

MEETING MINUTES
WATAUGA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2025

The Watauga County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Tuesday, November 4, 2025, at 5:30 P.M. in the Community Room located in the Watauga County Recreation Center in Boone, North Carolina.

1. CALL REGULAR MEETING TO ORDER

Chairman Eggers called the meeting to order at 5:31 P.M. The following were present:

PRESENT: Braxton Eggers, Chairman
 Todd Castle, Vice-Chairman
 Emily Greene, Commissioner
 Tim Hodges, Commissioner
 Ronnie Marsh, Commissioner
 Nathan Miller, County Attorney
 Deron Geouque, County Manager
 Katie Hancock, Clerk to the Board

Chairman Eggers offered the prayer and Vice-Chairman Castle led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Eggers presented the October 21, 2025, regular and closed session meeting minutes.

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to approve the October 21, 2025, regular meeting minutes as presented.

VOTE: Aye – 5
 Nay – 0

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to approve the October 21, 2025, closed session minutes as presented.

VOTE: Aye – 5
 Nay – 0

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairman Eggers called for additions or corrections to the November 4, 2025, agenda.

Chairman Eggers requested the following addition:

- Agenda Item 4A: Resolution Honoring Veterans Day

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to approve the November 4, 2025, agenda as amended.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

- **Laura Aiken** spoke in opposition to corruption and stated that individual rights are under attack locally. She expressed concern regarding efforts to disenfranchise Appalachian State University students and stated that those siding with Senator Ralph Hise should be ashamed of themselves.
- **Rick Woods**, a resident of Watauga County, spoke in support of Senate Bill 759, stating that it only changes the method of electing County Commissioners to allow residents in each district to vote for a candidate to represent their district, providing more accurate representation. He noted that he is among the voters considered disenfranchised and will be eligible to vote again in 2026. In response to concerns about money spent on the related lawsuit, Mr. Woods stated that Democrats previously paid \$35,000 to hire a lawyer from Asheville to challenge the bill. He added that the language of the referendum was unclear before his time expired.

4A. RESOLUTION HONORING VETERANS DAY

Chairman Eggers presented a resolution honoring Veterans Day. The resolution recognizes the service, sacrifice, and continued contributions of veterans in Watauga County and across the nation.

Chairman Eggers expressed his deep appreciation for the veterans in the community. He also noted an email he received commending Ms. April Goodman and Ms. Jennifer Kemp for their outstanding assistance in helping a veteran obtain needed services.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to adopt the resolution honoring Veterans Day as presented.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

5. ACCEPTANCE OF 2025 TOBACCO TRUST FUND COMMISSION GRANT AWARD

Mr. Richard Boylan, Area Specialized Agent in Agriculture with the NC Cooperative Extension, presented the 2025 Tobacco Trust Fund Commission grant titled “Small Farm Equipment for NWNCR” in the amount of \$46,906.15. The grant will support expansion of the shared-use farm equipment program serving small and new farmers in Watauga and surrounding counties.

Mr. Boylan noted that the Tobacco Trust Fund Commission waived the County match requirement. In response to questions from Chairman Eggers, he explained that the program operates through an appointment-based system, allowing farmers to check out and return equipment for a rental fee.

At the end of the year, staff will assess maintenance needs and overall program sustainability. When asked by Commissioner Hodges if the Extension would deliver equipment, Mr. Boylan responded that they would not, though he occasionally assists with requests.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to approve acceptance of the Tobacco Trust Fund Commission grant and authorize the County Manager to sign the necessary documents.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

6. MAINTENANCE MATTERS

A. Vehicle Purchase

Maintenance Director Robert Marsh presented bid results for the purchase of a three-quarter-ton, four-wheel-drive pickup truck with a utility bed, as approved in the FY 2025-26 Maintenance Department budget. Two bids were received: Piedmont Trucks of Greensboro at \$68,651.66 and Randy Marion Ford of West Jefferson at \$66,670.30.

Chairman Eggers inquired whether the County still utilizes state contracts, and County Manager Geouque confirmed that staff use state contract pricing when working with dealerships. Commissioner Marsh asked about the cause of the price increase, to which Mr. Marsh responded that pricing had risen significantly since the spring. Mr. Geouque added that a budget transfer would not be necessary, as sufficient funds were identified within the Maintenance Department budget.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to award the bid for a three-quarter-ton, four-wheel-drive pickup truck with a utility bed to Randy Marion Ford of West Jefferson in the amount of \$66,670.30.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

B. Health Department Boiler Deductive Change Order Request

Maintenance Director Robert Marsh presented a deductive Change Order Request for the Health Department Boilers Project. The Board had previously approved installation of high-efficiency boilers at a total cost of \$98,500. After the existing boilers failed on October 28, 2025, staff temporarily restored heat to the facility but determined that the high-efficiency units would require stainless steel ductwork and additional installation time.

