

MINUTES
WATAUGA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2025

The Watauga County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting, as scheduled, on Tuesday, February 4, 2025, at 5:30 P.M. in the Commissioners' Board Room located in the Watauga County Administration Building, Boone, North Carolina.

Chairman Eggers called the meeting to order at 5:30 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
	Anita J. Fogle, Clerk to the Board

Commissioner Greene opened with a prayer and Commissioner Hodges, led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

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

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

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

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

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairman Eggers called for additions and/or corrections to the February 4, 2025, agenda.

County Manager Geouque requested to add a proposed resolution in support of Watauga County School District's request for a two-week weather waiver and proposed amendments to SDR's contract for debris removal.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to approve the February 4, 2025, agenda as amended.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

WATAUGA COUNTY SCHOOLS FY 2024-2025 CIP FUNDS REQUEST

Mr. Joseph Nash, Watauga County Schools Finance Director, requested the release of \$550,000 from the County's CIP reserve to be used as follows:

CIP Reserves Project	Amount
Classroom Presentation Technology	\$80,000
HVAC/Sewer Pumps Repair/Replace	\$25,000
Technology Devices Repair/Replace	\$300,000
Heavy Vehicle Lift Install/Repair	\$75,000
Security Cameras	\$25,000
HP, BR, GV Classrooms, Bathrooms, Decking Renovations	\$15,000
Playground Updates/Renovations	\$30,000
TOTAL	\$550,000

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to release the CIP reserve funds as requested.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

WATAUGA COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY ANNUAL REPORT

Ms. Monica Caruso, County Librarian, presented the Watauga County Public Library Annual Report. Ms. Caruso reported on youth and adult services, activities at the Western Watauga Branch, volunteer activities and gave an overview of revenues and expenses, statistics, and grants received. The report was for information only and, therefore, no action was required.

PROPOSED APPROPRIATION OF STATE FUNDS FOR SENIOR CENTERS

Ms. Angie Boitnotte requested the acceptance of Senior Center General Purpose funding in the total amount of \$14,855. Both Senior Centers were eligible; with \$11,100 for the Lois E. Harrill Senior Center and \$3,755 for the Western Watauga Community Center. A 25% local match totaling \$4,952 was required and included in the agency's current budget.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to accept the Senior Center General Purpose funding in the amount of \$14,855 with the required 25% match.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

EMERGENCY SERVICES MATTERS

A. Bid Award for Comprehensive Disaster Recovery Management Services

Mr. Will Holt, Emergency Services Director, stated that bids were recently solicited for a firm to provide Comprehensive Disaster Recovery Management Services for Watauga County. The County received proposals from both Insight Planning & Development and Hagerty Consulting, Inc. After careful review and consideration, staff recommended Hagerty Consulting, Inc. Funding for these services will come from the Category Z funding through the FEMA Public Assistance program. County Attorney Miller stated that upon award of the bid for Comprehensive Disaster Recovery Management Services the necessary contract would be drafted.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to award Hagerty Consulting, Inc. the bid for Comprehensive Disaster Recovery Management Services and to direct the County Attorney to draft a contract.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

B. Proposed Resolution Authorizing the Disaster Applicant's Form

Mr. Will Holt, Emergency Services Director, requested approval of a resolution authorizing the Disaster Applicant's Agent form which was a requirement from the NC Emergency Management Hazard Mitigation Team. There were 40 applicants requesting assistance. County Attorney Miller stated that he was not happy with all of the terms; however, it was a form that could not be changed and would be required for the 40 citizens to receive assistance. Mr. Holt stated, if the County acquired property during the process (at the request of the property owner), the acquisition would be brought to the Board for consideration.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Chairman Eggers, moved to adopt the resolution designating the County's applicant agents as presented.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

C. Proposed Amendments to SDR Contract for Debris Removal

Mr. Will Holt, Emergency Services Director, requested approval of a resolution authorizing the Disaster Applicant's Agent form. Mr. Holt stated that this was a requirement from the NC Emergency Management Hazard Mitigation Team. Mr. Holt stated that in 2022 the Board of Commissioners approved a Memorandum of Understanding (MOA) with the North Carolina

Department of Transportation (NCDOT) for debris management which would expedite debris removal during times of disaster. The State has agreed to renegotiate fees which would allow for more competitive pricing and doesn't alter reimbursements. Therefore, the proposed amendments would update the contract provisions to better align with State and Federal requirements as well as provide an updated Fee Schedule that better aligns with the present market conditions for trucking and regional debris removal.

