Caldwell County
North Carolina
Board of Commissioners Meeting

July 27, 2026, at 6:00 PM
City-County Chambers
905 West Avenue NW, Lenoir

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MINUTES

Attendance

Randy Church, Chairman
Mike LaBrose, Vice Chairman
Jeff Branch, Commissioner
Donnie Potter, Commissioner
Patrick Starnes, Commissioner
Shane Fox, County Manager
Dylan Laws, County Attorney
Tasha Brown, Clerk to the Board

Call to Order

Chairman Randy T. Church called the July 27, 2026, Board of Commissioners meeting to order at 6:00 PM and welcomed those in attendance.

Public Comment Period

Faith Naff came to the podium to speak on the potential folding of the Social Services and Health Board governance. Chairman Church then stated that Ms. Naff would be able to speak on that topic during the public hearing portion. She then left the podium to be recognized during the public hearing to speak.

Sandra Salazar came to the podium next to speak. Ms. Salazar stated that she is a concerned citizen, concerned for herself, her family, and the immigrant community. She stated the operation at Wilsons Creek placed families at risk, caused fear, and limited access to recreational spaces for immigrant families. She added that she has visited Wilsons Creek for 25 years and has felt safe until yesterday. Ms. Salazar said that Public Safety should include ensuring that everyone can feel safe and enjoy a public place. She added that she witnessed the event from beginning to end and she believes the way the operation was done was questionable. She stated that she had given the

Sheriff the opportunity to come forward and speak with her and he refused, so she is filing an unofficial complaint. She has many questions that are unanswered.

Ginny Romero was next to the podium. She stated that she represents the Latino Community in Caldwell, Catawba, Burke and Alexander Counties. Ms. Romero stated that she went to the Sheriff's Department to get clarification on a few questions concerning the operation at Wilsons Creek. She said that they did not get their questions answered. She then asked the Board to help get answers to the questions. Chairman Church then said that he had no idea ICE was coming adding that it is not asked of them if they can come, It's a federal agency on federal property. Church added that we do have officers that are at Wilsons Creek every weekend. He added that he was sure the County officers were there and pulled in to assist the federal agency. She stated that the questions she wanted answers to were how many people were detained, how many detained have a criminal history, how many children were detained and how many families were affected. Ms. Romero then asked if their community was safe in Caldwell County. Chairman Church stated that Caldwell County is a safe place for all. He added that they appreciate everyone who lives and works in Caldwell County.

Diane Blanton and Tom Blanton were called to the podium next. They both stated they wanted to speak during the public hearing for the Social Services and Health Board. Chairman Church noted that he would call them to speak during the public hearing.

Meredith Maiken was next to the podium. She spoke about the Wilsons Creek ICE operation. She stated that as someone who recreates at Wilsons Creek, she wanted to be sure that she as well as anyone else recreating there would be safe. Chairman Church stated that the County spends $300,000 annually to cover law enforcement at Wilsons Creek. Ms. Maiken said that the resources they provide are appreciated. She then stated a few questions she would like answers for; where were the detainees taken, what agencies are Caldwell County coordinating with for arrest or detention of immigrants, what actions is Caldwell County taking to comply with Executive Orders 14411 and or 14288.

Erin Kizer came to the podium to speak on the Wilson Creek operation. She stated that she is a frequent user of that recreation space. She added that she felt the conditions during the operation were unsafe and she questions the judgement in doing that on a Sunday when multiple families are recreating. She added that she respects what the law enforcement agencies need to do but did not think it was the safest time to be enforced during a heavy use time with many families recreating. She added that this is not just a Latino issue but an entire community issue.

Jenna Grayson was next to the podium to speak. She stated that she appreciated the Board creating a space for the public to speak. Ms. Grayson said that she works in economic development, and she feels a welcoming community is more than a friendly neighbor it is also an economic driver. She encouraged the Board to investigate this operation at Wilsons Creek and continue to ask questions to find out if things were done correctly and if not, how can we correct that. Ms. Grayson stated she is a regular citizen, mom and foster mom and the idea that her kids would have been at Wilsons Creek yesterday when this was happening would have been very scary.

