Caldwell County
North Carolina
Board of Commissioners Meeting

May 18, 2026, at 6:00 PM
City-County Chambers
905 West Avenue NW, Lenoir

MINUTES

Attendance

Mike LaBrose, Vice Chairman
Jeff Branch, Commissioner
Donnie Potter, Commissioner
Patrick Starnes, Commissioner
Shane Fox, County Manager
William Sparks, County Attorney
Tasha Brown, Clerk to the Board

Call to Order
Vice Chairman Mike LaBrose called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Public Comment Period

Marlese Te Groen spoke out against Google and Data Centers. She inquired about the water restrictions for the Google Data Center. She stated her concern for water and electricity utilization. She added that she believes Google gives very little to the community in return.

Invocation
Vice Chairman, Mike LaBrose led the invocation for those in attendance.

Pledge of Allegiance
Commissioner Patrick Starnes led the Pledge of Allegiance for those in attendance.

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

DRAFT

Agenda Items

1. Communities In Schools

Keith Hindman, Executive Director, Charmion Frizsell and Eddie Peoples, Social Workers, came to the podium and spoke about the Annual Impact report for CIS. Hindman stated that for the second year in a row CIS has a 100% graduation rate. Mr. Hindman said that Communities in Schools serve seven Caldwell County Schools with 487 students receiving CISCC services and 4,397 students receiving whole school services. He then added the future plans for 46 graduates in the program with 24 continuing education at Community Colleges, 1 serving in the Military, 6 attending 4 year college with one of those students receiving a Coffey Scholarship to attend NC State and study Engineering as a first generation College student, 14 entering the workforce, 1 attending Seminary School, and 1 attending the Universal Technical Institute. Hindman added the program is serving approximately 11% daily that encounter the program. He stated that Google provided CIS with $100,000 this year for the program. These funds were utilized to help students who needed reliable internet or laptops for training, to assist financial hurdles for the inability to afford specialized tools, Certifications, or work attire. They also assisted with transportation failures and housing stability that derail career training, $32,000 went directly to the citizens of Caldwell County to assist.

Mr. Peoples, Social Worker at William Lenoir, Gamewell Middle, Hibriten and West Caldwell, came to the podium next. Mr. Peoples highlighted a Community Service effort at William Lenoir Middle School; students collected over 500 boxes of cereal to be donated to Yokefellow to then be distributed to families in the County to help with food insufficiencies. Peoples then spoke about another Community Outreach Program where they partner with the Animal Shelter. He then recognized Richard Gilliland and his staff for the work they do and the help they provide. The 7th grade CISCC Middle School students partner with the Caldwell Animal Enforcement Center to help get a better understanding of taking care of pets. He added that over 300 7th grade students have been through the program and have learned a better understanding of what pets' needs are and how to properly care for them. Mr. Peoples then spoke about another Community Service Project that all CISCC Middle School Sites partner with the Senior Center of Caldwell County. They can participate in hands-on activities to help them gain a deeper understanding of empathy. He stated that a lot of kids are being raised by older adults. He added that this program gives kids a new perspective on what their elders may be dealing with and they even learned they needed to be more patient and kinder.

Charmion Frizsell, Social Worker at Granite Falls Middle, Hudson Middle, and South Caldwell High School was next to the podium. Ms. Frizsell spoke about Workforce development mentioning that Google gave $30,000 toward career enhancement. She noted that the program focuses on the 3 E's (Employment, Enlistment, or Enrollment). The program also focuses on targeted pathways and helps them navigate to start building a plan for their future. All 9th grade CISCC students attend CCC&TI and spend an entire day on a personalized tour. Google has provided over $20k for enhancement of supplies for those specialized classrooms and students.

