

MEETING MINUTES
WATAUGA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 2025

The Watauga County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Tuesday, September 2, 2025, at 5:30 P.M. in the Commissioners' Board Room located in the Watauga County Administration Building in Boone, North Carolina.

1. CALL REGULAR MEETING TO ORDER

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
 Katie Hancock, Clerk to the Board

Commissioner Greene offered a prayer and Vice-Chairman Castle led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Eggers presented the August 19, 2025, regular and closed session meeting minutes.

Commissioner Greene requested changes under Section 11C: "Miscellaneous Administrative Matters – Boards and Commissions." She asked that the minutes reflect that the Board chose to waive the first reading for Dr. Breitenstein's reappointment to the Social Services Board, and that Mr. David Luther's volunteer application was not tabled, but rather considered a first reading.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to approve the August 19, 2025, regular meeting minutes as amended.

VOTE: Aye – 5
 Nay – 0

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to approve the August 19, 2025, closed session minutes as presented.

VOTE: Aye – 5
 Nay – 0

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairman Eggers called for additions or corrections to the September 2, 2025, agenda.

County Manager Geouque requested the following additions:

- Agenda Item 9 to include the following:
 - D. Change Orders 7, 8, 9, and 10 for Emergency Services Facility
 - E. Change Orders 1 and 2 for Howard Knob's Park

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to approve the September 2, 2025, agenda as amended.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

- **Shane Vaughan**, a resident of Powder Horn Mountain, expressed concerns regarding the proposed tower, including its impact on property values, rental revenue, and tower size. He noted that the Powder Horn Mountain Club had sold the lot for the proposed tower to the Stewart Simmons Volunteer Fire Department for \$1, and he urged the County to honor the original intent of that transaction.
- **Mark Laughlin**, a resident of Powder Horn Mountain, expressed concerns regarding the proposed tower. He stated that the community had 149 full-time residents who voted for the Board to represent their interests and invited the Board to visit Powder Horn Mountain and the proposed tower site.
- **Jeremy Cox**, a resident of Powder Horn Mountain, submitted affidavits regarding the proposed tower. He noted that the public notice contained an incorrect address and requested that the process be corrected and restarted.
- **Jill Williams**, a resident of Powder Horn Mountain, expressed concerns regarding the Board's response to the proposed tower. She noted errors in the response, including an incorrect address, and highlighted community concerns about property values and health. She indicated that the community intends to continue attending meetings and reviewing the process.
- **Andy Cox**, a resident of Powder Horn Mountain, expressed concerns regarding the Board's letter to the community. He stated that emergency communications were functional during recent forest fires and a hurricane, and noted discrepancies regarding the tower's expected height.

5. UPDATE ON THE HOMEPLACE RECOVERY HOUSING PROGRAM

Ms. Mollie Bolick, Center Director for Homestead Recovery, provided the Board with updates regarding *The Homeplace*, a recovery housing program funded through Watauga County's Opioid Settlement, and expressed her gratitude to the Board.

She explained that the program is run by people in recovery for people in recovery and was, for a period, solely funded by opioid settlement dollars. She noted that previously, individuals in the area often had to travel to Charlotte, Asheville, or Hickory to receive support; the program now provides an option to receive assistance locally in Boone.

Ms. Heather Smith, Housing Director, reported that the program had received 102 applications and made 25 admissions, emphasizing their focus on selecting individuals with the appropriate commitment to recovery.

The Board also heard from senior resident Amanda Hoke and neighbor Anthony Love, who shared their positive experiences with the program.

6. BRWIA HIGH COUNTRY FOOD HUB GENERATOR INSTALLATION

Ms. Liz Whiteman, Executive Director of Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture (BRWIA), presented the Board with a request to install a 26KW Generac generator at the High Country Food Hub, located within the Watauga Agricultural Conference Center.

She explained to the Board that the Food Hub was essentially an online farmers' market, and that they rent freezer space. She said that at any given time, they have a plethora of farmer's meat in the freezers. During Hurricane Helene, they nearly lost power to their freezers which stored tens of thousands of dollars of frozen food inventory for over 80 High County farmers and producers.

