MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'

BRIEFING MEETING OF AUGUST 18, 2026.

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Briefing Meeting on August 18, 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; Vice-Chair Martin Moore; Commissioner Terri Wells, Commissioner Al Whitesides; Commissioner Jennifer Horton; Commissioner Drew Ball.

Absent: Commissioner Parker Sloan

The following items were reviewed.

1. **UNC Health Letter of Support**

Chair Edwards provided background information. She explained that the proposed letter expressed support for UNC Health's Certificate of Need application to build a new 92-bed hospital in western Asheville, citing documented regional need and the benefits of improved access for rural counties. The letter highlights lessons from Hurricane Helene, noting that limited road access underscored the importance of distributed emergency care. The letter concludes that the project will enhance public health, safety, and economic development and urges state approval. Commissioners consented to adding the letter to the New Business agenda for review and approval.

2. **NCACC Legislative Goals**

Josh Hallingse provided background information and provided the timeline and structure for the NCACC 2026 Legislative Goals process, including deadlines for goal submissions. Commissioner Wells further outlined the proposed goals which included:

<u>State-level NCACC Legislative Goals</u>

- Support additional resources for mental and behavioral health, including emergency responders, law enforcement, and state employees.
- Ensure any restructuring of the behavioral health system accounts for county fiscal/operational impacts and protects community-based crisis capacity.
- Encourage state funding for essential medical, mental health, substance use disorder, and social services for individuals in local detention facilities.
- Advocate for statewide support to address detention facility bed shortages and in-custody treatment challenges.
- Seek state funding for K–12 and community college employees and related capital needs.
- Adjust state programs to improve property tax relief for low-income seniors, veterans, and disabled residents.
- Preserve local taxing authority and local control over locally delivered services.

- Fund and support affordable housing initiatives, including closing the property-tax loophole related to nonprofit ownership.
- Pursue increased recurring state funding for farmland preservation initiatives.

Federal-level NCACC Legislative Goals

- Support increased funding for disaster preparation, assistance, and mitigation, and seek policy changes to streamline and improve access to FEMA assistance.
- Oppose unfunded mandates or cuts to essential health programs such as Medicaid and SNAP.
- Improve food assistance programs at both state and federal levels.

The Board discussed and consented to sending a letter on behalf of the Board to the NCACC outlining the stated goals.

3. Update on Benefits and Pharmacy Offerings

Shauna Shepherd provided background information. USI consultants further detailed the proposed 2027 health plan changes, focusing on pharmacy benefits and weight-management medication strategies. The County recommends removing GLP-1 weight-loss drugs from the BCBS formulary and adopting an RxSaveCard program, which would provide lower direct-to-consumer pricing and yield an estimated annual savings of over $565,700. Employees would pay a $100 copay under this program, while the County funds the remaining cost through the RxSaveCard mechanism. USI also reviewed options due to BCBSNC's transition away from Prime Therapeutics, with USI recommending Employers Health-CVS because it delivers approximately $1.43 million in savings compared to the BCBS/Optum renewal. Though either PBM option would involve formulary changes and some disruption, Employers Health-CVS offers stronger rebate guarantees and wide pharmacy network access. Additional updates for 2027 include required IRS-related HDHP deductible increases, higher HSA contributions, and vendor changes for FSA and Dependent Care FSA programs. The proposed timeline targets implementation beginning in early September, with final approval expected at the September 1 Board of Commissioners meeting.

MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'

REGULAR MEETING OF AUGUST 18, 2026.

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Regular Meeting on August 18, 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.

Absent: Commissioner Parker Sloan.

The Chair opened the meeting and provided opening remarks.

CONSENT

1. Approval of the August 4, 2026 Combined Meeting Minutes

2. Justice Resource Advisory Council Name Change to Criminal Justice Coordinating Councils and Membership Change Resolution

3. Resolution Approving Pyrotechnic Experts for Firework Displays

Commissioner Wells made the motion to add UNC Health Letter of Support to New Business. The Motion was seconded by Commissioner Moore and carried unanimously.

Commissioner Moore made the motion to approve the consent agenda and the amended agenda. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Horton and carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

R.J. Taylor - Swannanoa resident - member of the Small Area Plan steering committee - voiced support for the plan and commended the planning staff for their extensive work. He highlighted the plan's focus on safety, connectivity, and transportation improvements that will help make Swannanoa a safer community.

Jennifer Eby – described her concerns about conditions at the Detention Center, stating that incarcerated individuals often lack outdoor time, exercise opportunities, and functional access to reading materials. She urged the board to investigate these conditions.

