

**MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS’
REGULAR MEETING OF DECEMBER 17, 2024, AT 5:00 p.m.**

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Regular Meeting on December 17, 2024, in the Commission Chamber at 200 College Street in downtown Asheville, North Carolina at 5:00 p.m.

Present: Chair Amanda Edwards; Vice-Chair Martin Moore; Commissioner Terri Wells; Commissioner Al Whitesides; and Commissioner Jennifer Horton.

Absent: Commissioner Parker Sloan

Chair Edwards called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. and provided opening statements.

Consent Agenda

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

1. [Approval of the combined December 2, 2024, Special, Briefing and Regular meeting minutes](#)
2. [Budget amendment to accept foster care donations from Helping at Risk Kids, Inc.](#)

Public Comment

Marty Benson, an attorney and activist with Strong Towns and Asheville for All, spoke in favor of reforming or abolishing mandatory parking minimums in Buncombe County. He highlighted recent decisions by the Board of Adjustment that tied housing development to excessive parking requirements, which he argued hinder housing construction. Benson urged the board to consider agendaizing the issue of parking reform to address the region's housing crisis.

Micky Dean (unsure if name was captured correctly), also representing Strong Towns and Asheville for All, echoed Marty Benson's support for eliminating parking minimums. He encouraged reconsidering these rules to allow for more housing development and to improve Asheville's growth.

Presentations & Updates

1. [First Quarter Financial Update – FY2025](#)

Melissa Moore, the Finance Director, presented the first-quarter financial update for FY 2025, covering the period from July 1 to September 30, 2024. She explained that the report includes general fund revenues and expenditures, Solid Waste revenues and expenditures, and capital projects. General fund totals are \$440.4 million, solid waste totals are \$16.5 million, and capital project totals are \$154.6 million. She further explained that year-to-date actuals are \$52.1 million, which is higher than last year's due to growth in property taxes. General Fund Expenditures: Year-to-date actuals are \$95.3 million, 2.2% higher than the same time last year. Solid Waste Revenues: Year-to-date actuals are \$3.3 million, 8.7% higher than the same time last year. Solid Waste Expenditures: Year-to-date actuals are \$2.1 million, 11.5% higher than the same time last year; and lastly, that County Capital Projects: Year-to-date expenditure is \$52.7 million.

2. Continuum of Care Quarterly Update

Lacy Hoyle, the Homeless Program Manager, provided an update on the Continuum of Care (COC) activities, including recent board actions and the response to the hurricane. The COC board recommended modifications to the deed restriction on the former Ramada site to include 50 units of veteran permanent supportive housing and 50 units of affordable housing, which was approved by the City Council. The board also allocated \$278,000 of city ARPA funding for the Code Purple response and \$222,000 for emergency shelter and supportive services after the storm. Additionally, the COC approved amendments to its coordinated entry policy to prioritize disaster rehousing for storm survivors. New work groups were established for coordinated entry, point-in-time counts, and compensation for individuals with lived homelessness experience. The board also submitted the consolidated application for HUD funding, supporting programs like rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing. Regarding the hurricane response, the COC coordinated outreach and shelter support, with ongoing efforts to assist those displaced, including the operation of temporary shelters by ABCCM and the Rescue Ministries. Plans are being developed for long-term support, particularly for those still impacted by the disaster.

3. School Consolidation Study Update

Rachel Sawyer, the Strategic Partnerships Director, provided an update on the school consolidation feasibility study, which was mandated by the state of North Carolina. She explained that the study is being conducted to explore the possibility of merging the Asheville City and Buncombe County Public School Systems. Buncombe County government is leading the study, which is set to be submitted to the state by February 2025. The local project team, consisting of representatives from both school districts and the county, was formed to oversee the process.

She explained that the study focuses on evaluating the economic and educational impacts of a potential merger, with an emphasis on equity, community engagement, and comprehensive data analysis. The consulting firm hired for the study, Prismatic Services, Inc. has conducted extensive fieldwork, including data collection, focus groups, interviews, public forums, and school observations. They gathered over 7,200 survey responses and conducted 35 school visits.

The final report with findings will be delivered to the Board no later than December 31st for initial review. It will be in draft form initially, allowing for review by the local project team and school boards before the joint meeting on January 16th. The final report must be submitted to the state by February 15th, and there is an opportunity for the Board of Commissioners and the school boards to endorse or comment on the report before the submission, nothing that this is not required.

Commissioner Whiteside raised concern about the \$300,000 cost of the study, which was funded by the County even though the study was mandated by the State. Manager Pinder explained that efforts are ongoing to secure reimbursement from the state, but as of now, no reimbursement has been received. The Commissioners discussed the possibility of sending a letter to the state with the final report that is due to the State in February.

