MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'

BRIEFING MEETING ON JUNE 16, 2026.

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Briefing Meeting on June 16, 2026, in the 1st floor conference room at 200 College Street in downtown Asheville, North Carolina at 3:00 p.m.

Present: Chair Amanda Edwards; Commissioner Moore, Commissioner Terri Wells, Commissioner Al Whitesides; Commissioner Drew Ball.

Absent: Commissioner Jennifer Horton and Commissioner Parker Sloan.

The following updates were reviewed and discussed:

1. **WNC Rail Letter**

Commissioner Ball introduced the draft WNC Rail Letter. He explained that the draft letter is to the North Carolina General Assembly expressing strong support for the Governor's proposed $28 million appropriation to advance development of passenger rail service between Salisbury and Asheville. The letter highlights the project's significant economic benefits for Western North Carolina and emphasizes that the state investment would position North Carolina to secure more than $530 million in federal funding. The letter states that the Board urges inclusion of the appropriation in the final FY 2026–27 State Budget.

The Commissioners discussed and consented to adding the letter to the Consent agenda for signature.

2. **State Cash Flow Loan -Amendment to Payment Terms**

Melissa Moore provided background information. She explained that the Helene State Cashflow Loan across three funding rounds totaling $19,443,054 and reviewed the original repayment schedule, which required incremental payments between the first anniversary of the loan and June 30, 2030. Moore then detailed the revised repayment terms, which now extend repayment to the latest of June 30, 2030, final FEMA coverage determination, or receipt of FEMA reimbursement funds. These changes follow Session Law 2025-97 (Senate Bill 449).

3. **Quarterly Helene Recovery Update**

Kevin Madsen provided background information. He outlined progress across multiple recovery sectors including cultural asset restoration, community health, economic development, hazard mitigation, and public safety initiatives. Key updates included ongoing restoration of parks and community facilities, commercial district revitalization efforts, extensive property acquisitions under the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, and significant activity within the Renew NC home repair and reconstruction programs. He also reported substantial advances in Preparedness Action Plan categories such as emergency operations, emergency staffing, 911 communications resilience, and community resource support. Additionally, FEMA Public

Assistance progress showed 57 projects submitted and $38.34 million obligated, with continued movement toward project closeouts and new funding opportunities through CDBG-DR programs.

4. **Air Quality Transition Plan**

Ashley Featherstone provided background information. She outlined the County's plan to shift the Air Quality program from a joint City–County structure to a fully County-operated function. She explained that this transition requires three actions: adopting a resolution to create the County Air Quality division, amending and terminating the interlocal agreement with the City, and adopting updated Air Quality regulations following a 30-day public comment period. The new structure would establish an Air Quality Advisory Council and designate the Board of Commissioners as the governing body for Air Quality. The timeline includes coordinated actions between the County and City, with full transition expected by July 24, 2026.

5. **Growth Management Strategies**

Nathan Pennington provided background information. He outlined the County's approach to addressing growth, development, and anti-displacement by implementing existing adopted policies rather than creating new ones. He further highlighted the County's Plan Protect Preserve Produce framework, supported by the 2043 Comprehensive Plan, which guides long-range land use, housing, and growth management decisions. Key initiatives include revisions to ordinances, mitigation strategies, affordable housing programs, and efforts to modernize development standards to reduce regulatory barriers. Pennington also emphasized measurable progress in affordable housing production and preservation, economic development outcomes, and coordinated strategies to reduce resident displacement risk.

MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'

REGULAR MEETING ON JUNE 16, 2026.

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Regular Meeting on June 16, 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 Drew Ball; and Commissioner Jennifer Horton;

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

The Chair opened the meeting and provided opening remarks.

CONSENT

1. Approval of the June 2, 2026, Combined Meeting Minutes
2. Approval of the Home and Community Care Block Grant Agreement and Funding Plan
3. Resolution Approving Pyrotechnic Experts for Firework Displays
4. Budget Amendment for the Digital Opportunities Initiative 2026 Grant (Buncombe County Public Libraries)
5. Resolution Creating a Local Air Quality Program and Buncombe County Air Quality Advisory Council
6. WNC Rail letter – added June 18

Commissioner Ball made a motion to add the WNC Rail Letter that was discussed at the Briefing meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Whitesides and carried unanimously.

