Burke County -- America 250 Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: Monday, March 9, 2026
Location: Burke County Commissioners Meeting Room
110 N. Green Street, Entrance E, Morganton
Time: 1:30 pm —2:40 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 reviewed the purpose of the committee printed in the Agenda.

Approval of Minutes from February 16, 2026

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

Old Business

1. NCDNCR Grant Update
   Ed Phillips explained that the remaining expenditure deadline from the large grant has been extended through September 30 of this year. The final grant report is due October 31.

2. Liberty Tree

   Ed met with Michael Berley, Project Manager in the Design Division, and Bryan Fish, Director of Parks and Recreation, from the City of Morganton. They looked at the site at Freedom Park where the tree will be located. It has been staked and photographed in preparation for the Liberty Tree to be planted. Photographs will be included in the Time Capsule. The city will have tree harvested and plant ASAP. A plaque will be made by Buncombe County America 250 program since they are managing the Liberty Tree program. Savannah Woods at the Buncombe County committee is the contact. The plaque will include a stake and is 8-14 inches wide. There is some ambiguity about the size of the plaque that we need to clarify before determining what names and other wording should go on the plaque.

3. Time Capsule

   The NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources provided an example of a Civil War era time capsule that was opened in Raleigh. The time capsule had been buried beneath a monument. Papers that were contained in the time capsule didn't survive. There was a map of Alamance County, NC, sketches, addresses/speeches, a map of Alamance County, and copies of newspapers. The papers were in very poor condition when the capsule was opened. There was a piece of an apple tree from Appomattox, a Confederate songbook, and a bullet. Since most items did not survive, we need to carefully consider the items included in the time capsule for America 250. The fact that our time capsule will be housed indoors and not buried will drastically improve conditions for preservation of its contents.

   See Time Capsule Idea List in packet (Attachment B). Ed produced this list based on some of the suggestions mentioned in our last meeting along with additional research. He suggested that we think of items as if they are evidence rather than just items. Ed emailed the Mayor of Valdese and had a meeting with him, asking him to write down his hopes and dreams for the future of the town. We can ask for similar letters from town mayors, Class presidents in the high schools and WPCC. Robert L. Patton had suggested we include a 2026 and 1976 penny. We can include a photo of this America 250 Committee, Burke County Annual Report, Retail Price lists, Business Cards, High School yearbooks, and The News Herald/The Paper could possibly do a Special Edition for the Anniversary. There was some discussion about electronics and what to include. Ed asked the group to consider the list and how we could enlist people to contribute, getting specific details about who, what, and how we need to proceed in getting items for the time capsule; bring those ideas to the next meeting.

4. July 4th Fireworks and Parade

   Ed met with county and city officials and leaders in emergency management. They determined that the fireworks for July 4 will stay where they are this year, which would be Freedom Park. There are lots of logistics involved, some of which involve finances and

personnel, the holiday being on the weekend, and the concerns over the fire station on Burkemont Avenue being blocked by firework traffic.

The last July 4th parade in Morganton was probably held in 2003. There are several reasons why a parade in Morganton is not recommended. Valdese is not doing a parade. So instead, Ed has talked with officials in Glen Alpine about their parade. The Glen Alpine Independence Day Parade is the longest running parade in Burke County. Ed asked town officials if they would be willing to be the official Burke County America 250 parade, and the City of Morganton will offer some support in the form of security, etc. They were thrilled. It is a small town parade and they do not normally vet participants, but they will need to do a slightly different route as well as have a sign up process for participants as the parade will be larger this year. The committee endorsed the plan with no opposition.

5. BCPS 4th Grade Outreach – Brett Wilson
   Ed reported to the group that he had met with Dr. Brett Wilson, the Elementary Education Coordinator for Burke County Public Schools to discuss the 4th grade outreach plans for later this year. They discussed the need to expose kids to Burke County History and a curriculum needs to be developed. A team from BCPS is currently working on it. Committee members asked if creating a brief video may help that would document Burke County events. The curriculum is planned to start in the fall, 2026.

   Burke County winners from the America 250 Flag design contest will be announced at the March 30 School Board Meeting.

