff has polled the Board of current non-profit memberships and

has prepared a motion for recusing Board members from voting where there is a potential conflict.

Hudson then provided a presentation that provided background information and explained that the proposed spending plan is for fiscal year 2026 (FY26), which runs from July 1, 2025-June 30, 2026. The proposed budget works to address challenges from post-Helene budget realities that include a loss of $11.4 million in revenues, the FY26 budget still prioritizes funding of Asheville City and Buncombe County school systems and A-B Tech Community College with $121.8 million. The budget's general fund comes in at $433.1 million with a tax rate of 54.66 cents per $100 of appraised value, an increase of 2.9 cents. He noted that education remains the largest function in the proposed budget making up 28% of the expenditures and that Commissioners are working hard to meet the challenges and diverse needs of our community while keeping the tax rate as low as possible.

He explained that in response to the loss of $11.4 million in revenues, the County has looked to find ways to reduce its costs with the following measures:

- Reduction of $4.6 million in County operating budgets
- Reduction of $7.5 million in salary budget accounting for potential vacancies, turnover, and staggering start dates
- Decrease of $4.6 million in discretionary community investments
- $1.7 million in debt service savings from debt refunding
- $446,767 reduction in the transportation fund
- No pay-go capital projects
- No FY26 debt service costs from new capital projects

Hudson noted other key elements of the proposed FY26 budget include: Asheville City Schools will get $2.4 million and Buncombe County Schools will get $8.5 million for school capital projects such as stadium repairs, roofing work, security upgrades, and more; $98.4 million for Public Safety for Emergency Medical Services, Fire Marshal, 911 Communications, the Sheriff's Office, Detention Center, community paramedics, firefighter training, Family Justice Center, and more; $96.6 million for Human Services supporting Medicaid, child support, foster care, septic and well permitting, the animal shelter, and more; $66 million for General Government that will provide support for property assessment and the 2026 general reappraisal, public engagement, general services and the fleet services portfolio, information technology, and more; $12.2 million for Cultural and Recreational services like libraries, preschool outreach, summer learning programming, parks, sports fields, recreation programming, and more; $10.8 million for Economic and Physical Development to ensure permitting and inspection work, allow for creation of a small area plan for the Swannanoa community, and other important efforts in Planning and Agriculture and Land Resources; $5.7 million for community investments in Early Childhood Education, Isaac Coleman grants, and supplemental aging funds among others; 3.09% COLA for full-time employees; and there are no new County positions with two reclassified positions: one recovery officer and one floodplain position in Planning.

Following the presentation, Chair Edwards asked about the Relative Funding effort – NC schools forum. Hudson explained that it's a model to look at tax revenues; however, counties collect revenues differently and therefore the data is based on assumptions and is not entirely accurate. Commissioner Wells asked about the property values, including the average rate of increase. Hudson explained that the natural growth and increase is about 3% without any change of tax rate. However, he noted that there was a 1.8% decrease this year.

Following discussion and in accordance with N.C. Stat. 14-234.3, Commissioner Whitesides moved to recuse Commissioner Edwards from voting on the Economic Development Coalition (EDC) grant due to the conflict of interest of being a member of the EDC Board. Commissioner Horton seconded the motion, and it was carried unanimously.

Commissioner Whitesides moved to approve the Economic Development appropriation as set forth in the FY26 budget. Commissioner Moore seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously with Chair Edwards recused from voting.

In accordance with N.C. Stat. 14-234.3, Commissioner Whitesides moved to recuse Commissioner Moore from voting on the Open Doores of Asheville appropriations due to the conflict of interest in being a member of Open Doors of Asheville. Commissioner Horton seconded the motion, and it was carried unanimously.

Commissioner Whitesides moved to approve the Open Doores appropriation as set forth in the FY26 budget. Commissioner Ball seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously with Commissioner Moore recused from voting.

