MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'

REGULAR MEETING OF SEPTEMBER 1, 2026.

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Regular Meeting on September 1, 2026, in the Chamber at 200 College Street in downtown Asheville, North Carolina at 5:00 p.m.

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

The Chair opened the meeting and provided opening remarks. Additionally, she stated that although she does not have a personal financial impact, she will be requesting a motion to recuse her from discussion and the vote on the Future Factories grant item under New Business on the agenda.

CONSENT

1. Approval of the July 2026 Tax Collection Report

2. Resolution Approving Pyrotechnic Experts for Firework Displays

3. Road Closure Petition to Delete a Section of SR-1495 from the NCDOT State System

4. Budget Amendment for Library Donations

5. Approval of the Interlocal Agreement Between the City of Asheville and Buncombe County Governing the General Assistance Program

Commissioner Horton made the motion to approve the Consent agenda and agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Moore and carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Thomas Schieber – expressed concern about County spending and property taxes. He urged the Board to reduce spending, focus on core government services, eliminate or consolidate non-mandated programs and funding, address fraud and waste, consider selling County property, and explore voluntary taxpayer donations to support non-mandated initiatives.

Jeff Fager- discussed ongoing flooding issues in Beacon Village, identifying damaged and improperly installed residential culverts as a contributing factor. He requested County assistance in identifying the appropriate department or enforcement mechanism to address the culvert issues and improve drainage in the neighborhood.

Gino Perez – Better Together Transportation - expressed concern about driver shortages affecting Mountain Mobility and resulting in canceled or delayed transportation for seniors and people with disabilities. He encouraged the County to consider placing a quarter-cent transit referendum before voters to provide additional funding and increase transportation capacity.

GOOD NEWS

1. **LEAD Fellow Madison Harms Introduction**

Manager Pinder introduced Madison Harms as the new Lead for North Carolina (LFNC) fellow. She explained that LFNC is a state affiliate of Lead for America, a nonpartisan fellowship program across the United States. She stated that Harms is a recent graduate from Appalachian State University and earned her degree in Political Science with a Minor in Community and Regional Planning.

NEW BUSINESS

1. **Approval of Pharmacy Benefit Changes and New Pharmacy Benefit Manager**

Shauna Shepherd, Human Resources Director with Roberta Ferdinand, USI provided background information. They explained the two recommendations: 1) The GLP-1 savings strategy for 2027; and 2) a new pharmacy benefit manager. Ferdinand explained both recommendations in detail. She said that the first is a recommendation for the County to remove GLP-1 medications prescribed for weight management from the BCBS formulary, eliminating coverage through the medical plan. Instead, the County would implement an RxSaveCard program to provide financial assistance for eligible employees prescribed these medications. The second recommendation is related to Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina announcing that Prime Therapeutics will no longer serve as its Pharmacy Benefit Manager (PBM) beginning in 2027. As part of our renewal strategy, USI conducted a PBM market evaluation and identified two primary options: to either remain with BCBSNC and transition to their default PBM, Optum, or to carve out pharmacy benefits from BCBSNC and contract directly with Employers Health-CVS (EHCVS) as the PBM. While both BCBS Optum and Employers Health - CVS involve formulary changes and some level of employee disruption, USI projected $1.43 million in additional savings, making Employers Health - CVS the stronger financial option.

The Board asked clarifying questions. They further clarified that GLP-1 medications for diabetes will remain on the pharmacy formulary, while coverage for weight management will transition to the RxSaveCard program as a cost-saving measure. Discussion also addressed premium increases, payment and reimbursement requirements, continued access to nutrition and lifestyle medicine services, employee communication regarding the pharmacy benefit changes, and the ability for employees using GLP-1 medications for weight management to work with their personal primary care providers.

Commissioner Wells asked about the total cost of the health plan and the increase in premiums. Manager Pinder answered that the health plan is approximately $40 million and that premiums increase amounts vary between 7%-20% based on the plan type. She further explained that claims data and utilization trends are reviewed annually to identify cost drivers and inform programs focused on prevention, early detection, and management of high-cost conditions.

Commissioner Horton noted that she was excited for employees to have this option and Board members expressed their appreciation for staff's continued evaluation of health plan costs and benefits.

Commissioner Horton made the motion to support the Health Insurance Plan as presented by Staff. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Sloan and carried unanimously.

2. **Authorization to Submit Proposed Projects for CDBG-DR Community Infrastructure**

Kevin Madsen, Helene Recovery Officer, provided background information. He explained that in response to the State of North Carolina's "Community Infrastructure" Community Development Block Grant - Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) grant opportunity, staff have prepared three proposed applications for funding; 1) The "Buncombe County Parks Recovery & Resilience" project proposes to rebuild Buncombe County Parks damaged by Hurricane Helene, restore park service to pre-Helene levels, and mitigate against future disasters; 2) The "Ferry Road Infrastructure to Enable Affordable Housing" project proposes to build and improve essential infrastructure that will enable the development of affordable housing on the Ferry Road Affordable Housing Community site; And 3) the "Community Resilience at County-Owned Facilities" project seeks to provide comprehensive permanent power redundancy systems for the county's critical facilities. He explained that this grant application requires one public hearing and the County has opted to include a public comment period. The public hearing was held on August 18th and the public comment period was open between July 31st and August 28th. He stated that the proposed action is to provide authorization to submit the three grant applications by the September 16th, 2026 deadline.