To restore reliable heat more quickly, staff recommended substituting standard-efficiency boilers. This modification reduces the total project cost by \$20,635.

Mr. Marsh clarified that the request is a modification to the original bid rather than a traditional change order. He noted that standard-efficiency boilers perform reliably, though they may use slightly more gas over time, and confirmed that the units carry a warranty. In response to questions from the Board, he added that the boilers could be built and installed within approximately two weeks.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the deductive Change Order in the amount of \$20,635 for the Health Department Boilers Project, substituting standard-efficiency boilers for the previously approved high-efficiency models.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

7. WINDOWS SERVER UPGRADE AND VIRTUALIZATION CHANGE

IT Director Drew Eggers presented a request to purchase Windows Server 2025 Datacenter licenses and 325 Client Access Licenses (CALs) to replace the County's current Windows Server 2019 licenses. The upgrade is necessary to maintain software compatibility and enhance system security.

Mr. Eggers explained that the County will also transition its virtualization environment from VMware to Microsoft Hyper-V. VMware support has become increasingly difficult, and associated costs have doubled in recent years. The new Server 2025 licenses will support this migration without additional virtualization expenses. The total project cost is \$77,561.95, with funds available in the current fiscal year budget.

During discussion, Commissioner Marsh asked about the life expectancy of the upgrade. Mr. Eggers responded that it should remain viable for a minimum of four years.

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to approve the purchase of Windows Server 2025 Datacenter licenses and 325 Client Access Licenses (CALs) in the amount of \$77,561.95.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

8. ACCEPTANCE OF BOND – MAPLE VIEW LANE

Planning and Inspections Director Jason Walker presented a request to accept a road bond for the paving of Maple View Lane, submitted by Sergio Luna of Clearwater Construction. The request was made in accordance with Chapter 18 – Subdivisions and Multi-Unit Structures, Article VII, Section 3, which permits deferment of improvements when the subdivider posts a bond equal to the estimated cost of the deferred work plus 20%.

Mr. Walker stated that J. Patrick Warren, P.E., inspected Maple View Lane and reviewed the cost estimate prepared by Main & Main, finding it acceptable. The total bond amount, including the 20% addition, is \$60,000.

Mr. Walker noted that a road bond must be in place before the project can proceed to the Planning Board. Chairman Eggers asked County Attorney Nathan Miller for his opinion, and Mr. Miller confirmed that the bond was satisfactory. Commissioner Marsh expressed concern that the proposed two-inch asphalt layer seemed thin, and Mr. Walker explained that the section of roadway is nearly flat, with little to no grade.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to accept the bond for Maple View Lane in the amount of \$60,000.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

9. PURCHASE OF 2025 JOHN DEERE DOZER – SANITATION DEPARTMENT

Operations Services Director Chris Marriott presented a request to purchase a 2025 John Deere 450P-Tier Utility Dozer from James River Equipment of Charlotte, the lowest bidder, at a cost of \$175,034.88. The new dozer will replace a 1998 model that has become unreliable and costly to maintain. Funds are available through reallocation within the Sanitation Department's FY 2025-26 budget, primarily from capital outlay originally designated for an air curtain burner project. Staff also requested authorization to declare the 1998 dozer as surplus once the new equipment is delivered.

Mr. Marriott explained that James River Equipment in Charlotte had the unit on site and offered the best price. Vice-Chairman Castle inquired about the potential sale price of the 1998 model, and Mr. Marriott estimated around \$10,000. Commissioner Marsh emphasized the importance of not delaying the air curtain burner purchase and noted that it is a cleaner way to manage brush disposal.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to approve the purchase of the 2025 John Deere 450P-Tier Utility Dozer in the amount of \$175,034.88 from James River Equipment of Charlotte and declare the existing 1998 dozer as surplus.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

10. MISCELLANEOUS ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

A. Inmate Catastrophic Insurance Contract

Finance Director Deron Geouque presented a request to renew the County's catastrophic insurance policy with Sirius America Insurance Company, which covers large medical claims for inmates. The renewal premium is \$25,047 with a \$5,000 deductible, representing an increase of \$726 from the previous year. Funds of \$35,000 are available in the current Detention budget to cover the contract.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to approve the renewal contract with Sirius America Insurance Company in the amount of \$25,047.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

B. Adoption of Capital Projects Ordinance – Middle Fork Greenway (Boone Gorge Park)

Mr. Geouque presented a Capital Projects Ordinance to establish the Middle Fork Greenway - Boone Gorge Park project. The ordinance formally appropriates funds and authorizes the County to proceed in accordance with North Carolina General Statutes, Chapter 159, Section 13.2. Total project funding is \$4,215,000, including contributions from Blue Ridge Conservancy (\$1,635,000), Watauga County TDA (\$1,480,000), Division of Water Resources Grant (\$500,000), Parks & Recreation Trust Fund Grant (\$500,000), and Recreation Trails Program Grant (\$100,000).

