Burke County -- America 250 Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: Monday, January 12, 2026
Location: Burke County Commissioners Meeting Room
110 N. Green Street, Entrance E, Morganton
Time: 1:30 pm —2:30 pm

Members Present:				Guests Present:
Gordon, Waits		Patton, Robert	✓	None
Johnston, Laurie (Secretary)	✓	Phillips, Ed (Chair)	✓	
Jones, Deborah	✓	Stroud, Mike	✓	
Lindsey. Dr. Bryant	✓	Swan. Dr. Mike	✓	
Lindsey, Dr. Linda	✓	Welch, Dr. Joel (Vice Chair)	✓	
McKesson, Dr. Leslie	✓	Wilkinson, Sam		
McSwain, Butch	✓	Woodie, Charles	✓	
Medford, Sylvia	✓			

Call to Order

Committee Chairman, Ed Phillips. called the meeting to order and welcomed committee members. A quorum was present. Ed announced, "It's here!" 2026 is the year we have been awaiting, the year of America 250. Ed reminded members to review of the Purpose of the committee, printed on the Agenda, and there is lots to do.

Approval of Minutes from November 10, 2025

Minutes from the November meeting were sent by email and hardcopies were distributed at the meeting for discussion. Mike Stroud moved to accept the minutes as presented, seconded by Linda Lindsey. The minutes were accepted by unanimous vote.

Old Business

- Ed showed the picture made at the Morganton City Council meeting on Monday, January 5 as well as a framed copy of the Proclamation in support of the America 250 initiative presented to the Committee at that meeting. The Resolution passed by the County Commissioners will also be framed in like manner. We need to determine where they will be displayed for the public. Someone suggested perhaps at the Burke County Tourism office.

- Grant Update (Ed Phillips)
  Ed has emailed the state America 250 grant coordinator, Dan Brosz but has not heard back from him yet. They are short staffed with only 2 people at the state level. Ed wanted to find out how flexible we could be with remaining funds from our grant in order to determine how it may be spent. Someone asked if there would be any additional funds from the state, but Ed answered that there is no state money available at this time and probably will not be any additional money. There was a short discussion among committee members that after the March primary, there is a possibility that things may move in favor of more support for America 250. There are some counties, like Burke, that will continue to have relevant and associated anniversaries after the July 4 anniversary this year. Ed reminded committee members of his previous experience with a large anniversary event like this, that the general public will maintain interest up until July 4 this year, but that interest will sharply decline once that date has passed. He reported that the first grant of $10,000, which was spent on banners and other signage, has been spent and is completed.
- 4th Grade Flag Contest (Ed Phillips)
  The fourth grade county flag contest is underway. Schools and students are participating. Some have contacted and come by the Burke Tourism office. Laurie Johnston reported visits by people researching county history for the flag design at the Morganton Public Library as well. Schools will choose their winners then send to the county committee. We will consider the entries and decide on a winner to represent Burke County at the state level. Sylvia Medford stated that the DAR is hosting a Poster contest this year for High School students later this year.

New Business

- 2026 Calendar of Local, Burke County Events
  Staff at the Burke County Tourism office have been using AI to scan for local events related to the America 250 theme and add them to a community calendar available on DiscoverBurkeCounty.com. These are available on the website and Facebook page. As we discover more events leading up to the America 250 anniversary in July, we can promote them more on our Facebook page.

- 4th of July Parade Discussion
  [This agenda item covered below on Agenda item #6 "July 4, 2026 Sub-Committee."]

- Liberty Tree Project Update
  Ed reported that he talked about the project with Sally Sandy, City Manager from the City of Morganton, and the site at Freedom Park has been approved for the tree planting. Fitzgerald Nursery will donate the tree, possibly an elm, fire maple, or oak. They recommend a March time frame for the planting. We will consider a plaque and plan a dedication ceremony. Mike Swan suggested that a construction team from the high schools could build a foundation for the plaque.

- Time Capsule Discussion

  The Town of Hildebran had buried a time capsule in 1976 and plans to open it this July. Ed discussed some logistics about burying a time capsule in this day and age. Burying a time capsule underground, as was done in the past, has many problems such as moisture, etc. that make it a bad choice for us. So the idea now is to do a time capsule that will be opened in 50 years, 2076, but do not bury it. It would be inside a building. There is much to consider, including where would be a good place? What represents 2026? What do we put in it? Photos? What else? Possibilities mentioned include cell phone, picture of this committee, elements of culture, clothing. What we put inside will determine size of capsule needed. This could be open for community input using some time of survey, perhaps on social media.

  Linda mentioned that the History Museum has an internal time capsule that was built by Larry Clark. Ed suggested that we could even use something non-traditional like a Yeti toolbox. Bryant mentioned that the new NC Archivist has made public a statement with suggestions on how and what should be archived by individuals, groups, and organizations. He reiterated that we should be archiving the events of this year and create written documentation.

