MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'

SPECIAL MEETING ON SEPTEMBER 15, 2026

TO HOLD BOARD INTERVIEWS

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Special Meeting on September 15, 2026, in the Chamber at 200 College Street in downtown Asheville, North Carolina at 1:00 p.m. to hold Board and Commission interviews.

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

Absent: Vice-Chair Martin Moore; Commissioner Parker Sloan.

The following candidates were interviewed for the following boards:

Strategic Partnership Grants Committee: Sala Menaya-Merritt, Sandy Feutz, Rachel Dudasik, Christine Crespo Valentin, and Sandy Feutz.

Asheville Buncombe Technical Community College Board of Trustees: Edward Willis, Byron Dixon.

Historic Resources Commission: Melody Oxendine

County Board of Adjustment: Scott Elliott and James Diaz, Jr.

MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'

BRIEFING MEETING OF SEPTEMBER 15, 2026.

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Briefing Meeting on September 15, 2026, in the First Floor Conference room 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 Jennifer Horton; Commissioner Drew Ball; and Commissioner Parker Sloan.

Absent: Vice-Chair Martin Moore.

The following items were reviewed.

1. **Bear Activity**

Dane Pedersen, Solid Waste Director and Ashley Hobbs with NC Wildlife provided background information. Pedersen explained that FCC currently provides bear-resistant carts for Buncombe County residents, offering them for purchase at 320 dollars or for lease at an additional 10 dollars per month, with about 2,853 carts deployed and increasing demand causing manufacturer lead-time delays. Hobbs provided a detailed update regaridng the Bear Wise program. She said that Buncombe County has experienced more than 250 home entries by bears since 2017, resulting in 11 human injuries and 30 bears dispatched for human safety, representing about 38 percent of statewide bear-related calls annually. NC Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) staff have responded with BearWise education, technical guidance on deterrence, aversive conditioning, and site visits addressing both intentional and incidental feeding.

The Commissioners asked questions about what the County and Community can do to prevent bear incidents. She said that NCWRC recommends adopting a wildlife-feeding ordinance, expanding bear-resistant cart programs, increasing public outreach, and promoting the NC Wildlife Helpline as the primary contact for bear concerns. She noted several studies that improved trash management significantly reduces human bear conflicts. She also urged the community to not welcome the bears into yards; they should only be passing by.

2. **Helene Recovery Update**

Kevin Madsen, Helene Recovery Officer and Max Taintor, Strategy and Innovation, provided background information. Madsen noted that the two-year anniversary of Tropical Storm Helene is approaching, with an anniversary video in development and partner events planned. Taintor reported on the progress of the Preparedness Action Plan, highlighting that 78 percent completion for high-priority items, 69 percent for medium-priority items, and 99 percent for low-priority items for the plan. Madsen said that FEMA's Housing Mission is concluding at the

end of September, while Disaster Case Management and housing repair programs such as RenewNC continue supporting residents, including 35 completed home repairs and additional construction underway. Multiple major recovery initiatives, including landslide mitigation, open space acquisitions, cultural asset restoration, commercial district revitalization, and community health projects are advancing with detailed project updates. He said that significant funding has been secured or is pending through FEMA Public Assistance, HMGP reviews, and CDBG-DR infrastructure applications, supporting long-term resilience and recovery efforts.

3. **Solid Waste Update**

Dane Pedersen, Solid Waste Director, provided background information. He said that there has been ongoing countywide complaints about litter and that NCDOT has limited resources for secondary road cleanups. To help provide a solution, the County is implementing two major litter sweeps each year, one in the fall and one in the spring that will cover a total of 2,000 shoulder miles at an estimated cost of 190,000 dollars. Volunteer engagement and partnerships with CAPE will support areas outside the contracted cleanups, alongside multiple communication efforts. Interested organizations can contact the NCDOT Litter Sweep Coordinator at: (828)298-0397 to volunteer with the program. Pedersen also provided an update on the progress on securing a pre-positioned disaster debris collection contract and a planned FCC rate adjustment discussion scheduled for October.