Dan Slagle –retired postal employee from Swannanoa - thanked the board for its support in efforts to restore the local post office and shared that residents have been told a fully funded 10-year lease has been signed. He requested that the board help obtain formal written confirmation from the Postal Service to reassure the community.

John Dennis – president of the Blue Ridge Bicycle Club - spoke on behalf of 10,000 regional cyclists to highlight the safety issues they face from a minority of aggressive drivers. He expressed support for Lennie's Law and Buncombe County's effort to advance it in the General Assembly to improve road safety for all users.

Maddie Barondeau – shared her personal story of losing her boyfriend, Lenny Antonelli, in the 2025 NC251 crash and urged the board to take actions that improve safety for vulnerable

road users. She expressed gratitude for recent safety improvements and emphasized the importance of bicycle safety zones to prevent future tragedies.

Adam Smith - Chair of the Woodfin Parks and Community Enrichment Committee- described how the deaths of Lenny Antonelli and Jake Hill inspired the creation of “Lennie’s Law,” a proposed bicycle safety zone initiative aimed at reducing speeding and protecting cyclists. He highlighted the widespread local support already secured and urged Buncombe County to join other communities in endorsing the proposal to help advance it at the state level.

GOOD NEWS

1. Elevate Buncombe Guide Award Winners

Shauna Shepherd and Richard Bell introduced the new employee recognition program. Bell explained that the program is designed to celebrate the incredible contributions our employees make every day. Built with feedback from departments across the County, the program aims to strengthen the County’s commitment to living the core values while creating more ways to highlight exceptional work throughout the year. Elevate Buncombe is designed with a two-tiered structure, featuring both quarterly awards and a distinguished annual award. Fifty-nine nominations were received, and 13 employee winners were recognized including Rocio Borghini (Human Resources), Tom Braine (Information Technology), Robert Brown (General Services), Lauren Couch (Health & Human Services), Matt Evans (Finance), Tracie Franklin (Health & Human Services), Sergeant Bryan Freeborn (Buncombe County Sheriff’s Office), Kelly Houston (Risk & Compliance), Neggy Rodriguez-Fox (Election Services), Felissa Vazquez (Health & Human Services), Jen Waite (Libraries), Conner White (Recreation Services), and Jack Wright (General Services).

PRESENTATIONS

1. Strategic Partnership Grants Committee Annual Update

Members of the Strategic Partnership Grants Committee shared an overview of the work of the board and their mission to grant funding to nonprofit organizations working toward outcomes in alignment with Buncombe County’s Strategic Plan and Helene recovery priorities. The board oversees a budget of $1 million in projects and each project can apply for up to $85,000 in funding. Sixteen projects received funding in environmental, community health, education, and economic development focus areas.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. Southeastern Container Economic Development Agreement

Josh Hallingse provided background information. He explained that on February 19, 2026, Southeastern Container announced its plans to expand at its existing facility in Enka, North Carolina. Southeastern Container is an injection molding and blow molding manufacturer that produces preforms, bottle closures, and pallets.

Southeastern Container plans to invest $31.3 million in capital expenditures and create 12 new full-time jobs, averaging $32.90 per hour. Prior to the February expansion announcement, Southeastern Container requested, and the County agreed, subject to formal approval by the Board of Commissioners at a Public Hearing, to provide economic development incentives to induce the Company to make capital investments and create jobs in Buncombe

County. The Buncombe County incentives will total $85,000. $5,000 of these incentives will be leveraged as the required local government match for the State of North Carolina's Building Reuse Program. The Building Reuse grant program requires a 5% local match and this project received a $100,000 Building Reuse grant award. In addition to the grant match incentives, per the Buncombe County Economic Development Policy, Southeastern Container is eligible for a one-time incentive of $80,000 based on capital investment and job creation targets. Additionally, a portion of the grant may only be earned if Southeastern Container demonstrates its ability to hire employees from workforce development programs. In total, between State Building Reuse grant incentives ($100,000) and Buncombe County incentives ($85,000), Southeastern Container is eligible to receive up to $185,000 in total incentives.

Hallingse said that staff have analyzed the economic impact of the expansion project, drafted an Economic Development Agreement (EDA) between Southeastern Container and Buncombe County, and are requesting the Board's formal approval for the incentive Grant and are also requesting approval for a budget ordinance that would establish the building reuse grant fund.

The Chair opened the public hearing at 5:48 p.m. There were no comments. The public hearing was closed at 5:48 p.m.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to approve the 1) Building Reuse Grant Agreement with N.C. Commerce and Southeastern Container 2. Economic Development Incentives for Southeastern Container; and; 3. Economic Development Agreement between Southeastern Container and Buncombe County; and 4. Establishing a $105,000 budget for the NC Commerce Building Reuse Grant. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Whitesides and it passed 5-1 with Commissioner Ball voting nay.

