Caldwell County
North Carolina
Board of Commissioners Meeting

February 23, 2026 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
Shane Fox, County Manager
Dylan Laws, County Attorney
Iris Whitt, Deputy County Clerk
Tasha Brown, County Clerk

Call to Order
Chairman Church called the February 23, 2026, Board of Commissioners meeting to order at 6:01 PM.

Public Comment Period
Amber Moretz was the first to come to the podium. Ms. Moretz expressed concerns about an unpermitted motocross track in Happy Valley at the corner of Riverside Drive and Nubbin Creek Road. Ms. Moretz has concerns about the noise from the motorcycles. She stated the noise level measured 85 decimals. She stated the property was zoned for residential, but was being used for commercial use. A packet was provided by individuals with Ms. Moretz that had information supporting their concerns. Ms. Moretz requested a written response to the zoning, permitting and noise ordinance concerns within 30 days.

Sarah Walker was next to the podium. Ms. Walker stated she was a drug and peer support advocate. Ms. Walker is concerned that there are no emergency shelters currently in our county, and the warming shelter was closed.

Jake Benfield was next to the podium. Mr. Benfield is concerned with the trash along the roadways in the western part of the county. Mr. Benfield showed a video of a portion of Beecher Anderson Road. He stated that citizens had to pick up trash out of their yards. Mr. Benfield stated the trash has gotten worse over the last three years, and requests that more money be allocated for trash pickup.

Invocation
Pastor Dr. Josh Hughes from First Baptist Church Lenoir led the invocation for those in attendance.

Pledge of Allegiance
Vice-Chairman LaBrose led the Pledge of Allegiance for those in attendance.

Agenda Amendments from the Board, Manager & Public
There were no amendments to the agenda.
Commissioner LaBrose made a motion to accept the agenda as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

Agenda Items

1. **Appointment of Tasha Brown as Clerk to the Board**
   Chairman Church stated the first item on the agenda was the appointment of Clerk to the Board, Tasha Brown. He began by reading a biography about Tasha. Tasha was sworn in as Clerk to the Board by the Register of Deeds, Wayne Rash.

2. **Recognizing the Retirement of Leslie Griffin**
   Chairman Church read the resolution recognizing the retirement of Leslie Griffin, Library Director.

   Vice Chairman LaBrose made the motion to adopt the resolution.
   The motion carried unanimously.

3. **Ambulance Franchise with Surge Non-Emergency Medical Transport**
   Emergency Services Director Trevor Key came to the podium to present a medical transport franchise application.

   Chairman Church declared the public hearing open.

   Key presented the application for Healthcare Rides LLC, dba SURGE non-emergency medical transport for an ambulance franchise contract as required by GS 153A-250 and Chapter 7. Key explained that entities carrying stretchers must have an ambulance; North Carolina does not allow a stretcher van for transport. Surge currently has contracts within the county with Hospice and the Department of Social Services for wheelchair transport. Key then stated that this contract would alleviate and take stress off of County ambulances for stretcher transport for non-emergency medical reasons.

   Ryan Graff, owner of Healthcare Rides LLC, dba SURGE, came to the podium. Ryan explained the meaning of SURGE, (Safe, Urgent, Reliable, Efficient). He stated they are currently contracted with agencies for wheelchair transport and ambulatory services for doctor appointments, hospital discharges, and hospice. He stated they

would like to assist Caldwell EMS and contribute by providing convalescent services. He then stated a brief history of his experience and education with a focus on safety and smooth transport.

Commissioner Starnes asked Graff if they billed insurance or would bill the County. Mr. Graff said no, it is private pay. If it is an insurance-related trip, they would still contact the County. When there is an increase in call volume, that is where Graff is hoping to assist.

Commissioner Starnes then asked if they would be doing nursing home transport only. Graff replied yes, nursing homes, hospice, hospitals, doctor appointments.

Commissioner Potter asked how many ambulances they currently have. Graff responded two with stretcher transport.

Commissioner Potter then added to clarify that we would be adding their services because the State requires an ambulance to take the stretcher patients. Mr. Key then added there would be no emergency treatment. The ambulance is convalescent, including only basic items required for transport, i.e.oxygen.

Chairman Church noted that SURGE is staffed with EMT personnel as he read in the contract. Mr. Key confirmed and stated that a minimum of 2 EMT personnel are required in an ambulance.

Vice Chairman LaBrose asked Graff if he currently knew the limit of liability insurance he has on his vehicles. Graff responded $1.5 million.

Chairman Church stated the liability insurance was a question he had as well. He then asked a question of County Manager Shane Fox to verify that the insurance limits provided would be sufficient coverage. Fox responded yes and this had been shared with the County Attorney as standard procedure.