As a result, they would like to install a generator on the western side of the building. The cost, which is \$16,800 is fully covered through the NC Food Hub Infrastructure Grant (Round 2). This generator can power 3 walk-in freezers and 3 walk-in refrigerators. They need Board approval, as they are currently in a long-term lease with the County, but BRWIA will be responsible for all costs, including installation, maintenance, and utility.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to approve the installation of the generator and authorize the County Manager to sign as property manager for the Town of Boone permit process.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

7. COURTHOUSE SECURITY CAMERA SYSTEM REPLACEMENT REQUEST

Mr. Drew Eggers, Information Technologies Director, presented a request to replace the Courthouse security camera system. He explained that the current system is outdated, with some

cameras over ten years old, resulting in poor image quality. Chairman Eggers noted that funding for the project was available and included in the budget.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the purchase of the security camera system from Creekside Electronics in the amount of \$20,665.20.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

8. SHERIFF'S OFFICE MATTERS

A. Purchase Request for Axon Taser 7 Devices

Captain Brian Bumgarner of the Watauga County Sheriff's Office requested Board approval to purchase 16 Axon Taser 7 bundles with accessories, cartridges, docks, Evidence.com licenses, and training equipment for deployment by School Resource Officers and Civil Deputies. He explained that the goal is to ensure all deputies are equipped and trained, as previously SROs did not have tasers.

The total contract cost is \$57,191.02 (excluding tax), payable over two years: \$28,595.51 in FY2025 and \$28,595.51 in FY2026. Funding has been included in the Sheriff's Office FY2025 budget.

Discussion included confirmation that all deputies receive training on tasers, that the department had not previously had enough tasers for all deputies, and that this purchase will address that need.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to approve the purchase of tasers and related equipment from Axon Enterprise, Inc. at a total cost of \$57,191.02 (excluding tax).

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

B. Purchase Request for Axon Body-Worn Cameras

Captain Brian Bumgarner of the Watauga County Sheriff's Office requested Board approval to purchase 14 Axon body-worn cameras, one multi-bay dock, eight single-bay docks, and 14 user licenses for use by School Resource Officers and Civil Deputies.

Captain Bumgarner explained that only two SROs currently have cameras, and this purchase will equip all SROs. He further noted that the contract is for one year to align license renewals across the department.

The total contract cost is \$15,638.30 (excluding tax), with funding included in the FY2025 Sheriff's Office budget.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Greene, moved to approve the purchase of the body-worn cameras and related equipment from Axon Enterprise, Inc. at a total cost of \$15,638.30 (excluding tax).

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

9. MISCELLANEOUS ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

A. Round 3 Cashflow Loan Agreement for Disaster Response

Finance Director Deron Geouque presented the County's Round 3 Cashflow Loan Agreement with the State of North Carolina, administered through the Department of State Treasurer. The loan provides \$3,268,632.81 in interest-free funding to support disaster response activities related to Hurricane Helene.

Mr. Geouque explained that the County has already approved Round 1 and Round 2 loans. He noted that the loan helps manage cashflow by covering eligible disaster response expenditures.

Repayment is scheduled over five years, beginning with \$1 on the first anniversary of the loan date, with the balance due by the earlier of the five-year anniversary or June 30, 2030.

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to approve the execution of the Round 3 Cashflow Loan Agreement, Resolution, and related Promissory Note with the State of North Carolina.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

B. Ambulance Purchase

County Manager Deron Geouque reported that two (2) 2025 Ford F-350 4x4 Type I AEV ambulances are available for purchase under the HGAC contract, consistent with prior ambulance acquisitions from ETA. The total cost is \$512,384, with funds available through the County's CIP.

Mr. Geouque noted that the units are available for immediate purchase.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the purchase of two (2) 2025 Ford F-350 4x4 Type I AEV ambulances from Northwestern Emergency Vehicles in the amount of \$512,384.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

C. Boards and Commissions

The Board considered a volunteer application from David Luther of Boone, NC, expressing interest in serving on the Adult Care Home Community Advisory Committee, the Nursing Home Community Advisory Committee, and the Watauga County Board of Adjustment.