New Business

1. Valdese Celebrates America 250 – Date TBD 2026
   Ed met with Valdese town officials to pitch some ideas related to July 4, including doing a spring tour of historic sites in Valdese. Some of the typical places, such as the winery are no longer available. The future of the Waldensian Trail of Faith is unknown. The Town of Valdese has already been planning an America 250 celebration. See Attachment C. Dates are not final but they are considering 8/22, 8/29, and 9/26 to be held at the Old Rock School & Temple Field. It would include a festival, Bocce tournament, art exhibits, food trucks, program, community choir, outdoor movie with sparklers, and slide presentation on US National Parks from Ed Lane. It is still in the planning stages.

2. Burke County 250th in 2027
   Burke County will be celebrating its 250th anniversary next year. This committee will be involved in plans to commemorate that anniversary as well. As for financial aspects, we don't anticipate any state funding. Do we have options for county funding?

a. Randell Jones is a historic presenter and author and has a dynamic voice. We may be able to enlist his help with a video on Burke County history. Reminder that our committee's activities extend beyond this year. We expect to assist over the next 5 years, as 2030 will be the 250th anniversary of the Battle of Kings Mountain, and there are other anniversaries up until 2033.

There was some discussion of partner organizations with our committee. We should include all of the organizations that we, as committee members represent on this committee. These include: Historic Burke Foundation, WPCC, DAR & SAR, Burke County Public Schools, Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail, Burke County Public Library, Burke Arts Council, History Museum of Burke County, etc. Linda Lindsey mentioned that Historic Burke Foundation will be doing a speaker series this year. It was recommended that every organization represented on this committee should have some sort of America 250 recognition, event, or activity. Mike Stroud also mentioned that the exhibit of flags is on display at the City of Morganton City Hall and there's a good interview with Robert Patton about the display on the public CoMPAS channel.

Before closing the meeting, Laurie Johnston distributed a draft of a letter that we could send from our committee to other local businesses and organizations in order to inspire and recommend America 250-related activities that these organizations could offer. See Attachment D. Laurie mentioned that although we, as a committee, lack funding to create major programs, we could inspire and lead others to make related plans and we can serve as a hub of communication and support. We can help to promote and advertise these activities that are developed by others. We will discuss this letter at our next meeting. Committee members are asked to read over the draft and make suggestions for improvement to be discussed in April. Ed commented that if we send out a letter such as this, it needs to be very soon since July 4 is approaching quickly.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 2:40 pm. The next meeting will be Monday, April 13 at 1:30 pm.

Submitted by Laurie Johnston, Secretary

March 31, 2026

Appendix:
Attachment A—Meeting Agenda
Attachment B—Time Capsule Idea List
Attachment C—Valdese Celebrates America 250
Attachment D—Community Partner Letter Draft

Attachment A.

AGENDA
BURKE COUNTY 250th PLANNING COMMITTEE
MORGANTON, NORTH CAROLINA

Committee Members: Butch McSwain, Deborah Jones, Dr. Bryant Lindsey, Dr. Joel Welch, Dr. Linda Lindsey, Ed Phillips, Charles Woodie, Laurie Johnson, Leslie McKesson, Mike Swan, Mike Stroud, Robert Patton, Sam Wilkinson, Waits Gordon.

REGULAR MEETING **March 9, 2026**

1:30 P.M. County Commissioners Board Room
(110 N. Green Street- Morganton- North End)

I. CALL TO ORDER

1. Purpose of the Committee- Burke County

"To engage all North Carolinians and ALL 100 counties through their many signatures and officially recognized programs, projects and events over the commemoration by inspiring future leaders and celebrating North Carolina's contributions to the nation over the last 250 years."