Mr. People's then spoke about "Real Skills" development in all CISCC sites. He then gave an example of an exercise to develop critical thinking skills and to get help when they need it.
Frizsell then spoke about character building. She said that CISCC students participate in weekly character education lessons and are recognized each month.
Mr. Hindman wanted to highlight positive things students are doing. He also mentioned the importance of mentors. He stated that 105 mentors come into the School system every week to have conversations and make connections with students and show adults that care. Bernhardt provided 46 mentors. He then spoke about how you can get involved and become a mentor adding that it makes a difference.
Vice Chairman Labrose stated that he appreciates everything Hindman and his team does. Adding that it is a very vital program to our school system that provides an extra umph that the students don't always get at home.
Commissioner Potter thanked them for what they do and stated that they have taken CIS to a different level. He added that he doesn't think people understand what is done outside of the education system to support families. Hindman added that there are many community partners including Smokey Mountain Furniture that have helped provide furniture for those students in need.
Commissioner Starnes thanked them for their service and time.

Vice Chairman LaBrose mentioned the absence of Chairman Randy Church from the meeting. He added that Church sent his regrets for not being in attendance and that the scheduling of time for himself and his family are the reason for his absence.

2. Hope for Caldwell

Hope Flanagan came to the podium to present for Hope for Caldwell. Ms. Flanagan stated that she is a public health educator at the Health Department. She added that one project they lead to help educate the public is the Hope for Caldwell Coalition. This initiative was formed in 2023 with the goal to prevent substance abuse. Through the coalition an Annual Fentanyl Awareness Challenge is hosted for high school students. This initiative serves as a creative way for these students to educate their peers on the risks of fentanyl use. She said that funding for this program is provided by Vaya Health and Bernhardt Furniture. With their support they were able to give the students a monetary prize and further develop their projects to be introduced into the community. Ms. Flanagan then recognized two winning participants. In first place, Gavin Keys, a sophomore at Hibriten High School. Gavin developed a video to be distributed across multiple social media and online platforms to spread awareness. Ms. Flanagan then played the video for those in attendance. She then recognized the second-place winner, Lalana Thongkai, a freshman at South Caldwell High School. Lalana developed a poster to be distributed in local schools and online with the intent of being engaging and informative. Ms. Flanagan then presented the poster to those in attendance. She commended them both for the hard work and dedication they put into this project. Both students then stood for applause. Ms. Flanagan then recognized several Coalition members that were in attendance and thanked them for their dedication.

Vice Chairman LaBrose stated that he thought it was wonderful what this program has been able to do.
Commissioner Potter then thanked the students and stated that he was proud of them for stepping up and making a difference.
The Commissioners then presented the two students with a Caldwell County challenge coin as a token of appreciation for what they have done.

3. EMS Week 2026 Proclamation

Trevor Key, Emergency Services Director came to the podium along with several EMS employees. Key stated that Caldwell County is blessed to have the best and spoke highly of the staff. Key said that there are over 400 credentialed EMS from fire departments, first responders, to our EMS and paramedics in Caldwell County. He then thanked the Commissioners for their support.
Commissioner Potter then thanked the EMS department for all that they do.
Vice Chairman LaBrose then read Proclamation 06-2026 proclaiming the week of May 17th – May 23rd, 2026, Emergency Medical Services Week in Caldwell County.
Commissioner Starnes made a motion to adopt the Proclamation as read.
The motion carried unanimously.

4. Older Americans Month 2026 Proclamation

Brittani Coffey, Adult Protective Services Social Worker, came to the podium. She stated that for the last fifty-five years we have honored Seniors in our community in the month of May with the Celebration of Life Event. She stated that this year's event was held on May 15th with over 263 attendees, 22 vendors, and our oldest citizen in attendance was 103 years old. Ms. Coffey then thanked Commissioner Potter and County Manager Fox for attending the event and serving food and supporting DSS.
Vice Chairman LaBrose then read Proclamation 07-2026 proclaiming May 2026 as Older Americans Month in Caldwell County.
Commissioner Branch made a motion to adopt the Proclamation as read.
The motion carried unanimously
Commissioner Potter thanked Ms. Coffey for the tremendous job that was done for the Celebration of Life event. He added that the attendees were very appreciative and grateful for the hard work that went into the event. He then thanked the sponsors for paying for this event and said no county dollars were used to pay for this event.