2. CDBG-DR Community Infrastructure - Public Hearing #1

Tyler Henry provided background information. He explained that this first funding round makes approximately $55 million available statewide, with individual projects capped at $15 million. Three potential projects aim to address unmet needs after Helene including parks recovery projects, infrastructure on the County-owned Ferry Road Affordable Housing site, and resiliency projects at critical county facilities focused on power redundancy. He noted that the Helene Recovery Plan outlined the need to recover parks, build more affordable housing, and invest in resiliency measures and preparedness.

Henry further explained that the public comment period will remain open through Aug. 28 to gather feedback before final applications are due Sep. 16. Public comment can be shared with the Helene Recovery Office by email, by phone at 828-250-6100, or in writing to the attention of the Buncombe County Helene Recovery Office at 200 College St., Asheville, NC 28801. Staff will incorporate public feedback for the Board’s review and approval at the September 1, 2026 meeting. Lastly, he noted that other infrastructure projects will be considered as more recovery funding streams become available.

The Chair opened the public hearing at 5:58 p.m. There were 8 speakers. The public hearing closed at 6:19 p.m.

Public Hearing comments:

David Nutter- Chair of the Connect Buncombe Advocacy and Partnerships Committee, voiced support for incorporating the recovery of Owen Park into the broader Swannanoa River and Fonta Flora Greenway plan, noting its alignment with existing French Broad River greenway efforts. He emphasized the regional importance, resilience needs, and long-term connectivity benefits of completing each segment of the Swannanoa River Greenway.

Jeff Fager- resident of Beacon Village in Swannanoa, described ongoing flooding issues caused by clogged culverts and inadequate stormwater infrastructure, exacerbated by recent development at the old Beacon plant site. He asked the board to intervene, noting that county and state departments have not coordinated effectively and that residents need support to address the persistent flooding.

Dan Slagle – described significant flooding in Swannanoa caused by clogged culverts that were only partially cleared after Hurricane Helene, resulting in repeated water backups into homes and streets. He asked the county to help coordinate with DOT to fully inspect, repair, or replace the drainage infrastructure using CDBG funds to protect the unincorporated community.

Rebecca Williams –Swannanoa resident, echoed neighbors' concerns about repeated flooding in Swannanoa and emphasized that rebuilding homes without addressing drainage problems is not sustainable. She also voiced strong support for the CDBG-DR grant, highlighting the importance of park restoration, particularly Owen Park, as part of the community's emotional, physical, and environmental recovery.

Shelly Mckechnie - executive director of the Friends of the Fonta Flora State Trail, thanked the county for its disaster recovery grant application and emphasized the importance of fully restoring Owen Park. She urged the county to ensure a greenway connection in the planning process, noting its significance for the Fonta Flora State Trail and the broader regional trail network

Liesl Erb – Warren Wilson College staff member, echoed neighbors' concerns about Swannanoa's flooding and expressed strong support for the county's disaster recovery grant focused on resilience. She highlighted the importance of restoring Owen Park as both a community gathering space and a model for regional resilience, emphasizing its role in local well-being and broader research on disaster recovery.

Jevald Pope – Swannanoa resident, urged the board to support the Owen Park project, emphasizing that the community has lacked a central gathering place since the mill closed and that Owen Park once served as its social heart. He noted how the park brought neighbors together and asked commissioners to remember the strong public support when the project comes up for a vote.

James Thomas –Swannanoa resident, voiced strong support for the Owen Park project and emphasized the importance of parks and greenways for healthy, vibrant communities. He also described ongoing flooding in downtown Swannanoa and urged the county to address the drainage issues impacting homes and businesses.

3. ZPH2026-00024 KOA Map Amendment (US Hwy 70)

Shannon Capezzali provided background information. She explained that the ZPH2026-00024 KOA Map Amendment: Kampgrounds of America Inc. applied to rezone two (2) parcels of land with the addresses 517 Lazy Bear Blvd. and 99999 US Hwy 70 further identified as PINs 9699-70-6736 and 9699-71-5166 from CS Commercial to R-3 – Residential. She further explained that the property is currently used as a recreation vehicle park with cottages and camping available with a vacant commercial space. This zoning change would allow for more residential uses like mobile homes and RV parks. Capezzali stated that the hearing was properly noticed in accordance with applicable General Statutes and County Code, including publication of a legal advertisement, mailed notices to property owners within 1,000 feet, notice on the County website, and physical posting of the property and noted that the Planning Board approved the amendment at their July 20, 2026 meeting.

