MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'

REGULAR MEETING OF OCTOBER 6, 2026.

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Regular Meeting on October 6, 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 Al Whitesides; Commissioner Jennifer Horton; Commissioner Drew Ball and Commissioner Parker Sloan.

Absent: Commissioner Terri Wells.

The Chair opened the meeting and provided opening remarks.

CONSENT

1. Approval of the September 15, 2026 Combined Meeting Minutes
2. Approval of the August 2026 Tax Collection Report
3. Request to waive occupancy tax penalty for Rock Haven Motel/Econo Lodge Biltmore
4. Resolution Approving Pyrotechnic Experts for Firework Displays
5. Appointment of Mr. Mark Matthews to the Reems Creek Volunteer Fire Department Firefighters' Relief Fund Board of Trustees

Commissioner Ball made a motion to remove agenda item New Business 5, a budget amendment. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Moore and carried unanimously.

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

Gerry Nugent- urged the board to adopt a resolution encouraging residents to vote no on all three proposed North Carolina constitutional amendments, citing concerns about unclear impacts on taxes, public services, and voting requirements. She emphasized that constitutional changes should be fully understood and justified to help residents make informed decisions.

Jackie Oerther – requested permission to hold the Fairview Christmas Parade on Charlotte Highway, emphasizing that the event represents hope and community after recent hardships. They noted that organizers are coordinating safety measures, and securing approvals, and funding.

Natalie Dorsey – urged the board to oppose all three proposed constitutional amendments, arguing they would reduce state and local revenue and harm essential services, particularly public education. They emphasized the significant financial impact of the income

and property tax amendments and asked the board to defend local decision-making and resources by passing a resolution against the measures.

Marissa Pack – requested support for Fairview Parade on Fairview Highway, noting it has become an important community tradition, emphasizing its emotional significance after the losses from Hurricane Helen and its role in supporting local families and small businesses. She explained that organizers are working on all safety, traffic, and insurance requirements and asked the county to provide a path for the parade to continue.

Sarah Kent- urged the board to scrutinize and oppose mass-surveillance technologies such as Axon's subscription-based system, expressing concerns about warrantless data collection and Fourth Amendment implications. She noted public uncertainty surrounding a recently pulled "camera project" budget item and said she will continue raising transparency and civil-liberty concerns at future meetings.

Anthony Pena – shared concerns about the safety of mRNA vaccine technology, citing a 2021 *Nature* article describing impurities that can form during lipid nanoparticle delivery and potentially affect mRNA stability and translation. He argued that these findings raise broader health and scientific questions as mRNA platforms expand beyond COVID-19 vaccines and urged commissioners to consider these issues carefully.

Gino Perez – raised concerns about the county's RIDE voucher program, noting that listed providers are limited or unsuitable and that voucher usage has dropped sharply despite reported capacity. He urged commissioners to require staff to present an alternative alongside the current program, arguing that RIDE delivers far fewer rides than promised and fails to meet real transportation needs.

Did not state name – expressed concerns about the upcoming election, alleging flaws in voting processes and warning of potential fraud in Buncombe County. He also shared personal frustrations related to identification, medical communication, and public safety.

PRESENTATIONS

1. **Domestic Violence Prevention and Awareness Month Proclamation**

Commissioner Ball read the proclamation which was accepted by April Burgess-Johnson, Executive Director of Helpmate. He stated that Domestic violence prevention and awareness are vital to Buncombe County and Western North Carolina because intimate partner violence impacts the safety, health, and stability of the entire community. Burgess-Johnson

thanked the Commissioners and provided detailed information for the upcoming Candlelight Vigil honoring the memory of domestic violence victims on October 29.

PUBLIC HEARING

1. **East Fork Economic Development Agreement**

Josh Halingse provided background information. He explained that in December 2025, East Fork Pottery LLC announced its plans to expand at its existing facility in Buncombe County. He further explained that East Fork Pottery is a leading manufacturer and distributor of ceramic dishware and plans to invest $2.5 million in capital expenditures and create 40 new full-time jobs, averaging $26 an hour.

Halingse further explained that prior to the December announcement, East Fork requested made formal application of incentives. The County, subject to formal approval by the Board of Commissioners at a Public Hearing, provided guidance on the utilization of economic development incentives to induce the Company to make capital investments and create jobs in Buncombe County. The Buncombe County incentives will total $21,000. Based on the County's policy, East Fork is eligible for a one-time incentive of $16,000 based on capital investment and job creation targets. Additionally, the Company may be eligible to receive up to $5,000 in employment incentives if the company demonstrates its ability to hire employees from workforce development programs. He stated that staff have analyzed the economic impact of the expansion project, drafted an Economic Development Agreement (EDA) between East Fork Pottery and Buncombe County, and are requesting the Board's formal approval for the incentive grant.