Commissioner Whitesides made the motion to approve the Consent agenda. Commissioner Horton seconded the motion and it was carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Gary Brunault - asked the Board to assist in resolving a permitting dispute with the County's Permits and Inspections Office regarding his son's barn-style home. He requested an administrative review and an independent reevaluation of the construction method, noting that construction has been delayed for over three months and is causing significant financial hardship.

David Greenson – thanked commissioners for engaging on displacement issues and urged the county to adopt tools to systematically track and prevent displacement. He invited the county to partner with GAP on an anti-displacement analysis tool.

GOOD NEWS

1. **2025 Governor's Volunteer Service Award**

Jennifer Aviles provided background information. She explained that volunteers are an integral part of our community, offering their time and energy to important causes often without reward or recognition that is why Buncombe County began accepting nomination for the 2026 Governor's Volunteer Service Award in November of 2025. The Governor's Volunteer Service Award honors the true spirit of volunteerism by recognizing individuals, groups, and businesses that make significant contributions to their community through volunteer service. Aviles acknowledged the work of the four 2026 winners: Lyndall Noyes-Brownwell, Betsy White, Kris Medic, and Anne Vilen.

MANAGER'S REPORT

Manager Pinder introduced Josh Hallingse as the new Intergovernmental Affairs Director.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. **Public Hearings on General Obligation Bond Order & Resolution Setting a Special Bond Referendum for Open Space and Housing**

Melissa Moore, Finance Director, provided background information. She explained that the County is pursuing the issuance of General Obligation (GO) bonds of the County which shall be for the following purposes and in the following maximum amounts: $30 million of bonds to fund the acquisition and improvement of land or interests therein for conservation purposes, including the protection of natural resources and the preservation of farms and scenic landscapes, and the development of parks, greenways, trails, and other outdoor recreational opportunities; and $40 million of bonds to pay the capital costs of housing the benefit of persons of low or moderate income, including construction of related infrastructure improvements and acquisition of related land and rights-of-way.

The Chair opened the Open Space Bond Public Hearing at 5:23 p.m. There were two speakers:

David Nutter- with Connect Buncombe thanked the Board for making this major step forward for progress.

Susan Bean – with Mountain True thanked the Board for considering this bond and highlighted the importance of land conservation.

The Chair closed the public hearing at 5:27 p.m.

Commissioner Wells noted that the proposed bonds align with the county's comprehensive plan and 2030 strategic goals, noting past bond successes such as affordable housing projects and park investments. She expressed support for moving both bonds forward, emphasizing their importance for community recovery, economic vitality, and long-term growth

Commissioner Wells made the motion to approve the bond order authorizing the issuance of $30 million general obligation Open Space Bonds. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ball and carried unanimously.

Melissa Moore provided more information related to the Housing Bonds.

The Chair opened the public hearing at 5:32 p.m. There were no comments, and the public hearing closed at 5:32 p.m.

Chair Edwards emphasized the importance of the item from both the Affordable Housing Subcommittee's perspective and the earlier Growth Management Strategy presentation, noting ongoing gaps in housing and unmet goals.

Commissioner Ball highlighted the flexibility of affordable housing bond funds compared to federal sources and noted the high demand demonstrated by recent grant applications. He emphasized that the funding supports both county projects as well as key community partners.

Commissioner Horton made the motion to approve the bond order authorizing the issuance of $40 million general obligation housing bonds. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Whitesides and carried unanimously.

Moore provided more information related to the resolution setting a Special Bond Referendum which would be delivered to the Board of Elections if approved.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to approve the resolution setting a special bond referendum and directing the publication of notice of a special bond referendum and notification of the Board of Elections. Commissioner Horton seconded the motion, and it was carried unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Approval of Policy Updates: Overtime Pay; Sustainable Fleet; PCI Compliance

Rafael Baptista provided background information. He explained that as part of the County's regular policy review process, three existing policies were evaluated and updated: Overtime Pay, Sustainable Fleet, and Payment Card Industry (PCI) Compliance.

The primary substantive change is within the Overtime Pay Policy, which removes compensatory time as a payment option. Beginning with the pay period starting June 27, 2026, all non-exempt employees will be paid time-and-a-half for all hours worked over 40 in a workweek.

The updates to the Sustainable Fleet Policy do not introduce major changes. Revisions focus on clarifying language to better align the policy with current practice and shifting operational details from policy to procedures.