In accordance with N.C. Stat. 14-234.3, Commissioner Whitesides moved to recuse Commissioner Moore from voting on the Arts AVL appropriations due to the conflict of interest in being a member of Arts AVL. Commissioner Horton seconded the motion, and it was carried unanimously.

Commissioner Whitesides moved to approve the Arts AVL appropriation as set forth in the FY26 budget. Commissioner Ball seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously with Commissioner Moore recused from voting.

In accordance with N.C. Stat. 14-234.3, Commissioner Whitesides moved to recuse Commissioner Sloan from voting on the VAYA Health appropriations due to the conflict of interest in being a member of Vaya Health. Commissioner Moore seconded the motion, and it was carried unanimously.

Commissioner Whitesides moved to approve the Vaya Health appropriation as set forth in the FY26 budget. Commissioner Horton seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously with Commissioner Sloan recused from voting.

**Proactively use Article 39 funds**

Commissioner Whitesides made the motion to approve the Resolution proactively approving the use of Article 39 funds should either or both SB131 or HB183 in the 2025 Legislative Session become law in NC. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Wells and carried unanimously. Commissioner Wells shared that the Board wholeheartedly supports not cutting the school's funding and restoring both BCS and ACS to the FY25 adopted budget levels because of the importance of strong public schools and that she was thankful for the legislative

delegation and school board members who worked together for this agreeable solution to get through an extremely challenging budget year.

**Annual Funds Budget Ordinance**

Commissioner Wells made the motion to adopt the annual funds budget ordinance with the addition of the ACS tax rate increase from 10.62 to 11 cents. Commissioner Whitesides seconded the motion, and it was opened for discussion.

Each of the Commissioners delivered a heartfelt and impassioned speech, underscoring their commitment to serving the county and upholding strong fiscal responsibility. They collectively emphasized the extraordinary difficulty of this year's budget process, describing it as the most challenging to date. The commissioners attributed this to the significant financial strain caused by Hurricane Helene, which has deeply impacted the County's resources and recovery efforts.

The Chair took a roll call vote which passed 5-2 with Commissioner's Sloan and Moore voting no.

**Capital Project Funds Budget Ordinance**

Commissioner Moore made the motion to adopt the Capital Project Funds Budget Ordinance. Commissioner Whitesides seconded the motion ang it was carried unanimously.

**Resolution Directing the Expenditure of Opioid Settlement Fund**

Commissioner Sloan made the motion to adopt the Resolution Directing the Expenditure of Opioid Settlement Fund. Commissioner Whitesides seconded the motion, and it was carried unanimously.

Following the budget votes, Chair Edwards provided closing remarks. She noted that this budget is only maintaining services, not increasing them and that the County must be prepared for the next disaster.

Commissioner Ball asked Dr. Jackson, BCS Superintendent, if through Article 39 funds would help to maintain the staff currently employed. Dr. Jackson stated that BCS has begun to receive some storm money and with fund balance and Article 39 funding, he believes the schools will be able to maintain current employment through the year, noting that these are one-time funds.

**New Business**

**CDBG Recovery Housing Program Additional Grant Funding Award**

Victoria Reichard provided background information on the CDBG Recovery Housing Program. She explained that in January of 2025, Buncombe County requested funds in addition to the $1,000,000 awarded from NC Commerce through the CDBG Recovery Housing Program (RHP) to support Asheville Buncombe Community Christian Ministries (ABCCM) in expanding Transformation Village by constructing a 4 story, 64-unit building with 32-units dedicated to women and mothers with children in recovery from substance use. The additional funds being awarded are $2,502,123 for a total grant award of $3,502,123.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to accept the additional funds and to approve the budget amendment. Commissioner Sloan seconded the motion, and it was carried unanimously.

**Board Appointments**

Commissioner Wells made the motion to reappoint Daniel Beerman; Deborah Oldt; Susan Schiemer; Eileen McMinn; and Melissa Harmon to the Home & Community Care Block Grant Advisory Committee. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Sloan and carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 7:45.