II. Approve Meeting Minutes from January 12, 2026

III. OLD BUSINESS

1. NCDCNR Grant Update
2. Liberty Tree
3. Time Capsule
4. July 4th Fireworks and Parade
5. BCPS 4th Grade Outreach- Brett Wilson

IV. NEW BUSINESS

1. Valdese Celebrates America 250- Date: TBD 2026
2. Burke County 250th in 2027
   a. Randell Jones

Adjournment:

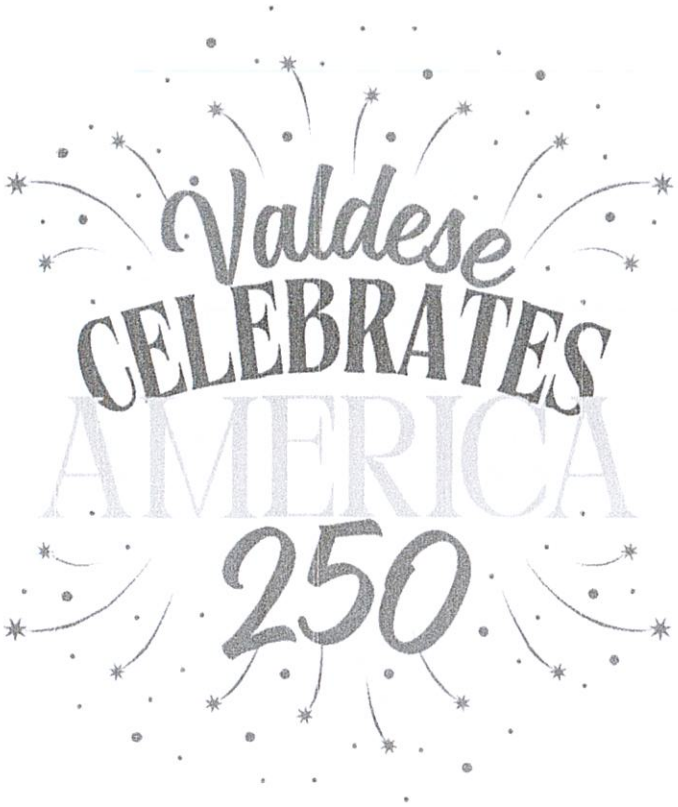
Time Capsule Idea List p. 1

Item		Received
2026 Penny		
Photo of America 250 Committee		
Photo of Burke County Commissioners- Manager		
I-phone/-charger-Remove Battery		
Newspapers *The Paper - News Herald*		
Burke County Annual Report-Most recent		
Burke Tourism Stickers		
Stanley Tumbler		
Letter from High School Class Presidents		
Retail Price Lists- vehicles, bread, milk, hamburger		
Proclomations		Yes
Photo of Liberty Tree as planted in 2026		
Chamber Magazine-2026		Yes
Typed narratives from:		
•A public school teacher		
•A high school senior		
•A factory worker		
•A small business owner		
•A nurse		
•A pastor		
•A retiree		
•A farmer		
•A sheriff's deputy		
•A restaurant server		
• What does your day look like?		
• What worries you?		
• What gives you hope?		
What do you think Burke County will be like in 50 years?		
City/County Governments		
• America 250 local proclamation		Yes
• County budget summary		
• City of Morganton budget summary		
• School system budget		
• Sheriff's annual report		
A printed sheet listing 2026 prices for:		
• Gallon of milk		
• Dozen eggs		
• Gallon of gas		
• Average rent		
• Median home price		
• Movie ticket		
• College tuition at WPCC		
• Electric bill per kwh		

Time Capsule Idea List p. 2

• Health insurance premium		
A Cultural Portfolio		
Include:		
• Church bulletins		
• Apple Watch		
• High school football program		
• A local restaurant menu		
• A brewery tap list		
• A community theater playbill		Yes
• A wedding announcement		
• A funeral program		
High School yearbook from 2026		
Signed letters from:		
• The Mayor		
• County Commissioners Chair		
• Sheriff		
• School Superintendent		
• Hospital CEO		
• A clergy leader		
• A student representative		
• Publisher of *The Paper*		
Each answering:		
• What are our greatest challenges?		
• What are our strengths?		
• What must you protect?		
Final Principle		
Do not curate only what makes us proud.		
Preserve what is true.		
A time capsule is not a marketing brochure.		
It is evidence.		

Attachment C p1



Date Options: 8/22, 8/29, 9/26 (September 12 conflicts with Morganton Festival & Bocce Tournament)

Location: Old Rock School & Temple Field

For the duration of the event 5pm-8pm:

Front steps painted/decorated in patriotic theme

Art Exhibit – 250 themed exhibit in the front lobby and hallways – possibly galleries

Old Colony Players – actors in American History costumes mingling for photos etc.