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Steve Huntley came to the podium to speak. Huntley stated that he has an extreme concern of MAGA taking over this county. Mr. Huntley spoke about the ICE operation at Wilsons Creek, stating that it appeared to him they sent forest rangers from Texas. He stated he would like to see the Board call the Sheriff and get the citizens' questions answered. Huntley then stated that he would like to ask the Sheriff If he would exchange him for 10 children under 10 and everyone else who will stand up, adding that he did not want to see children in prison. Several crowd members stood up.

Charles Senf came to the podium next to speak. Mr. Senf stated that he was an anchor baby, his mom came here from another country. He stated that he finds what is going on in this nation deplorable. Mr. Senf said that he hears excuses of it's not my job, it's the federal government's job, adding that this board is supposed to represent us at the state level and local level. Senf then said that the sign in the chambers should be moved to the back wall for members to see as citizens come before them, In God We Trust. He added that we are supposed to have a government that protects all religions. He added that he sang red, yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight from a young age, and this country needs to stand up for the principles that brought this nation together. He added that if the Sheriff's Department is arresting people you should know about it. If the sheriff is not accountable to you, and the only time we can make him accountable is during an election, then we need to do that when another election comes.

Tyler Nichols came to the podium and spoke about organizing a river safety day at Wilsons Creek. Mr. Nichols stated that he has organized a No Bad Days cookout for three years, to bring the community together and feed everybody at Wilsons Creek. He mentioned that moving forward he would like to coordinate a river safety day, mentioning that unfortunately every year people lose their lives, or get hurt at Wilson Creek. He said his goal is to have qualified individuals there to educate people. Nichols mentioned that he has contacted the Forestry Service, and they said he can hold the event however he needs to file a permit, and he is awaiting a call from the permit office. He then stated a list of people who are willing to help including a rescue 3 swift water rescue technician, a swift water paramedic, a fire training officer, CPR and stop the bleed instructor, certified diver, survival swim instructor, emergency and trauma nurse, and a current lifeguard.

Leonardo Chumbimuni came to the podium and spoke about the ICE operation at Wilsons Creek. Mr. Chumbimuni read a scripture verse. He then stated that saying you have no idea what is going on is unacceptable. He added that he is a resident of Caldwell County and was born and raised here and he must live in fear of his family being separated. He then said that the County Sheriff signed the 287G Voluntary agreement before the state required it. He added that immigration law is just paper, and he believes no family needs to be separated because of it. He stated that to him common sense is welcoming community, honoring community and anyone can choose to make Caldwell County their home.

Invocation

Chairman Randy Church led the invocation for those in attendance and watching from home.

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Pledge of Allegiance

Commissioner Jeff Branch led the Pledge of Allegiance for those in attendance and watching from home.

Agenda Amendments from the Board, Manager & Public Agenda Items

There were no amendments to the agenda.
Commissioner Potter made a motion to approve the agenda as presented.
The motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Church made a statement that he has empathy for those who have spoken tonight and he thanked them for coming and being a part of the meeting. He then spoke about livestreaming meetings on YouTube. Church said after thoughtful discussion and hearing from many citizens over the past few weeks, the board has listened to the concerns, and the board has decided to resume the livestream on YouTube. Chairman Church added that livestreaming gives every citizen the opportunity to engage. Chairman Church then asked for everyone to watch the entire meeting adding that a quick snippet on social media rarely covers the entire meeting and the only way to understand is to see for yourself and come to your own conclusion. He stated that the board cares deeply about this county and the citizens they serve and take that responsibility seriously. He then thanked the public for continued interest and feedback and stated they remain diligent to serve Caldwell County in an open and transparent manner.