Commissioner Potter asked Fox if the County Attorney had reviewed the contract. Fox said yes. County Attorney Dylan Laws then confirmed that they had reviewed the contract.

Vice Chairman LaBrose then noted that the Certificate of Insurance was dated 10/24 and asked if Graff could provide a more current one. Graff responded yes.

No one signed up to speak during the public hearing. With that, Chairman Church closed the Public Hearing.

Commissioner Starnes made a motion to adopt the ambulance franchise with Surge Non-Emergency medical transport.
The motion carried unanimously.

4. Local Jobs Retention Grant for Bakers Waste Equipment, LLC

Economic Development Director Ashley Bolick came to the podium to present a local jobs retention grant. Chairman Church opened the public hearing. Ms. Bolick presented the request for Board approval of a Local Jobs Retention Grant for Bakers Waste Equipment, LLC. She stated that Iron Crest is a rapidly growing manufacturer of commercial trash containers. Over the past two years, the company has evaluated expansion and acquisition opportunities. The Company has acquired an existing business located at 1808 Norwood St SW in Lenoir that was at risk of closure. The approximately $10 million plus investment includes acquisition of the business, retooling equipment, and retraining the existing workforce. As a result of this investment, 150 plus existing jobs at the Lenoir facility will be retained with an anticipated addition of 12 new positions over the next three to five years. The projected average annual wage is approximately $60,000. The Company will also offer health insurance and cover more than 50% of the premium. Staff recommends approval of the Local Jobs Retention Grant in the amount of $2,000 per retained job for up to 150 jobs, subject to a one-year retention period. Grant payments will be made in quarterly increments and are contingent upon the Company maintaining at least 90% or 135 of committed jobs, in accordance with the terms of the grant agreement. If the Company retains fewer than 150 jobs but not less than 90% or 135 of such jobs for the full retention period, the final grant payment shall be reduced on a per-job basis at the rate of $2,000 for each job not retained. This project has been reviewed and recommended for approval by the Caldwell County Economic Development Advisory Committee.

Ms Bolick invited Kate Crowley and Jason Staubs to the podium. Ms Crowley of Cap Civic is the site selector for the project. Jason Staubs is the general manager for Bakers Waste Equipment, LLC. Ms Crowley spoke about the selection process for the site, saying it was very clear that Lenoir was the right home for Iron Crest and Bakers Waste. Mr. Staubs said he was pleased to see Bakers Waste come full circle.

Commissioner Potter expressed gratitude to them for investing in Caldwell County siting a long relationship between Bakers Waste and the County.

Chairman Church stated that Ms. Crowley and Mr. Staubs were the only two signed up for the public hearing. With this, Chairman Church closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Potter made a motion to approve the Local Jobs Retention Grant for Bakers Waste Equipment, LLC.
The motion carried unanimously.

5. Sales Tax Reinvestment Fund Request for Economic Development

Economic Development Director Ashley Bolick remained at the podium to present a Sales Tax Reinvestment Fund Request for Economic Development. Chairman Church opened the public hearing, but there were no individuals signed up to speak. Ms. Bolick presented the request for a distribution from the sales tax reinvestment fund. She then stated that staff recommended the purchase of 15.38 acres to support the development of a new industrial building or industrial park at 4016 Lower Cedar Valley Road with the expenditure of $552,000 from the Sales Tax Reinvestment Fund to Vista Ventures Development, Inc. Bolick said in April 2025, Caldwell county and Vista Ventures, a nonprofit corporation, entered into an economic development agreement to promote and improve economic development for the benefit of Caldwell County's citizens. She stated this request would enable the County to advance strategic economic development initiatives and position the site for future projects, creating jobs for residents and increasing the property tax base. The requested $552,000 will be used to cover acquisition costs, including the purchase price, closing costs, and required due diligence. Bolick then stated the negotiated property purchase price is $525,000 and Vista Ventures Development, Inc. will be responsible for all closing costs associated with the transaction. The $27,000 in additional funds above the purchase price will be used for the closing costs and due diligence. Bolick then stated the contract for purchase would include several conditions to protect the County's interests. This property is located within the Town of Sawmills ETJ. She then thanked Chase Winebarger from the Town of Sawmills for attending and showing support for the project. Bolick added the property must receive rezoning approval from the Town of Sawmills, changing the current zoning classification from R-15 to General Manufacturing. In addition, the proposed project area must successfully pass a compaction test performed by a certified third party. She stated they also wanted to update the survey as part of the due diligence and the only remaining item to be finalized is the closing date. The seller requests approximately 60 days from the signing of an agreement, which would be approximately April 30th for closing. Bolick said funds have been budgeted and are available in the Sales Tax Reinvestment Fund.