Commissioner Wells asked if the County has heard about Public Assistance for Owen Park yet. Madsen said that we have not heard back at this point and noted that staff continues to work with FEMA partners and that we hope to hear back soon.

Commissioners discussed potential future funding opportunities, including whether a subsequent round of Community Infrastructure funding could support stormwater improvements in Swannanoa if additional funding is needed after NCDOT completes its assessment. Madesen confirmed that an inquiry has been submitted to the State regarding eligibility and staff is awaiting a response.

Madsen further clarified that that the remaining $137 million is part of the same funding allocation, with approximately $55 million available in the first round. Awards under the program range from $500,000 to $15 million, with commercial district projects capped at $10 million.

The Board also discussed how CDBG-DR funding interacts with FEMA Public Assistance (PA) and other funding sources. Madesen explained that CDBG-DR is considered funding of last resort, with insurance and FEMA PA pursued first. Any remaining funding gaps, such as those associated with Owen Park, could potentially be considered in a future CDBG-DR funding round once FEMA PA determinations are known.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to approve the resolution and authorize staff to submit proposed applications for the Community Infrastructure CDBG-DR Helene Recovery Grant program. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Sloan and carried unanimously.

3. Notification of Award for WNC Future Factories and Authorization for the County Manager to Execute Agreement

Josh Hallingse, Intergovernmental Relations Director, provided background information. He explained that the WNC Futures Factory is a development of a 70,000-square-foot workforce training and innovation center designed to support Western North Carolina’s economic recovery following Tropical Storm Helene. AB Tech, Buncombe County, and Land of Sky collaborated to

pursue funding through the EDA's FY2025 Disaster Supplemental program, ultimately securing a total project budget of more than $37 million. The award was announced on July 27, 2026, with grant agreements issued shortly thereafter and requiring signatures by September 8, 2026. He explained that a 60-day special conditions period must be completed before funds can be used, including the subdivision and transfer of a 13.18-acre property from Biltmore Farms to AB Tech. He further explained the 52-month project timeline encompassing design, construction, review, and closeout phases. Hallingse highlighted that the County co-applicant and is managing construction and financial administration of related project expenses, while Land of Sky is the primary point of contact for the EDA and is leading grant management and AB Tech is the lead applicant, overseeing programming and procurement for innovation components, programming if workforce space and the lead procurement of innovation operating partner while also being a participant in construction-related procurements.

Hallingse noted that for construction awards, recipients must report job creation/retention and private investment leverage at three, six and nine years after the EDA investment. Lastly, Hallingse explained the upcoming steps, which include finalizing a subrecipient agreement between the County and AB Tech and the Board is asked to authorize the County Manager to accept the grant award and execute all necessary agreements to implement the project.

Vice-Chair Moore made the motion to recuse Chair Edwards from the vote in the interest of avoiding any appearance of conflict of interest due to employment purposes and/or fiduciary potential gain. Commissioner Whitesides seconded the motion, and it was carried unanimously. Vice-Chair Moore presided over the following Board discussion and vote.

Commissioner Wells asked about the County's financial responsibilities. Hallingse explained that project funding consists of approximately $30 million from the EDA grant, a previously authorized $5 million local match, and approximately $3.1 million previously awarded by the State. He said that the EDA grant does not reimburse County staff time associated. Manager Pinder noted that staff are exploring whether local option sales tax funding could cover those costs or whether construction oversight could be contracted to preserve staff capacity.

Commissioner Wells asked about reporting. Hallingse stated that A-B Tech would provide information related to project deliverables, while the County and Land of Sky would participate in reporting milestones to EDA.

Commissioner Horton asked whether the County could be held liable to repay the grant if the project is not carried out, and whether there is an agreement on whether AB Tech or the County would be responsible for repayment. Hallingse explained that the County is a co-recipient of the grant alongside AB Tech and is subject to its terms for nonperformance, although staff does not foresee performance issues, and stated that this is among the matters the Board was being asked to authorize the County Manager to address through subsequent agreements.

Commissioner Sloan asked if there could be more than one innovation partner(s). Hallingse confirmed. Commissioner Sloan asked for further clarification that the property is being transferred to AB Tech and that the building will be theirs. Hallingse confirmed that AB Tech is intended to own the building and lead its design and internal operating model. He further explained that the County will participate as a partner in discussions around procurement, but AB Tech will be the lead. He said that additional agreements between the County and A-B Tech will be formalized as the project progresses.