Agenda Items

1. **2025 Tax Collectors Settlement and 2026 Charge to Tax Collector**

Tax Administrator, Josh Angle came to the podium and presented the 2025 Tax Collectors Settlement in accordance with N.C.G.S. 105-373(a). Mr. Angle stated that the total settlement for outstanding 2025 Real & Personal Property Taxes is $1,344,589.70. He added that a list of the people owning real property with unpaid 2025 taxes are available at the Caldwell County Tax Department. Angle then requested this settlement be accepted and the 2025 taxes be recharged to the tax collector. Mr. Angle then stated the second item in accordance with N.C.G.S. 105-321 & 352, requesting the authorization to collect the 2026 taxes. He stated that such taxes would be declared to be a first lien on all real property with the respective taxpayers in the County of Caldwell.
Chairman Church then said after hearing the request of the Tax Administrator what the pleasure of the board was.
Commissioner Branch made a motion to adopt the 2025 Tax Collectors Settlement and 2026 Charge to Tax Collector as presented.
The motion carried unanimously.

2. **Public Hearing — Economic Development Project Pillar**

Jesse Trivette came to the podium to speak on an industrial application for Project Pillar, which involves the expansion of an existing manufacturing operation. The company manufactures advanced protective materials, engineered components for electronics, cabling, semiconductor packaging as well as other industrial applications. Trivette stated that the project will create 37 new permanent full-time jobs in Caldwell County and retain

approximately 200 positions resulting in a total capital investment of approximately $473,000 of which $373,000 is in real property improvements. Trivette said the proposed improvements include replacement of approximately 920 square feet of reinforced concrete pads, the removal of various HVAC systems, plumbing and electrical upgrades. Trivette stated the proposal incentives are included in participation in the rural division building reuse program with an estimated value of $186,000 that is subject to subject to applicable program requirements, final approvals, and the company's satisfaction with the required performance obligations which is the $400,000 investment, and they also must hire and hold 37 positions for a minimum of 6 months before they receive the first check from the Department of Commerce or Caldwell County. Trivette added that the County would be responsible for the

required 5% local match, which is $9,300 to be paid from the sales tax reinvestment fund. Mr. Trivette then said that the project had been reviewed and was recommended by the Caldwell County Economic Development Advisory Committee. Trivette then introduced Derek Odell, who came to the podium. Mr. Odell stated he was the director of manufacturing for Chase Corporation adding that the Chase Corporation is the global leader in specialty chemicals and protected materials, headquartered outside of Boston in Westwood, Massachusetts. Mr. Odell said the company has 800 employees globally and was founded in 1946 and celebrates 80 years in business this year. He added that locally they have two sites in North Carolina, one in Hickory and the other in Lenoir. He said the Lenoir facility produces tapes primarily for the wiring cable industry. He mentioned they plan to use these funds to grow the business. Mr. Odell also said they have a site consolidation that is currently taking place as they are shutting down their Oxford, Massachusetts location and relocating those assets to Lenoir. He said he appreciated the board is considering this and he looks forward to being able to grow the business in Caldwell County.

Chairman Church declared the public hearing open. With no one signed up to speak Chairman Church declared the public hearing closed.

Commissioner Potter thanked Mr. Odell for taking the time and investing in Caldwell County. Chairman Church said that he appreciated the willingness to come to the County and that this would be a very good thing for Caldwell County and help maintain a longtime business, improve the facility and maintain jobs. Church then asked what the average salary would be for the 37 new employees hired. Mr. Trivette responded, just over $55,000 annually. Commissioner Branch then thanked them for coming to Caldwell County.

Commissioner Starnes made a motion to adopt the project.
The motion carried unanimously.

3. **Caldwell County Board of Social Services and Board of Health and Advisory Board Discussion**