4. **East Fork Project Update**

Josh Hallingse, Intergovernmental Relations provided background information. He explained that East Fork Pottery, established in 2010, announced a major expansion in December 2025 that will double production capacity and create new living-wage jobs while sustaining its 125 existing positions. The company plans to invest 2.5 million dollars in building improvements and business personal property and create 40 new jobs with an average annual salary of 54,080 dollars. The County's economic development incentive package totals 21,000 dollars, structured as a single-year, pay-for-performance payment over a five-year term. The investment schedule projects 2.5 million dollars in capital investment and 40 new jobs, with cumulative tax revenue estimated at 54,950 dollars and a net cumulative gain of 33,950 dollars to the County. Next steps include holding the hearing on October 6, followed by a formal vote on the incentive agreement.

5. **Sidewalks Grant Update**

Kevin Madsen, Helne Recovery Officer, provided background information. He explained that NC Commerce launched the Small Business Infrastructure Grant Program in April 2025, enabling funding to repair and rebuild infrastructure supporting small business recovery. Staff partnered

with NCDOT to develop pedestrian improvement projects in the Swannanoa Commercial Corridor and successfully secured two awards totaling 1.7 million dollars: 979,000 dollars for Whitson Avenue and 786,000 dollars for Railroad, Alexander, and South. He said that these projects will improve more than 2,200 square yards of sidewalk infrastructure, with construction management provided by NCDOT. He noted that additional funding requests have been submitted, including 10 million dollars in CDBG-DR funding for Highway 70 improvements and up to 750,000 dollars in CDBG-NR funds for right-of-way acquisition. He said that staff will return to the Board on October 6 to seek authorization to accept awarded grants and participate in public hearings for pending applications.

MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'

REGULAR MEETING OF SEPTEMBER 15, 2026.

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Regular Meeting on September 15, 2026, in the Chamber at 200 College Street in downtown Asheville, North Carolina at 5:00 p.m.

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

Absent: Vice-Chair Martin Moore.

The Chair opened the meeting and provided opening remarks.

CONSENT

1. Approval of the September 1, 2026, Meeting Minutes
2. Approval of the August 18, 2026, Combined Meeting Minutes
3. Resolution Approving Pyrotechnic Expert for Fireworks Display
4. Budget Amendment and Acceptance of Governor's Crime Commission (GCC) Violence Reduction 2026 Grant

Commissioner Sloan made the motion to approve the consent agenda and agenda as presented. Commissioner Whitesides seconded the motion and it was carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Tom Dessereau – a nearby resident and representative of the Sand Hill Community Garden and dog park, expressed concern about the lack of communication with local stakeholders regarding the proposed Buncombe County indoor recreation facility. He requested that the community have a seat at the table in the design process to address impacts on the community garden, dog park, and neighborhood access concerns.

David Greenson- GAP AVL – urged the county to create a standardized anti-displacement analysis framework, noting that major projects, such as the proposed Deaverview Mountain Park, should be evaluated for potential impacts on housing costs and resident stability. He requested that staff assess and publicly report any displacement risks and begin monitoring outcomes to ensure current residents benefit from future investments.

MANAGER'S REPORT

Manager Pinder introduced the two-year video. The video highlighted the recovery progress made in the last two years following the storm.

PRESENTATIONS

1. **First Step Farm of WNC 50th Anniversary Month Proclamation**

Commissioner Whitesides read the proclamation to proclaim September as First Step Farm of WNC's month in honor of their 50th Year Anniversary. The proclamation was received by Mike Plemmons and Scott, Chair of the Board.

2. **National Manufacturing Day and Month Proclamation**

Chair Edwards read the proclamation to proclaim National Manufacturing Day and October 2026 as National Manufacturing Month in Buncombe County.