Commissioner Sloan asked about future ownership of equipment or machinery provided for the facility. Manager Pinder said that those details have not yet been determined and may depend on arrangements with A-B Tech and future innovation partners.

Vice-Chair Moore requested that Commissioners provide the County Manager with concerns or priorities to consider as agreements and negotiations proceed. Manager Pinder requested feedback as soon as possible due to the project's timeline.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to authorize the County Manager to accept the grant award and execute all necessary agreements to implement the project. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ball and carried 6-0 with Chair Edwards recused from voting.

4. Budget Amendment for the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program Subrecipient Management Funds

John Hudson and Kevin Madesen provided background information. Madsen explained that the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) is a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) fund administered by North Carolina Division of Emergency Management. He said that Buncombe County has been awarded a total of $4,124,262.76 to serve as the point of contact with homeowners from application intake to project completion. He said that the Program will acquire and demolish residential structures and return the land to green space. Hudson said that this is the third group of properties for which the County has received Subrecipient Management Funds, which is 5% of the total of the project: Group 3: $4,124,262.

He noted that there are currently two groups of properties for which the County has already received Subrecipient Management Funds, which is 5% of the total of the projects: Group 1: $406,010 and Group 2: $550,950 with the total for all three groups: $5,081,222.

Manager Pinder clarified that the property acquisition program was established following Tropical Storm Helene and is entirely voluntary. She explained that property owners whose homes were impacted by flooding or landslides had the opportunity to apply; the County does not determine which properties will be acquired or demolished. The State reviewed and accepted applications through the state-led program, and the County is now implementing applications submitted more than a year ago.

Commissioner Horton asked how many properties are in group three. Madsen said that group three currently has 152 properties. 142 were approved in batch one and the County was recently notified last week of 10 additional properties in batch two for a total of 152.

Madesen noted that the program is funded 75% federally and 25% by the State, with funding administered at the state level. The approximately $4 million before the Board today would reimburse County staff costs associated with overseeing contractors and implementation of the program.

Commissioner Wells asked about the elevation applications. Madesen said that 53 application packets for Buncombe County properties have been submitted to FEMA for federal review. He said that the State completed engineering studies and determine if the properties meet HMGP eligibility requirements for elevation. He noted that eligibility considerations include foundation type and structural condition and further explained that because this is the first group of elevation projects to reach federal review, staff does not have an estimated approval timeline

at this point. Madsen noted that an additional group is anticipated and that a comprehensive Helene Recovery update, including additional program data, will be presented to the Board at an upcoming Briefing meeting.

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

5. FY2026 Budget Carryforwards

John Hudson, Budget Director, provided background information. He explained that the attached ordinance provides information regarding departments or functions that have requested FY2026 budget in the amounts indicated to be carried forward into FY2027 for the following reasons:

- Purchases in FY2026 not delivered prior to June 30, 2026 due to shipping or vendor delays;
- Services obligated in FY2026 however were unable to be completed prior to June 30, 2026;

Total annual budget requested to be carried forward by fund are as follows:

- General Fund: $126,981
- Mountain Mobility Special Revenue Fund: $392,147
- Health, Employment, Property & Casualty Insurance Internal Service Fund: $33,483.

Hudson said that the total amount of annual budget to be carried forward is $552,611; $58,335 of the budget carried forward in the General Fund will transferred to the Capital Fund to be budgeted in the FY26 Ambulances project to cover an overage identified in FY2026 that was covered by the General Fund where the purchase was not made in the fiscal year.

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

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

Mountain Area Workforce Development Board - Commissioner Whitesides made the motion to reappoint Eric Watts, Tara McCracken, Michael Horvath, John Gossett. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Sloan and carried unanimously.

Asheville-Buncombe Continuum of Care – Commissioner Sloan made the motion to appoint Commissioner Ball to replace Commissioner Horton. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Whitesides and carried unanimously.

Juvenile Crime Prevention Council – Commissioner Sloan made the motion to appoint Commissioner Horton to replace Commissioner Ball. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Whitesides and carried unanimously.

The Board scheduled interviews for September 15, 2026, at 1:00 p.m. for the following boards:

- Strategic Partnership Grants Committee

- Asheville Buncombe Technical Community College Board of Trustees
- Historic Resources Commission
- County Board of Adjustment

BOARD UPDATES

The Board members provided updates to the various Boards and Commissions they regularly attend. Commissioner Wells provided an update on the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners' Conference in which she and other Board members recently attended.

Commissioner Ball provided an update from the Continuum of Care (COC) meeting, noting that he was recently appointed and attended their last meeting. He said that the COC is working to coordinate local homelessness strategies, track data, and secure funding. They have identified funds to hire an individual or firm to help find additional funding opportunities and currently have a request for quotes out for that work. They also issued an RFQ for strategic communications to improve public understanding and engagement. Additionally, the COC recently conducted a community cleanup on Tunnel Road, collecting 69 bags of trash plus larger discarded items in efforts to keep the community safe and clean.

Meeting adjourned at 6:32 p.m.