Commissioner Wells asked about a rezoning request involving a flood hazard area and how staff's impact analysis applied. Capezzali explained that while the rezoning would reduce the intensity and range of permitted uses, it would not reduce allowable residential density, which remains 12 units per acre; a lower-density district such as R-1 or R-2 would be more consistent with the hazard-area considerations. Staff further explained that the impact analysis considers existing and potential uses and their effects on surrounding properties and hazard areas, noting that because this proposal is a downzoning, its potential impacts would generally be less than those associated with an upzoning.

The Chair opened the Public Hearing opened at 6:26 p.m. there was one public commenter. The Public Hearing closed 6:28 p.m.

Public Comment:

Liesl Erb – Ecologist and Buncombe County resident, urged commissioners to avoid permitting development in flood-prone areas, stressing that repeated flooding reflects a new climate reality requiring long-term, science-based planning. She encouraged the county to think broadly and act as a national model for resilient land-use decisions.

Commissioner Whitesides made the motion to approve the rezoning of the subject property as it is consistent with the Buncombe County 2043 Comprehensive Plan. Commissioner Wells seconded the motion and passed 5-1 with Commissioner Horton voting nay.

Commissioner Horton asked to be recognized to speak to her nay vote. She stated that as a lifelong resident of Buncombe County, as a resident who was affected greatly by Hurricane Helene, as someone who lost family and close friends, and having seen the devastation on US 70, she could not support building in a known floodplain and changing the rezoning.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Resolution in Support of Lennie's Law

Commissioner Ball read the resolution. He said that the Board of Commissioners expresses support for the Leonard Antonelli and Jacob Hill Bicycle Safety Zone Act of 2025 ("Lennie's Law"), created in response to the death of Alex Rozos who tragically lost his life in a hit-and-run collision while riding his bicycle on Swannanoa River Road in 2024 and the tragic

crash that killed two cyclists, Leonard “Lennie” Antonelli and Jacob “Jake” Hill while injuring Griffin Tichenor on NC 251 in 2025.

The resolution highlights the region’s high rate of bicycle-related crashes and emphasizes the urgent need for enhanced roadway safety. It supports establishing Bicycle Safety Zones, implementing traffic-calming measures, and collaborating with NCDOT, the French Broad MPO, and local municipalities to improve safety along NC Scenic Byway 251 and other key corridors. Additionally, the resolution honors the victims and underscores the community’s commitment to preventing future tragedies.

Commissioner Ball made the motion to pass the Resolution in Support of Lennie’s Law. Commissioner Moore seconded the motion and it was carried unanimously.

2. Indoor Recreation Center Design Services Contract Approval

Ronnie Lunsford provided background information. He explained that as part of the FY27 Capital Improvement Plan, the Board of Commissioners approved a project to design an Indoor Recreation Center located on County-owned property at the Buncombe County Sports Park. Consultants are needed to facilitate this design project and their services will include the following:

- Space Programming
- Schematic Design
- Design Development
- Construction Documents
- Cost Estimating
- Bid and Construction Administration

He further explained that pursuant to General Statute, General Services released a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to select a consulting firm. Ten responses to the RFQ were received, and a scoring committee made up of Parks and Recreation and General Services staff evaluated and scored those responses. Of the ten, Method Studio received the highest score and was selected as the design firm. After negotiations, their contract amount is $1,599,220, which is within budget for this project and no new funds are needed.

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

3. UNC Health Letter of Support

Chair Edwards noted that this was added from the Briefing and noted that the letter of support signaled their strong support for the Certificate of Need application filed by UNC Health West Medical Center to develop a new 92-bed acute care hospital on the western side of Asheville. The proposed site located west of the French Broad River near the interstate interchange is positioned to serve as a point of entry for patients traveling into Buncombe County from Clay, Graham, Madison, and Yancey Counties. The letter emphasizes the need for a well-distributed network of accessible emergency and inpatient care throughout Buncombe County in the aftermath of Helene

Commissioner Ball made the motion to approve the letter of support. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Wells and carried unanimously.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

1. Board Appointments for August 18, 2026

- **Strategic Partnership Grants Committee –** The Board requested to keep accepting applications to be reviewed at the September 1 meeting and schedule interviews for September 15.
- **Asheville Buncombe Technical Community College Board of Trustees –** The Board requested to keep accepting applications to be reviewed at the September 1 meeting and schedule interviews for September 15.

Adjourned at 6:50 p.m.