3. **National Hispanic & Latino Heritage Month Proclamation**

Commissioner Ball read the proclamation in both English and Spanish in recognition of National Hispanic and Latino Heritage Month in Buncombe County from September 15 to October 15 in 2026.

4. **Buncombe County Soil and Water Conservation District's 75th Anniversary Proclamation**

Commissioner Wells read the proclamation celebrating Buncombe County Soil and Water Conservation District's 75th Anniversary.

5. **Human Resources Professionals Day Proclamation**

Commissioner Sloan read the proclamation celebrating Human Resources Day on September 26, 2026.

PUBLIC HEARING

1. **FY28 NCDOT Community Transportation 5311 Application**

William High provided background information. He explained that the FY28 Section 5311 Community Transportation Grant Applications, total $1,172,175 in federal, state, and local funding. The grants support administrative needs such as management contracts, data processing, and facility costs, as well as capital purchases including six vehicles with propane conversions, a push-to-talk radio system, and updated vehicle lettering. High stated that Mountain Mobility serves seniors, individuals with disabilities, human service agency clients, and the general public and noted that the Notice of Public Hearing was published and is also provided in the meeting materials.

The Chair opened the Public Hearing at 6:00 p.m. There was one commenter: Kim West – appointed member of the Community Transportation Advisory Board expressed gratitude for Mountain Mobility and encouraged further technology improvements and use of existing resources to address ongoing driver shortages. The Chair closed the Public Hearing at 6:02 p.m.

Commissioner Wells asked for clarification about ongoing driver shortages and the status of new ride-tracking technology for Mountain Mobility. High explained that that funding, approved two years ago is now being used to acquire upgraded tracking software, with deployment expected before the end of the calendar year. He noted the system will improve efficiency for operators and dispatchers while providing riders with more accurate trip information. High also stated that existing contract provisions, including penalties for staffing shortfalls, will be more fully enforced to address the gap between required and current operator levels.

Commissioner Horton made the motion to adopt the Resolutions Authorizing the Chairperson to Execute an Application for FY 2027 Public Transportation Program Funding, enter into agreement with the North Carolina Department of Transportation, and to provide the necessary certifications and grant documents. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Sloan and carried unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

2. Low-Income Housing Tax Credit & CDBG-DR Awards for LIHTC Projects Update

Matt Cable, Community Development Division, provided an update on affordable housing efforts, reviewing disaster recovery funding sources and the limitations on how state and city CDBG-DR funds may be used within and outside Asheville city limits. He shared updated FEMA data showing 379 homes destroyed countywide, with approximately 75% of losses occurring outside the city, an important distinction for determining eligibility for various recovery programs. He further outlined how Buncombe County compares to other disaster impacted counties and explained constraints in the data where FEMA reports numbers only in ranges for small counts. Cable described the LIHTC award process, noting the county's position in the Metro Region and the differences between 9% and 4% tax credit projects, including their funding needs and typical unit sizes. He noted that Crescent Place Apartments received a 9% LIHTC award along with CDBG-DR funding, while two additional 4% projects in Asheville received awards in a separate cycle. He further explained new coordination between the state's Department of Commerce and the Housing Finance Agency, which added CDBG-DR funding to LIHTC awards under specific rules, including prioritizing new construction and limiting awards to one per county.

Cable further explained additional parameters of the CDBG-DR program, including a requirement that all LIHTC applicants in disaster impacted counties be willing to accept CDBG-DR funds and design their projects accordingly and noted that while all applicants indicated a need for the funding, they would have been required to accept it even if they had not. The total CDBG-DR program allocation was increased to $69 million, with caps of $24 million for 9% projects, a $3 million maximum award for 9% projects, and a $15 million maximum for 4% projects, though the state retained authority to exceed these caps, as demonstrated in Haywood County's unusually high award. Cable highlighted CDBG-DR awards across several counties, noting that Buncombe received $1.7 million for a 60-unit project, while other counties received substantially higher awards and stronger recovery ratios compared to their disaster related housing losses. Cable also reviewed separate state noticed awards for 4% projects, explaining that although Buncombe had eight eligible projects, none received funding because initial awards had not yet been allocated across all eligible counties. The presentation included combined data showing how CDBG-DR awards varied by county and how awarded units compared to destroyed units, with Buncombe recovering about half of lost rental units while some counties exceeded 100% recovery.