County Manager Shane Fox came to the podium. Mr. Fox then delivered a presentation starting with the objective of the proposal, the current status and structure, history, the pathway and governance options, as well as impacts of change and the conclusion. Mr. Fox then presented a Power Point presentation. Fox stated the proposal is for the Board of Commissioners to consider transitioning the Department of Social Services and the Health Department from autonomous standalone boards to the direct oversight of the board of Commissioners, led by

the County Manager, pursuant to N.C.G.S. 153A-77/77. Fox stated the objective of this structural reorganization is to modernize our human service delivery model and with removing standalone boards and placing the governance directly under the Board of Commissioners and County Manager we can eliminate operational silos and establish a direct line of public accountability. Fox stated that currently we have both the Department of Social Services and the Health Department are governed by separate boards that are appointed through the Board of Commissioners and the State of North Carolina. This has been the same governance since the establishment of both departments over 100 years ago. Fox said some of the current responsibilities of the Calwell County Social Services Board and Health Board are hiring the county social services and health directors, evaluating the director's performance, dismissing the director is his or her job performance is unsatisfactory or engages in unacceptable conduct, assisting the director in planning the county social services and health department budget and approving the budget and providing general oversight of the county social services and health department. Fox then stated that the current position of the Board of Commissioners and County Manager is no direct oversight of the department's day to day. He added that the Board of DSS and Health are currently appointed and meet once a month or every other month without real day-to-day involvement. Fox mentioned the budget processes are determined through the Board of DSS and Health prior to coming to the Board of Commissioners. Mr. Fox said the public are welcome to attend the meetings of Health and DSS, but they rarely do. Manager Fox then discussed the history and timeline of the County DSS and Health governance, stating that the history and pathway start in 1868 when the County Board of Commissioners were allowed to be elected and established and in 1927 the County Manager form of govt was established, in 1973 the ratification of statutes 153A and modernization of County government. In 2012 Session Law 2012-126 eliminated the population threshold and allowed any NC County with a Manager to dissolve traditional boards and changes with new options. Fox explained the pathway given by North Carolina General Statute 153A-76/77 grants the Caldwell County Board of Commissioners the authority to make governance changes to both the Department of Social Services and the Health Department through the consideration and approval of resolution after conducting a public hearing with at least 30-day notice. Mr. Fox said a 30-day notice was given and posted in the local paper Lenoir News Topic on June 27, 2026, posted on our website as well as the Courthouse and County Plaza. Mr. Fox then spoke about the options the statute allows. Option1 of 3: Option A allows the board of commissioners to assume the powers and duties of the board of health and/or the board of social services, thus becoming the governing body for both agencies, they must also appoint a public health advisory committee with the same membership as a traditional board of health. The statutes do not require a social services advisory committee, but a county could choose to appoint one. Option 2 of 3: Option B allows the board of commissioners to create a consolidated human services agency, governed by an appointed consolidated human services board, with all members appointed by the board of commissioners. In this model N.C.G.S. 153A-77(e) states that the human services director is appointed by the county manager with the advice and consent of the board and shall report to the county manager and may only appoint staff of the agency with county manager's approval. Option 3 of 3: Option C allows the board of commissioners to create a consolidated human services agency, governed directly by the board of commissioners. In this model N.C.G.S. 153A-77(e) states that the human services director is appointed by the county manager with the advice and consent of the board and shall report to the county manager and may only appoint staff of the agency with the county manager's approval. Fox then stated that Option A is being presented tonight with dissolution of the current DSS Board and Health Board. Fox said this is essentially the least impactful model, it is essentially taking the current health board and converting that into an advisory board with the same structure and

makeup, and they would be an advisory board to the board of commissioners. Mr. Fox said on the DSS side we are not required to have an advisory board but the recommendation would be to keep the same DSS board to report as an advisory board to the board of commissioners. Manager Fox then presented a map showing the counties across the state with commissioners as governing boards of Public Health, including Burke, Alexander, and Yadkin as the closest counties. He showed a map with DSS board of commissioner governance across the state as well. Fox then provided some impacts of this change, mentioning the new structure of the organization chart and the departments would fall within the structure under the county manager and board of commissioners. He added that the day-to-day operations would not change and there would be no service change. Fox said that with the governance change there would be direct oversight from the BOC and county manager and will require monthly updates to the BOC at the regular BOC public meeting. With the open BOC meeting, monthly updates would provide more opportunities for the public to be more aware of the operations. Adding that the governance change would accelerate strategic decision making by removing the middle tier board. Mr. Fox then said to answer some possible questions he stated that the county would not be losing the medical and social expertise they currently have.

