

**MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS’
SPECIAL MEETING OF NOVEMBER 1, 2024, AT 11:00 a.m.**

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met in regular session on November 1, 2024, in the Commission Chamber located at 200 College Street in downtown Asheville, North Carolina at 11:00 a.m. where and when the following business was transacted.

Present: Chairman Brownie Newman; Vice-Chair Parker Sloan; Commissioner Terri Wells, Commissioner Al Whitesides; Commissioner Amanda Edwards; and Commissioner Jasmine Beach-Ferrara.

Absent: Commissioner Martin Moore

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m. and provided opening statements. He announced that there were only two items on today’s agenda, the introduction of the Disaster Recovery Consultant and staff update on Recovery Funding Reallocations.

Introduction of the Disaster Recovery Consultant

Jeremiah LeRoy, the Deputy Disaster Recovery Lead, provided background information related to the Disaster Recovery Consultant Contract. LeRoy explained that the framework shows how preparedness, response, and recovery efforts are interrelated. Despite the challenges posed by the ongoing recovery efforts, the County has managed to pivot quickly to ensure both the continuation of regular operations and a swift recovery.

The County issued an RFP for disaster recovery consultant services, with a focus on disaster recovery frameworks, financial and grants management, and pre-disaster recovery planning. After receiving 20 proposals, an interdisciplinary team from the County evaluated the submissions. Criteria for selection included clarity of scope, experience with FEMA Public Assistance, long-term planning and resilience capabilities, and experience working within North Carolina. The vendor selected was Tetra Tech, a leading disaster recovery consulting firm with significant experience in both disaster management and FEMA processes.

The initial scope of services from Tetra Tech will cover several key areas of support. These include providing advisory services for public and individual assistance, outreach program development for impacted communities (including schools, fire districts, and community-based organizations), and debris management assistance. Tetra Tech will also support shelter and housing services, as well as staff augmentation in areas like the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and Points of Distribution (PODs), helping to restore normal operations as quickly as possible.

The County’s recovery efforts will continue to focus on seven primary recovery support functions: debris management, economic revitalization, education, health and social services, housing, infrastructure and access, and natural and cultural resources. These efforts will be supported by volunteers, community organizations, and funding. The contractor will assist across many of these functions, ensuring comprehensive recovery support.

Additionally, the County is considering the formation of a Blue Ribbon Committee, a stakeholder group that would provide recommendations to the Board on specific recovery efforts.

LeRoy gave a reminder to apply for FEMA assistance before the November 27th deadline, stressing the importance of community registrations for determining available resources. Extensions may be requested, but timely submissions are critical.

LeRoy introduced Jonathan, the Business Unit President at Tetra Tech. Jonathan shared his condolences and discussed the importance of FEMA applications for securing long-term recovery funds. He praised the County's collaborative efforts and emphasized that identifying unmet needs early and engaging with Congress is crucial for securing recovery funding. He emphasized that the next 30, 60, and 90 days will be crucial for identifying unmet needs and advocating for recovery funding through both state and federal channels.

Commissioner Wells asked about debris removal, particularly the process for clearing debris from private properties. Jonathan explained that debris removal on public rights-of-way will be covered, but private property debris removal is also possible if it poses a health and safety risk. FEMA, in coordination with the Army Corps of Engineers, is currently working with the County to define eligibility for private property debris removal. In closing, Jonathan emphasized the importance of acting quickly to address debris removal, particularly the health and safety issues that can arise from standing debris. He assured the commission that Tetra Tech would assist the County in working through the technicalities of eligibility and help facilitate the debris removal process.

Introduction of Disaster Recovery Reallocations

Elizabeth Odderstol, provided the update regarding funding reallocations to support recovery efforts following Hurricane Helen. The hurricane caused significant devastation, impacting hundreds of businesses and residents across Buncombe County. Odderstol emphasized that many individuals and businesses would not be able to recover through insurance and FEMA assistance alone, and additional support would be necessary to aid in their recovery. She explained that County staff is requesting approval to reallocate \$3.194 million in ARPA funds originally designated for a broadband match to fund post-disaster relief initiatives. The proposal includes \$2 million for a household assistance program and \$1.1 million for a small business grant program.

The household assistance program will offer grants to households impacted by Hurricane Helen, focusing on essential needs such as rent, utilities, and mortgage payments. The program will be managed by a county partner, and funds will be distributed directly to service providers. She noted that applicants would be screened to ensure they had exhausted all other available resources, including public assistance programs. For the small business grant program, the goal is to support businesses with fewer than 25 employees that can demonstrate job retention or rehiring. Grants will range from \$2,500 for businesses retaining one employee to \$5,000 for businesses retaining multiple employees. Priority will be given to BIPOC- and women-owned businesses, as well as sole proprietorships. The program will also be administered by a nonprofit partner, which will be selected through an RFP process.

Staff explained that if approved, the next steps would be to open an RFP for nonprofit partners on November 1st, with the RFP closing on November 8th. A public hearing would then be held at the next regular meeting on November 19th to comply with the required public process for economic development allocations, with the goal of making the first awards by early December. In response to concerns about the timeline, Chairman Newman asked if a special meeting could be called to expedite the process. Staff agreed to explore this option but noted that the public hearing and RFP process would need to be followed.

During the discussion, Chairman Newman suggested splitting the allocated funds equally between the household assistance and small business programs, which would allocate \$1,597,053.34 to each program. The Commissioners discussed and Commissioner Edwards made the motion to approve the reallocation of the \$3.94 million ARPA funds, with the adjusted 50/50 split. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Wells and was passed unanimously.