Cable concluded with an overview of Asheville's separate CDBG-DR program and an update on the County's Coxe Avenue affordable housing project, including the planned 203-unit mix and its reliance on future LIHTC He outlined next steps for the Coxe Avenue project, which include evaluating project costs with and without CDBG-DR funding, noting that while removing CDBG-DR requirements would slightly reduce costs, the savings would not close the full $15 million funding gap. Cable said that Harmony Housing is actively preparing additional funding applications and will need to reapply for LIHTC in the next available window, most likely the January pre-application cycle rather than the October deadline due to timing constraints.

Commissioners discussed the implications of the CDBG-DR award structure on Buncombe County, expressing concern and frustration that the county, having the highest number of homes destroyed, received the smallest allocation of disaster recovery housing funds. Cable clarified that the outcome resulted from two separate program rules: Buncombe was guaranteed one 9% award, but the state's "one award per county" rule prevented Buncombe from also receiving a 4% project award until all other eligible counties had been funded. Commissioners noted that these combined rules, along with discretionary increases awarded to other counties, created inequitable results that did not align with the scale of Buncombe County's disaster losses. Several commissioners voiced frustration, stating that the funding distribution appeared misaligned. The Commissioners discussed sending a formal letter to state leadership seeking explanations and advocating for corrective action. The discussion concluded with commissioners reaffirming their support for pursuing all possible funding avenues for Coxe Avenue and to continue advocating for Buncombe County residents impacted by the disaster. In closing, the Commissioners thanked staff for compiling the data and helping the Board to understand this process.

NEW BUSINESS

1. **Approval of the Deaverview Master Planning Contract**

Allison Dains, Parks and Recreation Director provided background information. She explained that the Deaverview Mountain Master Plan contract is now coming before the Board after the County's March 2026 acquisition of more than 342 acres using grant funds from the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, the NC Land and Water Fund, and the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership program. She further explained that grant requirements mandate that the property be preserved, remain open to the public in perpetuity, and be accessible by 2029, with 319 acres protected under a conservation easement and managed for passive recreation such as hiking, wildlife viewing, and mountain biking. Staff outlined the master planning scope, which includes community outreach, environmental study, full property surveying, trail assessments, and recommendations for amenities, ingress/egress engineering, and complete driveway design. The selected landscape architecture firm, Equinox Environmental, will complete the work through two concurrent phases, with a future Phase III planned for development of trails, access points, and viewshed features. The proposed contract totals $1,392,190, covering master planning and engineering services. Project timelines extend

from late 2026 through 2027, culminating in a completed master plan and full engineering design.

Commissioner Wells thanked staff for these ongoing efforts and the community engagement. Commissioners asked about the project timeline, including when more funding would be needed. Dains said staff would be coming back with more funding requests once 100% design drawings are completed. She further clarified the plans for phased implementation, including the possibility of safely opening portions of existing trails and offering early programming before full construction is finished. Commissioners highlighted the importance of continued robust community outreach, including stakeholder-specific events, neighborhood meetings, large public gatherings, and targeted outreach in community hubs. Daines confirmed that community engagement will follow a model previously successful at Owen Park.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to approve the resolution for the contract of Deaverview Mountain. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Sloan and carried unanimously.

2. Budget Amendments for Conservation Easements

Ariel Zijp and Michelle Puliese, Southern Appalachian Highlands Society provided background information. Zijp explained that the Conservation Easement funding requests are being requested by both the Land Conservation Advisory Board and the Agricultural Advisory Board and noted that all project requests are within Buncombe County Conservation Focus Areas. She explained that the Buncombe County Land Conservation Advisory Board recommends one conservation easement project for funding and that Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy will be the conservation easement holding entity for this project.