Alex Matisse, CEO of East Fork provided more detailed information related to the operations of the company and their commitments moving forward.

The Chair opened the public hearing at 5:48 p.m. There was one public comment:

Ashley Swanger – spoke in support of the investment in this community.

The Chair closed the public hearing at 5:49 p.m.

Commissioners expressed strong support for approving the economic development incentive agreement, praising East Fork as a model local business that invests in its employees, reflects community values, and contributes to the region’s creative and economic vitality. Multiple commissioners highlighted East Fork’s living-wage commitments, fair-chance practices, and positive workplace culture.

Commissioner Whitesides made the motion to approve economic development incentives for East Fork Pottery and the Economic Development Agreement between East Fork and Buncombe County. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ball and carried unanimously.

2. **CDBG-NR Public Hearing**

Rachael Sawyer, Strategic Partnership Director, provided background information. She explained that Buncombe County received a $400,000 CDBG-NR grant in 2022 to support home repairs for low- and moderate-income homeowners, but no funds were spent due to program delays and Tropical Storm Helene. Because home-repair partners have shifted to disaster-recovery work, the state's Rural Economic Development Division offered the County the option to modify both the project scope and the award amount instead of canceling the grant. She noted that Staff has reviewed program guidelines and proposed redirecting the funds to support NCDOT's Swannanoa Sidewalks project, which addresses funding gaps for sidewalk construction on Whitson Avenue and several adjacent streets. The proposed modification would increase the grant to $719,400 with 90% allocated to infrastructure improvements and 10% to general administration. This would supplement other pending grants of $979,069 for Whitson Avenue, and $786,291 for Railroad Street, Alexander Place and South Avenue. The project meets HUD's low-to-moderate income national objective, supports livability principles by investing in existing communities, and aligns with multiple County plans, including the Comprehensive Land Use Plan and the Helene Recovery Plan.

The Chair opened the public hearing at 6:02 p.m. There were no public comments. The Chair closed the public hearing at 6:02 p.m.

Commissioner Sloan asked about the Rural Economic Development Division's openness to modifying the existing CDBG-NR grant to fund sidewalk construction and NCDOT's role. Sawyer said that staff has had multiple discussions about eligibility and feasibility, and that the division had responded favorably. She further clarified that NCDOT would serve as the lead agency for right-of-way acquisition, design, engineering, and construction, ensuring compliance with federal funding requirements.

Commissioner Moore made the motion to approve the resolution authorizing submission of grant modification documents for CDBG-NR 21-C-4009 Funding. Commissioner Sloan seconded the motion and it was carried unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

1. **Economic Development Update and Building Reuse Grant Local Authorization**

Josh Halingse, Intergovernmental Affairs Director, provided background information. He explained that in spring 2026, Appalachian Mountain Health (AMH) purchased and began planning to renovate a 8,740 square-foot facility to establish a comprehensive Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) serving the Black Mountain and Swannanoa communities of Buncombe County. He said that this facility will address a gap in healthcare services that was closed when a medical practice in the same building closed in October 2025. In order to support the renovation of this facility, the restoration of healthcare services to this community, and the creation of full-time jobs at this facility, AMH and Buncombe County partnered to pursue a Building Reuse grant from N.C. Commerce. The Building Reuse grant program includes funding

to support the renovation of healthcare facilities. This program requires a local government sponsor in order to participate, and Buncombe County is serving in this role.

Halingse said that with the County's support, this project was awarded a $480,000 grant from the Building Reuse program. The Building Reuse Grant Program requires a non-State, non-Federal 5% match ($24,000). Appalachian Mountain Health has secured this match with a letter of commitment from Dogwood Health Trust. He further noted that this project will be at no cost to Buncombe County.

Commissioner Horton made the motion to authorize the County Manager to coordinate with Appalachian Mountain Health and participate in the NC Commerce Building Reuse Grant Program. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Whitesides and carried unanimously.

2. Approval of Revisions to the Affordable Housing Services Program Guidelines

Jonathon Jones, Lead Community Development Analyst, provided background information. He explained that Buncombe County created the Affordable Housing Services Program (AHSP) to ensure comprehensive opportunities for affordable and safe housing as a foundation for healthy and thriving families and neighborhoods. He fruther explained that the AHSP's Description, Requirements and Guidelines are amended, reviewed, and approved by the Board of Commissioners for final adoption. He said that at its regularly scheduled meeting on September 1, 2026, the Affordable Housing Subcommittee recommended the Board of Commissioners adopt revised AHSP Guidelines to modify funding requirements and provide administrative clarifications for potential applicants.