After discussion, Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Chairman Eggers, moved to approve the SDR contract amendments as presented.

VOTE: Aye-5

Nay-0

MISCELLANEOUS ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

A. Proposed Resolution in Support of the Watauga County School District's Request for a Two-Week Weather Waiver

County Manager Geouque presented a proposed resolution in support of the Watauga County School District's request for a two-week weather waiver for the calendar start date of school. This was needed, not only due to the recent Hurricane but, due to the amount of snow days experienced each year as well.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to adopt the resolution in support of the Watauga County School District's request for a two-week weather waiver for the calendar start date of school.

VOTE: Aye-5

Nay-0

B. Proposed Resolution Authorizing the Advertisement of A Lease with Red Cross

County Manager Geouque stated that the American Red Cross needed to relocate from the Health Department building as the Health Department and Veteran's Office planned to utilize the space they were in for a Veteran's Clinic. The Red Cross requested a lease for space at the East Annex (Rock Building) due to the relocation. The request was for a three (3) year term to start March 4, 2025, through February 29, 2028. Rent was one dollar (\$1) per year.

Discussion was held in regards to having the lease be for one year to allow time during budget discussions to determine whether the space in the Rock Building needed to be utilized by County Departments. County Attorney Miller stated that if the lease was for 363 days a resolution would not need to be published. If it were for one to ten years, ten-day public notice of a resolution authorizing the lease would be required.

Chairman Eggers, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to direct staff to present the lease for a term of 363 days to The Red Cross and, if they agree, to execute such a lease contingent upon the County Attorney's approval of the lease.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

C. Referral of Fire Appendices to Planning Board

County Manager Geouque stated that there had been a Commissioner request for the recently adopted Fire Appendices to be reviewed by the Planning Board.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to direct staff to send the adopted Fire Appendices to the Planning Board for review.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

D. Annual Pre-Budget Retreat Tentative Agenda

County Manager Geouque presented a draft agenda for the upcoming Annual Pre-Budget Retreat. Per Commissioner request, the Sheriff's Office has been invited to present at the retreat and staff has started the process of preparing and compiling the information for the retreat. The County Manager stated that the Retreat would be held in the Commissioners Board Room rather than at the Recreation Center as listed on the draft agenda.

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to approve the Annual Pre-Budget Retreat agenda as presented with the correction to the meeting place.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

E. Boards and Commissions

County Manager Geouque presented the following:

Watauga Medical Center Board of Trustees

The Watauga Medical Center Board of Trustees had recommended Lisa Cooper for reappointment and Matthew Vincent for appointment as Board Trustees. Each of their terms would be effective January 1, 2025, through December 31, 2027. This was a second reading.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to reappoint Lisa Cooper and appoint Matthew Vincent with each term to begin on January 1, 2025, and end on December 31, 2027.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

Watauga County Board of Adjustment

County Manager Geouque stated that the Board of Adjustment term of Ms. Sue Sweeting had expired. The revised NC General Statute 160D no longer makes any mention of appointments representing zoned areas of counties with partial-county zoning; therefore, it was not necessary to consider where appointees live. The term would be for three years. There were no recommendations from the Board of Adjustment at this time and no volunteer applications have been received by staff. Chairman Eggers stated that he had received an application from Mr. Shane Robbins. County Attorney Miller stated that the Board could table action until the next meeting, waive the second reading and make an appointment now, or request Mr. Robbins fill out an official County Volunteer Application prior to any action.

Chairman Eggers tabled consideration of Mr. Robbins until the next meeting.

F. Announcements

County Manager Geouque announced the following:

- The High Country Council of Governments' 49th Annual Banquet was postponed due to Hurricane Helene and has been rescheduled for Friday, March 7, 2025, from 6:00 to 9:00 P.M. in the Grandview Ballroom at the Northwest End Zone Facility, Appalachian State University.
- An After Action Debrief with all Emergency Services in the area in regards to Hurricane Helene will be held on Saturday February 22, 2025, at the Caldwell Community College Campus.

Commissioner Marsh followed up by stating that the Debrief has been delayed until March and he would bring details to a future meeting.

CLOSED SESSION

At 6:37 P.M., Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to enter Closed Session to discuss Attorney/Client Matters, per G. S. 143-318.11(a)(3) and Land Acquisition, per G. S. 143-318.11(a)(5)(i).

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to resume the open meeting at 7:50 P.M.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

ADJOURN

Chairman Eggers, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:51 P.M.

VOTE: Aye-5
Nay-0

Braxton Eggers, Chairman

ATTEST: Anita J. Fogle, Clerk to the Board