Zijp further explained the four proposed conservation easements and an expansion of the Camp Sequoyah easement. The Rymer-Davis properties and Ruby Brown Farm, located in the Leicester–Sandy Mush Conservation Focus Area, include farmland and forest tracts with high percentages of prime soils and several NC Century Farms; each meets between five and six Open Space Bond eligibility criteria, with transaction cost requests ranging from $53,000 to $62,400. The Camp Sequoyah easement expansion adds approximately 80 acres to an existing 37-acre easement and ranks highly within several regional conservation priority models, supported by significant natural, scenic, ecological, and historic resources. Funding requests for Camp Sequoyah total $351,500, including $288,000 from the Open Space Bond, $63,500 in FY27 transaction costs, and private donor support. They also outlined the Agricultural Growth Zone (AGZ) grant renewal, requesting an additional $2 million in Open Space Bond matching funds. Zijp provided a financial overview which showed remaining Open Space Bond funds at $2.7 million after recommended allocations. Zijp requested Board approval of conservation easement projects totaling approximately $311,300 from the annual budget and $2.2 million from the open space bond. She further clarified that bond funds are allocated before issuance, with bonds issued when projects are ready to close, which may take two to three years. Noting that future requests for four agricultural projects would draw from previously approved 2024 Agricultural Growth Zone matching funds, with amounts determined following appraisals.

Commissioner Wells and Zijp clairified that conservation easements take several years to complete and that the Board will see some projects several times. Commissioners expressed

support for the projects' benefits to farmland preservation, water quality, viewshed protection, and climate resilience and highlighted progress in preserving the Newfound farming corridor and the opportunity to apply for an additional $2 million in state funding. Commissioner Wells thanked participating landowners and the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy for their voluntary conservation efforts.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to approve the budget amendments as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ball and carried unanimously.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

Agricultural Advisory Board – Commissioner Wells made the motion to appoint Charles Hubbard and Mark Diaz. The motion was seconded by Commisoner Sloan and carried unanimously.

Strategic Partnership Grants Committee: Commissioner Wells made the motion to appoint Sala Menaya-Merritt, Sandy Feutz, Rachel Dudasik, Christine Crespo Valentin, and Sandy Feutz. The motion was seconded by Commisoner Horton and carried unanimously.

Asheville Buncombe Technical Community College Board of Trustees: the Board voted to appoint Edward Willis.

Historic Resources Commission: Commissioner Ball made the motion to appoint Melody Oxendine. The motion was seconed by Commissioner Whitesides and carried unanimously.

County Board of Adjustment: The board voted to appoint Scott Elliott as alternate and James Diaz, Jr. As regular member.

Vaya Regional Board: Commissioner Whitesides made the motion to reappointment of Ellis Matheson to the board. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Horton and carried unanimously.

BOARD UPDATES

Commissioner Wells announced that she has been appointed to the NCACC Legislative Goals Committee.

Commissioner Horton announced that she was appointed to the NCACC Public Health and Human Services Board and the Public Education Board.

Chair Edwards announced that she was appointed to serve on the NCACC Justice and Public Safety Steering Committee.

CLOSED SESSION

County Attorney Euler read the motion to go into the closed session to consult with an attorney employed or retained by the public body in order to preserve the attorney-client privilege between the attorney and the public body, which privilege is hereby acknowledged to consider and give instructions concerning the handling of three lawsuits in Buncombe County Superior Court Estate of Malorie Crisp v. Buncombe County et al, 25 CVS 007620-100, William Johnston v. Buncombe County et al, 23 CVS 003028-100 and the Estate of Michael Boone v.

Buncombe County et al, 26 CV 004979-100. He said that no formal action taken at this time and the statutory authority is contained in G.S. 143-318.11(a)(3).

Commissioner Sloan made the motion to go into closed session for the reasons provided. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Horton and carried unanimously.

The meeting went into closed session at 7:39 p.m.