Jones reviewed the proposed revisions to the Affordable Housing Services Program (AHSP), in detail. He said that the revisions aim to clarify loan and grant language, align standards across programs, expand rental assistance to include mortgage assistance, eliminate historically unfunded activities, and strengthen financial requirements for loan applications. Key changes include new documentation standards, updated Tenant-Based Rental Assistance guidelines, a cap on administrative costs, and combining the New Start and Administrative grant programs. The Construction Loan Program revisions introduce clearer project scope requirements, a standardized for-sale loan maximum, and three updated underwriting standards to ensure financial soundness. He explained that the proposal also clarifies standard, optional, and special loan terms, along with new cashflow repayment rules designed to accelerate reinvestment in affordable housing. He concluded with the timeline for the FY27 AHSP cycle.

Commissioner Ball expressed appreciation for the work updating the Affordable Housing Services Program (AHSP) guidelines, noting that nearly all proposed revisions strengthened the program; he also highlighted his concerns about the guideline requiring 50% of available project cash flow to be directed toward loan repayment, explaining that its position in the capital stack could make it difficult for large-scale affordable housing developers to use the program. He shared feedback from financing experts, housing authorities, and developers, and requested to send the guidelines back to the subcommittee for further review of that section.

Chair Edwards noted that the subcommittee had already approved the revisions by a 4–1 vote and expressed reluctance to override its work, arguing that the new structure promotes fiscal responsibility and ensures loan dollars can be reinvested in future projects. The commissioners acknowledged concerns raised by some housing groups but stated that adopting the revisions now, with the option to revisit them after a year of implementation, would best serve taxpayers and maintain trust in the bond commitments that rely on loan repayment.

Commissioner Sloan asked about the timeline, and if delaying adoption for further subcommittee review would impact the upcoming cycle. Jones clarified that revisiting the guidelines would delay the application cycle by at least a month, and that the next feasible time to revise the guidelines again would be in the spring, after a full program cycle.
Commissioner Sloan made the motion to adopt the revisions approved by the Subcommittee. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Whitesides and passed 5-1 with Commissioner Ball voting no.

3. **Budget Amendment to Receive & Appropriate Grant Funding for Multifamily Recycling Pilot Program**

Cassandra Lohmeyer, Recycling Coordinator, provided background information. She explained the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality's Division of Environmental Assistance and Customer Service has awarded the Solid Waste department $71,500 in grant funding to implement a pilot program to increase accessibility to recycling in multifamily communities over calendar year 2027. She said that total expenditures with matches are $78,650. She explained that the pilot program includes infrastructure improvements as well as a comprehensive educational initiative to multifamily residents. The City of Asheville's Sanitation division will be co-implementing this pilot project and, as such, will split the local grant match with Buncombe County.
Commissioner Sloan asked if this funding is related to Helene Recovery in any way. Lohmeyer clarified that this is a separate pot of money.

Commissioner Moore made the motion to Accept NC DEQ DEACS' $71,500 for the Multifamily Recycling Grant and to approve the budget amendment for Multifamily Recycling Grant. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Horton and carried unanimously.

4. **Budget Amendment to Accept Grant Agreements for Sidewalks Project**

Kevin Madsen, Helen Recovery Officer, provided background information. He explained that the Small Business Infrastructure Grant Program (SmBIZ) is a Helene recovery grant program managed by the N.C. Department of Commerce that provides funding for local governments to help support small business recovery from Hurricane Helene. This action is to accept two grant awards from the SmBIZ program. The first grant is for $979,069 to repair and extend sidewalks on Whitson Avenue. The second grant is for $786,291 to repair and extend sidewalks on Railroad, Alexander and South in

Downtown Swannanoa. He said that these projects will be completed in partnership with the N.C. Department of Transportation, who will provide construction management services. Madsen noted that no additional County funding is required.
Commissioner Horton made the motion to approve the Budget Amendment and accept the two Small Business Infrastructure Grant program awards. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ball and carried unanimously.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

Health and Human Services Board – Commissioner Horton made the motion to appoint Jennifer Farmer, Carmen Robinson, Caitrin Doyle, Thomas Kelly. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ball and carried unanimously.

BOARD UPDATES

Chair Edwards provided update on School Justice Partnership Committee.

Commissioner Horton noted she attended the Public Education meeting and the HHS Steering Committee meeting.

Commissioner Whitesides said he will send the Helene Recovery Committee information.

Adjourned at 6:49 p.m.