5. Caldwell Chamber of Commerce Update

Bryan Moore, President and CEO of the Caldwell County Chamber, came to the podium. He stated that the Caldwell Chamber is a very dedicated, business-minded organization and he is excited to share a two-part presentation. Mr. Moore then read a certificate he presented for Building Bridges to Strengthen local business. He said on behalf of The Chamber of Commerce of Caldwell County thank you for partnering with us, the Chamber recognizes each one of you. Moore then handed a certificate to each commissioner and the County Manager. He stated the Chamber is doing this will all municipalities promoting

advocacy. Moore then handed out paper copies of the presentation to each commissioner. Moore said that many are aware of the work the Chamber does and many are aware of the work they do on behalf of Tourism for Caldwell County. He then spoke about Tourisms contribution to the economic engine and about the big picture. He added that tourism is about more than just managing visitors; adding that it is a vital economic engine that serves as the "front porch" of community development. Moore said that when executed well, we can evolve from just a "pass-through" county on US 321 and transition into a designated "Basecamp for Adventure, Exploration & Lasting Experiential Visits". Moore added that when coupled with an improved "Quality of Life Initiatives", a strong Tourism effort would help market our assets, drive visits, while promoting our long list of assets to visitors and residents while helping to erase the "There's nothing to do here mentality." He said that some neighboring counties that are like us in many ways are Wilkes and Burke Counties, he added that they are ahead of us regarding Tourism efforts and he would like for Caldwell to catch up. He stated his goal as we move into future implementation of a plan to market and review the assets in our community. Finalize funding sources put together with tourism funds that is based on a bill that was written in 1987, hiring a dedicated tourism director to drive tourism in the right way in our community, and elevating marketing efforts such as the Explore Caldwell website. He then looked at a few examples of success in neighboring counties including MerleFest and Nascar in Wilkes County that are profiting well and seeing great success. Burke County has three people in office to bring tourism to their area. They are promoting trails, local areas and restaurants. McDowell County has done a great job with their branding efforts and is seeing great success. Moore added they believe it is also about responsibility – adding that a Tourism Manager would be able to build relationships and promote events, businesses, and restaurants. Moore stated they would like to move forward, however they need funding due to the funding being based on the bill written in 1987. He added that experience – is an important part of the economic engine. We need the driver to drive Caldwell County Tourism to the next level and manage the work. Moore then showed a graph with occupancy tax trends and growth from 2019 ($139,971) through 2025 ($362,051). He then showed detailed local efforts for a proposed tourism manager. Moore suggested adjusting admin fees as they have not increased the fixed fee since he has been with the Chamber.

Vice Chairman LaBrose asked if he had spoken with the County Manager.

Moore replied, "Yes and a couple of staff members.

Vice Chairman LaBrose stated his opinion is let's go.

Commissioner Potter said that he appreciated the certificate and acknowledgement. He added that he feels Mr. Moore is on the right track with his ideas for tourism.

Commissioner Starnes thanked Mr. Moore for his time.

Consent

Vice Chairman LaBrose then turned the meeting over to County Manager, Shane Fox to present the Consent Agenda.

6. **Budget Revision - Airport Due Diligence Grant Addition**

This budget revision is a Golden Leaf Foundation grant for the sewer project at the airport. This grant is in the amount of $26,490 and will be used for due diligence for the project. No local match is required.

7. **Budget Revision EDC REDO Membership**
This budget revision is a $1,500 grant through Blue Ridge Energy to allow the County to join the Northwestern NC Regional Economic Development Organization (REDO). No local match is required.

8. **NC Department of Commerce Building Reuse Grant App P. Pillar**
This is a request to apply for the NC Department of Commerce Reuse Grant for Project Pillar to expand and renovate an existing facility. The maximum amount for the grant is $500,000, which would require a 5% local match ($25,000) if awarded. This match would come from the Sales Tax Reinvestment Fund and is already budgeted.

9. **Reappointment of Dale Hamby to the CCC&TI Board of Trustees**
Dale Hamby, current member seeking reappointment to serve on the CCC&TI Board of Trustees for a four year term expiring June 30, 2030.

10. **Fireworks Application- Village of Cedar Rock**
The Village of Cedar Rock is requesting approval of a firework application to be conducted on July 5th located at 2065 Cedar Rock Estates Drive at the Cedar Rock Country Club.

11. **Approval of Regular and Closed Session Minutes from April 27, 2026, Board of Commissioners Meeting and May 6, 2026, Board of Commissioners Special Meeting**
Approval of April 27th Board of Commissioners Regular and Closed Session Meeting Minutes and May 6th Board of Commissioners Special Meeting Minutes were requested.