Commissioner Potter asked about including the request for survey, asking if that was referring to the NCDOT project and exactly what that would entail. Potter then asked for confirmation that the NCDOT had already bought that property. Bolick replied yes, that is correct.

Chairman Church then declared the public hearing closed.

Commissioner Branch then made a motion to approve the request for the Sales Tax Reinvestment Request for Economic Development for the Cedar Valley Road property. The motion carried unanimously.

Consent

Chairman Church turned the meeting to County Manager Shane Fox to present the Consent Agenda.

6. Budget Revision - Airport Utilities Study Grant

This budget revision is an Airport Utilities Study Grant in the amount of $50,000. This is fully grant funded no local match is required.

7. Budget Revision - Health Department

This budget revision is an agreement addendum that increases funds for WIC by $3,736.00. This is a flow thru of funds, no County money is utilized.

8. Budget Revision and Capital Project Ordinance for Wilson Creek Visitor Center Repairs and Renovations Grant

This budget revision and capital project ordinance allows state OSBM grant funds in the amount of $1,183,347 to be spent on repairs and renovations needed after Hurricane Helene at the Wilson Creek Visitor Center.This is fully grant funded and no local match is required.

9. Budget Revision and Project Ordinance for Collettsville Convenience Site Water Line Extension

This budget revision and project ordinance allows state OSBM grant funds in the amount of $323,164 to be spent for the Collettsville Convenience Site Water Line Extension. This is fully grant funded, and no local match is required.

10. Budget Revision - Animal Care and Enforcement Donated Funds

The Animal Care and Enforcement department received a generous donation of $10,000. This budget revision allows those funds to be spent with $5,000 going towards free adoptions and $5,000 going towards supplies.

11. UnderCover Vehicle Trade

This budget revision in the amount of $6,550 allows the Sheriff's Office to trade in an old undercover vehicle and purchase a new one. This revision is funded by asset seizure funds and requires no local funds.

12. Surplus Property-Service Weapon for Jerry Simmons

This Resolution has been requested by the Sheriff's Office in honor of Jerry Simmons, who has retired after 20-plus years of service at the department. Awarding his badge and service weapon to him.

13. IVC Transport Agreement Approval

The Sheriff's Office requested approval of the IVC Transport Agreement. This agreement is to allow a third party to provide IVC transport.

14. Appointments to Board of Equalization and Review

William "BJ" Fore (Chairman), Max Jeff Roland, Phil Case, Bob Price, Thomas Larry Andrews, Wayne Parson, Donna McCall, and Mitchell Laws were appointed to the Board of Equalization and Review.

15. Transportation Agreement for Recovery Court Participants

Emergency Services submitted a Transportation Agreement for Recovery Court Participants. The agreement is between Caldwell County and The Cognitive Connection to provide transportation to Recovery Court participants that do not have transportation to court and recovery appointments. This agreement will have no impact on the budget and current year budgeted opiod settlement funds will be used as authorized.

16. EDA Disaster Grant Program Application

Economic Development requested approval to proceed with the application process for the EDA Disaster Grant Program. If received, the monies would be utilized to help pay for the potential sewer line project to expand from Gamewell to the Airport.

17. Reappointment of Town of Sawmills ETJ Planning Member

A recommendation from the Town of Sawmills for the reappointment of Jeff Plummer as the Town of Sawmills ETJ Planning Board Member.

18. NC Governor's Crime Commission— Court Based Crisis Programming Grant

The Sheriff's Office is seeking consent to apply for the NC Governor's Crime Commission - Court Based Crisis Programming Grant. This grant will help expand capacity of drug treatment court, with a two-year grant cycle with the potential of receiving $500,000 for the lifespan of the grant.

19. Approval of Minutes from January 29, 2026, Board of Commissioners Meeting

Approval of the January 29, 2026, Board of Commissioners Meeting minutes was requested.

Vice Chair LaBrose made a motion to adopt the Consent Agenda as presented.
The motion carried unanimously.

Closed Session

20. Closed Session Pursuant to NCGS 143-318.11(a)(4) and NCGS 143-318.11(a)(6)

Chairman Church made the motion to enter into closed session pursuant to NCGS 143-318.11(a)(4) and NCGS 143-318.11(a)(6) for discussion of a personnel matter and Economic Development discussion of a potential project at 7:06 PM.
The motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Potter made the motion to exit closed session at 8:06 PM The motion carried unanimously.

Adjourn
Chairman Church made the motion to return to Open Session at 8:07 PM.
The motion carried unanimously.

County Manager Shane Fox presented a recommendation to appoint Janet Fore as the new Library Director.

Chairman Church made a motion to approve Fore as the Library Director.
The motion carried unanimously.

With there being no more business to attend to. Commissioner Donnie Potter made the motion to adjourn at 8:09 PM.
The motion carried unanimously.