During discussion, Commissioner Marsh confirmed that the project funds will span multiple fiscal years. It was noted that adopting the ordinance is necessary to manage the project.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to adopt the Capital Projects Ordinance for the Middle Fork Greenway - Boone Gorge Park.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

C. Boards and Commissions

Watauga Medical Center, Inc. Board of Trustees

County Manager Deron Geouque presented a request from the Watauga Medical Center, Inc. Board of Trustees to appoint the following individuals to the Board of Trustees for a three-year term beginning January 1, 2026, and ending December 31, 2028: Mr. Jonathan Allen, Mr. Jim Deal, and Mr. Chris Wilcox. The appointments were unanimously approved by the Watauga Medical Center Board of Trustees at their October 23, 2025 meeting.

This item was presented for first reading. The Board chose to utilize the first reading and did not proceed with the appointments at this time.

Board of Adjustment

Mr. Geouque presented a request regarding the Board of Adjustment. The terms of Mr. Kenny Baughman and Mrs. Jenna Isenhour are expiring, and both have expressed a desire to continue serving. In addition, there is one vacant alternate position on the Board.

This item was presented for first reading. The Board chose to utilize the first reading and did not proceed with the appointments at this time.

Valle Crucis Historic Preservation Commission

Mr. Geouque presented a request regarding the Valle Crucis Historic Preservation Commission. The terms of Mr. Scott Jensen and Mr. Pat Brown are expiring, and both have expressed a desire to continue serving on the commission for a three-year term.

This item was presented for first reading. The Board chose to utilize the first reading and did not proceed with the appointments at this time.

Volunteer Application for Advisory Committees – Phillip Hardin

Mr. Geouque presented a volunteer application from Mr. Phillip Hardin of Banner Elk (Shawneehaw Township), expressing interest in serving on the Watauga County Board of Adjustment or the Watauga County Social Services Board. Mr. Hardin is currently the Economic Services Director for Buncombe County Health and Human Services and has 37 years of experience in social services, including serving as a Department of Social Services Director. He also served 12 years on the City of Asheville Board of Adjustment, including four years as Chair.

At this time, there is one vacant alternate position on the Watauga County Board of Adjustment, with the term expiring in November 2026. This item had previously been presented for first reading.

Chairman Eggers emphasized the importance of due diligence and background checks for individuals serving on boards and commissions. County Manager Geouque noted that background checks have not been conducted in the past. The Board discussed the difficulty of recruiting volunteers, identifying qualifications, and the desire to obtain additional information before taking action.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to table the item to the next meeting.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

D. Budget Amendment

Mr. Geouque presented a request to draw down \$162,718.92 from the County's existing 911 fund balance. This expenditure is required to qualify for additional funding from the North Carolina 911 Board and will allow the County to procure necessary equipment and technology upgrades for the 911 Center.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to authorize the drawdown of \$162,718.92 from the 911 fund balance to access the additional NC 911 Board-approved funding for equipment purchases at the 911 Center.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

11. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

- **Commissioner Marsh** expressed condolences for the recent passing of Jon Price, a Watauga County detention officer. He noted that Mr. Price was a dedicated public servant who took time to engage with inmates and support their well-being and faith.
- **Chairman Eggers** highlighted recent achievements of Watauga High School athletic teams, including women's cross country winning the state title, volleyball finishing as state runner-up, women's tennis also finishing as state runner-up, men's soccer performing strongly, and football completing another 10-0 season.

12. CLOSED SESSION

At 6:21 PM, Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to go into Closed Session pursuant to G.S. § 143-318.11(a)(3) to discuss matters protected by attorney-client privilege, and pursuant to G.S. § 143-318.11(a)(5) to consider matters related to the acquisition of real property. County Attorney Miller noted that, under the attorney-client privilege provision, the Board would discuss Case No. 5:25-cv-157.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

At 8:09 PM, Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to resume the open meeting.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

13. ADJOURN

At 8:11 PM, Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to adjourn the meeting.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

Braxton Eggers, Chairman

ATTEST: Katie Hancock, Clerk to the Board