P&W Railroad Museum Open House – tours & trains

5pm:

Food Trucks/vendors in side parking lot –

Highlands, Myra's Ice Cream, others TBA

*Eat in Waldensian Room or bring a blanket & picnic on the front lawn of ORS

Hunt for Stars & Stripes – Rock School lawn, Temple Field area

(find a flag, bring it to the kids area for a treat bag)

6pm:

Waldensian Room – Area for kids events – Facepaint, Crafts, Make & Take Art

*Rock School Arts Foundation may help

6:30-7:30 – Program in Auditorium (WHF)

Presentation of colors by the Legion Hut
Singing patriotic songs – Community Choir
Photo / slide presentation – US National parks – Ed Lane photographer

7:30pm – Movie at Temple Field & Bike Parade

Concessions – Popcorn, sodas, movie candy
(Purchased by TOV-CA – profits split between WHF & TOV)
Patriotic Merch – TOV-CA
Sparklers at the end of the movie

Items needed:

Steps décor – balloons, chalk, temp paint, banners

Event Banner

Small flags

Sparklers

Crafts

Popcorn

Drinks

Movie Candy

Who to hire/contract/schedule/coordinate – TOV-CA

P&W RR

RSAF

Facepainter

American Legion

Contract Patriotic Movie & Rights

Bouncy House? TBA – CA

Promotions – TOV-CA

Social Media – Boosts, Events, Schedule

Print – Flyers, rackcards, posters

Articles – PR & contact media outlets

Dear Community Partner,

As we approach the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 2026, the **America 250 Burke County Committee** is reaching out to inspire our local organizations and individuals to join this historic commemoration.

Our committee serves as a dedicated partner to help spark, elevate, and celebrate the local initiatives that showcase Burke County's distinctive role in the American story. From the legendary march of the Overmountain Men through our foothills to the diverse heritage of our modern community, we have a powerful story to tell.

We invite **organization / you** to create a project or event this year that reflects any of the three core themes of the North Carolina America 250 campaign:

- **Visions of Freedom:** This theme recognizes that the American Revolution was only the beginning of a continual journey. It explores the people and movements throughout our history who have sought to expand the reach of freedom and the promises of 1776.
- **Gathering of Voices:** Our national story is a "symphony of voices," not a single narrative. This theme celebrates the diverse perspectives—historical and modern—that have shaped North Carolina and continue to inspire future generations to lead.
- **Common Ground:** Our physical spaces carry our shared stories. This theme explores how historic sites, state parks, and our natural world reflect our collective struggle, creativity, and connection to one another.

Project and Event Ideas for Burke County:

- **Schools & Youth Groups:** "Living History" demonstrations, heritage art contests and essays, working with historic statistics across time, or creating "future-focused" time capsules.
- **Businesses & Artisans:** Commemorative "Burke 250" products, themed window displays, create commemorative or colonial clothing, or historic shop tours.
- **Non-Profits & Service Organizations:** "250 Acts of Service" volunteer challenges, gather and present your organization's history, or plant trees.
- **Art & Craft Groups:** Patriotic or heritage themed artwork or craft creations, Community murals celebrating local heritage or recording "Voices of Burke" oral histories.

The America 250 Burke County Committee is here to help you **amplify your impact**. We can provide guidance, help cross-promote your events, and ensure your efforts are recognized as part of our official county-wide celebration.

We would love to hear your thoughts and ideas. If you have a project in mind or would like to attend a meeting with our committee, please reach out to us. You can follow our progress and message us on Facebook at **America 250 Burke County, N.C.** For direct inquiries, please contact:

Ed Phillips, Committee Chair
Burke County Tourism Development Authority
director@discoverburkecounty.com | (828) 433-6793
Laurie Johnston, NC Room Curator
Burke County Public Library
ljohnston@bcpls.org | 828-764-9266

Let's work together to make this milestone a defining moment for Burke County.
With pride in our past and hope for our future,
The America 250 Burke County Committee