There are currently vacancies on the Adult Care Home Community Advisory Committee and the Nursing Home Community Advisory Committee. The Board of Adjustment has no vacancies.

Mr. Luther has extensive volunteer experience with senior care facilities and currently serves as a volunteer firefighter and EMT.

This item was presented as a first reading at the August 19, 2025, Board meeting.

On second reading, Commissioner Greene, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to appoint Mr. Luther to the Adult Care Home Community Advisory Committee and/or the Nursing Home Community Advisory Committee, contingent upon available vacancies.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

D. Change Orders 7, 8, 9, and 10 for Emergency Services Facility

County Manager Geouque presented Change Orders 7–10 for Board approval:

- Change Order 7: Telecommunications handholds – \$3,092.14
- Change Orders 8 & 9: Weather delays – 11 additional days, no cost
- Change Order 10: Floor box adjustments – \$2,383.06

The total impact of Change Orders 7–10 is \$5,475.20 and 11 additional days. Funds are available in the project budget.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to approve Change Orders 7–10, including the cost increase of \$5,475.20 and the addition of 11 days to the project schedule.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

E. Change Orders 1 and 2 for Howard Knob's Park

County Manager Geouque presented Change Orders 1 and 2 for Board approval:

- Change Order 1: Drainage improvements – \$7,800. An additional drain inlet and piping were added after water began concentrating in one corner of the site, causing erosion. The architect approved the corrective work.
- Change Orders 2: Safety railing at upper parking lot – \$16,470. Landscaping was originally intended to provide separation, but grading created a steeper

slope than expected. Since the landscaping will not provide sufficient protection in the short term, railing is recommended to reduce fall risk.

The total impact of Change Orders 1 and 2 is \$24,270. Project funding is provided through grants and TDA funds.

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve Change Orders 1 and 2 in the amounts of \$7,800 and \$16,470, respectively.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

Announcements

County Manager Geouque presented two upcoming events for Board awareness:

- **Lincoln Regan Dinner:** September 20, 5:30–9:00 PM at the North End Zone, ASU Campus
- **Community Leaders' Breakfast:** September 4, 9:00–10:00 AM at the Grandview Ballroom, 135 Jack Branch Drive, Boone, NC

He noted that no Board business will be discussed at either event.

10. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

There were no Commissioner comments.

11. CLOSED SESSION

At 6:29 PM, Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, made a motion to go into Closed Session pursuant to G.S. § 143-318.11(a)(3) to discuss attorney-client privileged matters, § 143-318.11(a)(5) to consider matters related to land acquisition, and § 143-318.11(a)(1) to discuss personnel matters.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

At 8:07 PM, Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to resume the open meeting.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

12. POSSIBLE ACTION AFTER CLOSED SESSION

Powder Horn Mountain POA Proposed Amendment

The Board was presented with a written ballot from the Powder Horn Mountain Property Owners Association regarding a proposed amendment to Article XI of the Declaration of Restrictive Covenants.

As a property owner within Powder Horn Mountain, Watauga County received a ballot for the amendment.

Commissioner Greene, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved that the County vote “Against” the proposed amendment.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

Opioid Settlements – Sackler, Secondary Manufacturers (G8), and Sandoz

The Board considered participation in the Sackler, Secondary Manufacturers (G8), and Sandoz national opioid settlements. These settlements provide financial resources to counties for addressing opioid-related public health impacts, prevention, treatment, and recovery programs.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the County’s engagement in all opioid settlements, including the Sackler, Secondary Manufacturers (G8), and Sandoz settlements.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

[Clerk’s Note: On September 8, 2025, County Manager Geouque confirmed with Pam Perkins from the National Opioid Settlement that Watauga County is not eligible to participate in the Sandoz Settlement, as it was inventory-specific.]

13. ADJOURN

At 8:09 PM, Chairman Eggers, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to adjourn the meeting.

VOTE: Aye – 5
Nay – 0

Braxton Eggers, Chairman

ATTEST: Katie Hancock, Clerk to the Board