  Robert said he would donate a 1776 penny for the time capsule. Ed will start an email chain in the group to gather ideas and input for the time capsule. Everyone should be thinking of items that could be considered for inclusion in the time capsule. Someone mentioned that it should be made clear that any items contributed for the time capsule will not be returned to the contributor. Joel offered that WPCC could build something to house the time capsule. Robert mentioned that it would be nice to highlight something manufactured in Burke today. Ed wrapped up the discussion reminding members that we will continue this discussion and make decisions at the next meeting.

- Spring Historic Site Tours

  Ed reported that the Tourism office recently reviewed a mid-year report on the Trolley and they are looking for more and different things to do with the Trolley. It works well for small groups of no more than 20, and a box lunch would be more economical than using the Community House as was done in the Historic Site Tour in the Fall. On that tour, it cost over $100 per person, but that expense was covered in part with grant money. One possibility is the A. C. Avery or Avery-Summersette house, that was originally going to be part of the fall tour but was not available then. The owner has expressed willingness to have this historic home available for a special tour. Joel Welch commented that he thought we should offer something with a higher pricetag and a more elevated experience such as a period-style meal with a tour for those who are willing to pay more for a special event. Some others in the group agreed that the idea would appeal to certain audiences. Ed mentioned that the business model for the Trolley works well for charters of special events where the participants cover cost of the driver, insurance, etc.

Other ideas included doing wine or brewery tours, ghost walk, Christmas lights, Halloween decorations on houses, Brown Mountain lights, and historic Broughton with its champion trees, new History Museum and graveyard.

- July 4, 2026 Sub-Committee

Ed explained that he met with the County Manager, Brian Epley on Thursday. An important point was brought up, that this committee is a County committee and represent the County Commissioners. They should be involved in large decisions such as the events of July 4. So a task force is being assembled to work on it and we will need to send an official representative to communicate for the committee to discuss things such as costs, logistics, security, township involvement, etc.

Bryant Lindsey inserted that in Rutherford County, they are changing the way they will celebrate the 4th of July this year as a county. They are planning to concentrate their celebration on the Isothermal Community College campus, using money pooled from separate municipalities. There was a little discussion on the city [of Morganton] being part of the sub-committee and Glen Alpine having a traditional parade every year that will likely be continued this year.

Butch McSwain moved that Ed Phillips be this committee's representative on the aforementioned Task Force. Robert Patton seconded, and it passed by unanimous vote.

The group continued discussion on the events of this year with Robert asking Charles Woodie to explain the 4th of July dinner event sponsored by SAR/DAR/Historic Burke Foundation. It would be a ticketed event at the McDowell House, where dinner would be served. Tickets will likely be around $30-$40. It is still in the planning stages, but would be held on the evening of July 4.

There was discussion about having a community band if we have a parade. Mike Swan will check on the interest in the school system to gather students and teachers from the schools for such a band. He noted that this event would happen in the summer and it presents a variety of challenges including availability and willingness of band directors and students to be involved, instruments, rehearsals, sheet music, etc. It was mentioned that with the event being on a Saturday, people that handle the grounds, safety issues, etc. will have to be paid overtime so there will need to be budget and willingness to absorb such costs for the various organizations involved, such as the cities and towns.

Robert suggested that band boosters may be able to help with assembling the band. Joel inserted his opinion that in this day and age, it is a different world when it comes to people's willingness to volunteer.

Again, the location of a fireworks show was brought up for discussion. Is it possible to go back to the Western Piedmont Community College location for the fireworks as was done in past years? Ed answered that the issue, he believed, was a response from the State Troopers regarding interference and distraction with traffic on I-40 during the fireworks. Some committee members expressed that perhaps we could request reconsideration and perhaps there could be measures such as increased signage or reduced lanes on I-40. Perhaps we could consider alternate launch sites within the general area between NCSD, Broughton, & WPCC.

Other ideas included bringing the old folk style games back such as greased pole games, and frog jumping as was done for the Red, White, & Bluegrass festival. Linda suggested that we include a reading of the Declaration of Independence and ring the courthouse bell. Other bells such as church bells could be coordinated as well. Owners may need to check the bells in these various locations to make sure they will be accessible or will work when the time comes.

Ed asked the group if anyone else had anything else for discussion. With no response, he thanked everyone for being at the meeting.

Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by Mike Swan and seconded by Deb Jones. All agreed. The meeting was adjourned at 2:35 pm. The next meeting will be Monday, February 9 at 1:30 pm.

Submitted by Laurie Johnston, Secretary

January 17, 2026

Appendix:
Attachment A—Meeting Agenda
Attachment B—Photo from Morganton City Council Mtg. Jan. 5