Commissioner Starnes made a motion to accept the Consent Agenda as written. The motion carried unanimously.

Adjourn
Commissioner Potter made the motion to adjourn at 7:02 PM.
The motion carried unanimously.

DRAFT

BK 2165 PG 332 - 332 (1)
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05/19/2026 08:46:17 AM

Fee $0.00
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Caldwell County North Carolina
Wayne L. Rash, Register of Deeds

PROCLAMATION

06-2026

EMS Week 2026

To designate the Week of May 17-23, 2026, as Emergency Medical Services Week (EMS Week).

WHEREAS, emergency medical services is a vital public service; and

WHEREAS, the members of emergency medical services teams are ready to provide lifesaving care to those in need 24 hours a day, seven days a week; and

WHEREAS, access to quality emergency care dramatically improves the survival and recovery rate of those who experience sudden illness or injury; and

WHEREAS, emergency medical services fills healthcare gaps by providing important, out-of-hospital care, including preventative medicine, follow-up care, and access to telemedicine; and

WHEREAS, the emergency medical services system consists of first responders, emergency medical technicians, paramedics, emergency medical dispatchers, firefighters, police officers, educators, administrators, pre-hospital nurses, emergency nurses, emergency physicians, trained members of the public, and other out of hospital medical care providers; and

WHEREAS, the members of emergency medical services teams, whether career or volunteer, engage in thousands of hours of specialized training and continuing education to enhance their lifesaving skills; and

WHEREAS, it is appropriate to recognize the value and the accomplishments of emergency medical services providers by designating the Emergency Medical Services Week; now

Therefore, Be It Resolved that the Board of Commissioners of Caldwell County declares the week of May 17 - 23, 2026, as EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES WEEK in Caldwell County, in honor of the men and women whose diligence and professionalism keep our county and citizens safe

Adopted this 18th day of May 2026.

Mike LaBrose, Vice Chairman of the Board
Caldwell County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

Tasha Brown
Caldwell County Clerk to the Board of Commissioners

BK 2165 PG 333 - 334 (2)
This document presented and filed:
05/19/2026 08:46:18 AM

Fee $0.00
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Caldwell County North Carolina
Wayne L. Rash, Register of Deeds

OLDER AMERICANS MONTH
CHAMPION YOUR HEALTH: MAY 2026

PROCLAMATION

07-2026

Older Americans Month 2026

WHEREAS, May is Older Americans Month, a time for us to recognize and honor Caldwell County's older adults and their immense influence on every facet of American society; and

WHEREAS, older Americans have built the foundations of our communities through their dedication, wisdom, and lifelong contributions to family, work, and civic life; and

WHEREAS, the strength and resilience of our nation depend on honoring the experiences, talents, and achievements of older adults, while ensuring they remain valued, included, and supported members of society; and

WHEREAS, communities thrive when people of all ages are connected, engaged, and empowered to share their knowledge and skills across generations; and

WHEREAS, it is essential to reaffirm our commitment to promoting the health, independence, and dignity of older adults, and to eliminating barriers that prevent their full participation in community life; and

WHEREAS, Older Americans Month provides an opportunity to recognize the diverse contributions of older adults and to highlight the importance of fostering age-friendly communities that respect and celebrate individuals at every stage of life; and

WHEREAS, our community celebrates their achievements, learns from their experiences, and works together to ensure that every older adult is supported, respected, and empowered to continue making valuable contributions to our society.

Now, therefore, we the Caldwell County Board of Commissioners do hereby proclaim May 2026 as Older Americans Month. This year's theme, "Champion Your Health," emphasizes focus on prevention, wellness, and self-advocacy, encouraging older adults to take an active role in managing their physical, emotional, and social well-being.

We call upon all residents to join us in recognizing the contributions of our older citizens and promoting programs and activities that foster connection, social well-being and support for older adults.

Adopted this the 18th day of May 2026.

Mike LaBrose, Vice Chairman
Caldwell County Board of Commissioners

Attest:

Tasha Brown
Caldwell County Clerk to the Board of Commissioners