The next possible question will one department take over the other. Fox replied no, Health and DSS will remain separate from one another on day-to-day services and oversight. Fox also said that the hope is for this change to improve staff morale by making DSS and Health a part of the overall Team and having monthly updates for the BOC to be better invested in the day to day. Fox then said the overall proposal is a resolution that allows for consideration of the governance change of DSS and Health, with the Board of Commissioners assuming responsibility as the governing board with the current boards remaining as advisory boards.

Chairman Church thanked the manager for a great presentation that was thorough and answered all his questions.

4. **Public Hearing - Caldwell County Board of Social Services and Caldwell County Board of Health**

Chairman Church declared public hearing open.

First to the podium to speak was Faith Naff. Ms. Naff said that she stood before the board this evening to voice opposition to folding these boards under the Board of Commissioners. She added that this would be simpler and cheaper, perhaps, but she believes that some things are worth the extra effort and cost and that checks and balances are fundamental to the core of governance. Naff said that choice now sits with the Board. She stated that after attending the budget meetings and hearing the County's books are balanced, debts are paid, and the rainy-day fund is secure adding that these are commendable accomplishments. She stated that we can afford to keep these two boards. Naff then said she implores the board to reject this consolidation of power.

Diane Banton came to the podium. Ms. Blanton asked why Would like the Board thinks they can run the Department of Social Services and the Health Department better than the State of North Carolina. She then addressed Commissioner Potter, stating that she understands he will be resigning as of January.
Commissioner Potter stated that November would be his last meeting.

Ms. Blanton then said she had heard a rumor that Mr. Potter had resigned to apply for a cushiony job at Social Services.
Commissioner Potter said that is absolutely not true and can be put on record.
Ms. Blanton said she was glad to hear that was untrue and in closing stated she was not for this change.
Chairman Church then stated we are not taking the place of the State of North Carolina, they are still providing funding and they will continue to govern as always. Church said the difference for this Board is to have some say so and currently they do not have the ability to be responsible for that governance.

Tom Blanton came to the podium and stated his concern is this board has enough to worry about trying to run this county, and this county has a lot of needs. He said we need more restaurants, more diverse industry and support for small businesses. He said we need a concentration on competence with competent people running these departments and this board doesn't need to be taking on extra responsibilities.

Jessica Tomberlin, daughter of past DSS employee and former Health Department employee came to the podium. She stated that in her experience there is already public accountability. She said with these departments a commissioner serves on the Board of Health and the DSS Board. She stated that she urged the Board not to proceed with this.

Roger Patterson came to the podium to speak. Mr. Patterson stated that he was opposed to dissolving the two boards and believes this appears to be a power grab. He said he believes that government is becoming more authoritarian. He added that his concern increased when he hearing the Commissioners will be able to appoint these positions. Patterson then agreed with prior speaker Tom Blanton saying the board has enough to deal with now. In closing Mr. Patterson said he believed the decision had already been made and he thanked the board for giving him an opportunity to present my concerns.

Steve Huntley came to the podium to speak next. Mr. Huntley stated that he was a waste fraud and abuse auditor. He stated that he felt this plan was a scheme for the board to control it. He said he did not want this man, Donnie Potter, who gets in fights controlling our DSS and Health Board.

Charles Senf came to the podium to speak. Mr. Senf said that during the presentation when the Manager was pointing at the screen it was easier to hear. Senf stated that Manager Fox mentioned that a 30-day public hearing was required, and during a previous presentation Chairman Church explained there was quite a bit of conversation, and he didn't hear anything about this. Mr. Senf said that Ms. Brown sent out the agenda a few days ago with a proclamation of how this was to be done. He said that he first heard about this on Caldwell Voices on the 17th of the month. Mr. Senf then detailed each notification for public meetings and notices that he received and was signed up for. He added that the Clerk emailed notices of special meetings in the past. Mr. Senf stated that he believed this notice was supposed to be delivered to him 30 days ago and has yet to meet a citizen who received one in an email. Mr. Senf stated that he feels this public meeting is out of order and should be postponed for 30 days. He asked the board what was wrong and what they were trying to fix. Inclosing Mr. Senf stated that they deserve to know the details of why this is being done.