For the PCI Compliance Policy, updates are technical in nature. The policy has been aligned with PCI DSS v4.0 (previously v3.12) for all systems handling cardholder data. The revisions also clarify the responsibilities of the Finance Director and the Computer and Information Security Officer.

Baptista explained that Staff recommend that the Board consider shifting the approval authority for these three policies from “Board Approved” to “County Manager Approved.” He further explained that this change would streamline the policy approval process and support more efficient operations by placing policies not mandated for Board approval under the County Manager’s authority, while enabling the Board to focus on strategic governance and oversight.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to approve the updated Overtime Pay, Sustainable Fleet, and PCI Compliance policies and move future approval of Overtime Pay and PCI Compliance from Board Approved to County Manager Approved Policies. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Horton and carried unanimously.

2. Resolution Approving the Design and Engineering Contract for the Garren Creek Landslide with ECS Southeast, LLC

Kevin Madsen, Helene Recovery Officer, provided background information. He explained that Tropical Storm Helene caused widespread damage in Buncombe County, including nine landslide sites in the Garren Creek and Craigtown communities in Fairview. The Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) has obligated funding to pay for design and engineering services to examine potential landslide hazard mitigation options. The County released an RFQ for this work and has selected ECS Southeast, LLC to complete this work with the contract amount of $1,826,800. This work will be paid for with Public Assistance funding from FEMA and NCEM

Commissioner Horton made the motion Approve the resolution authorizing the execution of a contract for design and engineering services with ECS Southeast, LLC to examine potential landslide hazard mitigation options. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Whitesides and carried unanimously.

3. Resolution to Adopt the Hazard Mitigation Plan

Brad Hughes, Emergency Services, provided background information. He explained that Buncombe County and Madison County face a variety of natural hazards that pose risks to life and property, prompting both jurisdictions to coordinate mitigation efforts. In response, a multi-jurisdictional hazard mitigation plan has been developed with input from appropriate local and state officials to reduce long-term exposure to such hazards. Adoption of this plan supports the counties’ obligations under state and federal law, including the North Carolina Emergency Management Act and the Stafford Act, ensuring continued eligibility for disaster assistance. The plan has been reviewed by North Carolina Emergency Management and FEMA and has been approved pending completion of local adoption procedures. Hughes noted that this is a living document and that additions/edits may need to be added during the 5 year lifespan of the program.

Commissioner Whitesides made the motion to approve the 2026 Buncombe County and Madison County Hazard Mitigation Plan. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ball and carried unanimously.

4. **Budget Amendment for Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) Compliance**

Jay Shih, Budget Analyst, provided background information. He explained that each year's Budget closeout requires adjustments based on the Government Accounting Standards Board's statements. These amendments do not require additional use of funds as each expenditure has an offsetting revenue: lease financing revenue for leases and subscription financing revenue for subscriptions. Alternatively, some subscriptions and leases must be reclassified as debt expenses, as in the case of the Register of Deeds Automation Fund. Funds includes General, ROD Automation, Transportation, and Solid Waste Enterprise.

Commissioner Horton made the motion to approve the budget amendment. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Whitesides and carried unanimously.

5. **Budget Amendments for Debt Activity**

Jay Shih provided background information. He explained that This action is to approve budget amendments to increase budgetary capacity for debt service charges and debt issuance costs resulting from the issuance of LOBs 2026A and 2026B in the current year. Costs in the Public School Capital Needs Fund, the Capital Projects Fund, and the Solid Waste Capital Projects Fund will be fully offset by debt proceeds, while costs in the General Fund will be offset by both debt proceeds and existing available budget.

Commissioner Horton made the motion to approve the budget amendment. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Whitesides and carried unanimously.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

Strategic Partnership Grants Committee – Commissioner Horton made the motion to reappoint Ann Flynn and Mark Mickey to the Committee. Commissioner Wells seconded the motion and it was carried unanimously.

Early Childhood Education and Development Fund – Commissioner Ball made the motion to reappoint Adrian Sandler, Emily Nicholson, and Sara Lappe to the Committee. Commissioner Wells seconded the motion, and it was carried unanimously.

Economic Development Coalition – Commissioner Horton made the motion to reappoint Kirck Ritchie, Sabrina Rockoff, Allison Blake, and Abhi Biswas to the Committee. Commissioner Whitesides seconded the motion and it was carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 6:07 p.m.