Chairman Church declared the public hearing closed.

Commissioner Branch made a motion to adopt the resolution as presented by the County Manager.

The motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Church stated there is a consensus among residents that taxes are too high and they want someone who oversees their taxes and where they are being spent and we as a board adopt the budget for DSS and Health but that is as far as it goes. Adding that as commissioners they would like to have a little more say in that process. Church said this is not a power grab as Mr. Patterson said. The board will remain intact with the doctors, dentist and pharmacist that will remain on those boards.

Consent

Chairman Church then turned the meeting over to County Manager, Chane Fox to present the Consent Agenda.

5. **Budget Revision - Health Department rollover unspent CCPN funds**

   This budget revision is to rollover unspent CCPN grant funds from the previous fiscal year to the new FY 26/27 in the amount of $35,185.04.

6. **Budget Revision - Project Scrimmage Grant**

   This Budget revision allows the county to accept and spend a $28,000 grant from Duke Energy related to the Lower Cedar Valley land purchase.

7. **Deloitte Economic Development Consulting Services**

   This allows the county to participate in a mock-site selection, assessment designed to assess how Caldwell County is perceived by prospective investors to be paid for with Duke CIF funds.

8. **Budget Revision STRAP Grant 2026**

   This budget revision accepts and appropriates $2,236,466 in new STRAP Grant funds for 2026 to be used for stream bank restoration.

9. **Utility Account Grant Application & Resolution — Airport Match Funds**

   This is for approval to apply for an Industrial Development Fund (IDF) Grant, in the amount of $700,000, if awarded the funds would be used as matching funds for the Foothills Regional Airport sewer expansion project.

10. **ARC Grant Application — Lower Cedar Valley Project**

    This is for approval to apply for an ARC Grant. If awarded, $688,500 would be used to support the Lower Cedar Valley Road Industrial Park engineering design, and early site work. If awarded, a $688,500 county match would be required and could be funded by the Sales Tax Reinvestment Fund or other Economic Development Funds.

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11. Governors Crime Commission Grant 2000087726– Caldwell County Drug Court Program

Approval of accepting this $200,000 grant is requested. The funds will be used to support expansion of services, including increased peer support capacity, enhanced supervision, and targeted risk assessment to reduce incarceration through the Caldwell County Drug Court Program.

12. Resolution Emergency Services - Conveyance of Surplus Property

Resolution of conveyance of 4 surplus vehicles is requested.

13. NC Cardinal Memorandum of Agreement FY 2026 - 2027

This is an annual MOA with the NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, the State Library of NC, and the Caldwell County Public Library that allows access to a shared online catalog for library patrons.

14. Appointment to the Advisory Board of Health

Appointment of Jessica Tomberlin to fill the Dentist position on the Advisory Board of Health.

15. Appointment of ETJ Members to the Town of Granite Falls Planning Board and Board of Adjustments

Appointment of Mike Norris to the Town of Granite Falls Board of Adjustment and Jeremy Scott Reid to the Town of Granite Falls Planning Board.

16. Appointment to Advisory DSS Board

Appointment of Beth Hinshaw to the Advisory DSS Board to replace Chapel Davis who ended her second term.

17. Approval of Regular and Closed Session Minutes from June 22, 2026, Board of Commissioners Meeting

Approval of regular and closed session minutes from June 26, 2026, Board of Commissioners Meeting was requested.

Chairman Church made a motion to adopt the consent agenda as presented by the County Manager.
The motion carried unanimously.

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Closed Session

18. Closed Session Pursuant to N.C.G.S.§ 143-318.11(a)(4)

Commissioner Potter made a motion to enter closed session at 7:30 PM.
The motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Potter made a motion to exit closed session at 8:54 PM.
The motion carried unanimously.

Adjourn

With there being no more business, Commissioner Potter made a motion to adjourn at 8:55 PM.
The motion carried unanimously.

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