County Manager's Report

1. [Hurricane Helene Update](#)

Avril Pinder, County Manager provided the update on each of the recovery support functions: debris management; economic revitalization; education; health and social services; housing; infrastructure and access; and natural and cultural resources. She explained that as of December, 521,113 cubic yards of debris and 9,740 tons of mud, silt and soil collected from public right of way and that 1,352 private property debris removal applications have been received. Of those, 165 inspections are scheduled and 99 are complete. In regard to business assistance, Pinder noted that the County is partnering with 25 organizations participating in business response planning. For housing, she noted that the Helene Recovery Housing Assistance Grant application is open, which can provide up to three months' support for rent, mortgage, or utility bills. For health and social services, Pinder explained that 16,950 applications have been received for the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (DSNAP) with a total amount of \$10,125,551 in awarded funds. Currently, 5,100 applications for individual household assistance through Buncombe County received as of 12/13/24; and that \$440,700 in Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) funds have been approved to date, supporting over 1,251 individual households; lastly, that the Crisis Intervention Program has approved 1,372 applications for a total of \$559,378. She then covered FEMA Housing Assistance to date; noting that 1,403 Buncombe County households are currently in 37 FEMA Transitional Sheltering Assistance (TSA) Hotels; that a blanket extension of TSA eligibility through January 11, 2025, and that eligibility does not guarantee hotel room availability. The County is providing outreach to assist residents in TSA to remain sheltered through new year and strategizing more permanent housing solutions in the long-term FEMA Direct Housing. She explained that 147 households have been approved for Direct Housing and that for temporary Housing Units (private sites, commercial site pads, group sites) that 16 installed and 37 are in progress. 171 Households approved for Rental Assistance and that direct leasing as been expedited contracting approved and executed to include WNC properties and where units are being inspected now and matched to household needs. In regard to the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, that State handles application intake, eligibility review, buyout management, construction management and all associated costs and that applications will be open for a year; Next onsite applications will be week of January 6 & week of January 13 at the Asheville Mall Disaster Resource Center. To date, there are over 200 applications for HMGP in Buncombe County, including 150+ buy-out requests. Buncombe County has right of refusal on all properties and that the first set of applications will be ready for consideration in the new year. She explained that Staff are developing process in alignment with our Comprehensive Land Use Plan, Commissioner vision, and the Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan. In regard to the Emergency Watershed Protection Plan (EWP) she explained that Buncombe County residents with damage or severe erosion from Helene causing a threat to infrastructure could be eligible for the USDA EWP Program. EWP Assists with: Debris-clogged waterways; unstable streambanks; severe erosion jeopardizing public infrastructure; wind-borne debris removal; steep slopes that have lost ground cover and are endangered of sliding.

The Commissioners thanked Manager Pinder and staff for their ongoing recovery efforts.

New Business

1. [Approval of COVID Recovery Fund Reallocations](#)

Tyler Henry, Grants Manager and Jaime Brown provided the background information. They explained that in 2021, Buncombe County was awarded a total of \$50,733,290 in Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (“COVID Recovery Funding”) via the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to invest toward recovery from COVID-19 and its negative economic impacts. These funds were awarded on a rolling basis to projects by Commissioners as selected via multiple Request for Proposals (RFP) processes. Hurricane Helene had a profound impact on Buncombe County, straining resources and requiring significant budgetary adjustments. Emergency response, housing recovery, and infrastructure repair became immediate priorities, redirecting staff time and administrative costs from planned areas of focus. These demands placed pressure on the FY2025 budget, emphasizing disaster recovery and long-term resilience being a continued focus, staff is recommending the following reallocation of funds based on current needs and U.S. Department of Treasury requirements.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to approve the reallocations. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Whitesides and carried unanimously.

2. [Approval of the Disaster Leave Policy](#)

Karen Marshall, Interim HR Director provided the background information. She explained that per the Board’s request, staff is introducing a new policy to provide additional paid leave to support employees who were adversely affected by Hurricane Helene and have depleted their accrued leave balances. Eligible employees may be granted up to forty hours of paid Helene Disaster Leave, which must be used specifically for Hurricane Helene recovery related needs. Additionally, after exhausting Helene Disaster Leave, employees may use their accrued sick leave for absences for Helene recovery-related needs.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to approve the Disaster Leave Policy. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Horton and carried unanimously.

3. [Budget amendment for Disaster Rental Assistance funding from the State](#)

John Hudson, Budget Director provided background information. He explained that as a result of the NC Disaster Recovery Act, NCDHHS has distributed state funding to provide Rental Assistance to residents of counties qualifying for FEMA Individual and Public Assistance who have suffered hardship due to Hurricane Helene and meet the income eligibility criteria outlined in the emergency rental assistance program. Assistance will be provided in a one-time payment up to the local area Fair Market Rents (FMR) for the state of NC. This is a separate program from the county ARPA-funded program recently established with different rules and policies and the income limit is 200% of federal poverty level. The county program and this state program will be run concurrently with the same staff. Of the 25 counties identified in the federal disaster on September 28, 2024, Buncombe County has been allocated \$199,296 for Disaster Rental Assistance of which \$9,965 of this allocation will be used for the administrative costs of the program.

Commissioner Moore made the motion to approve the budget amendment. Commissioner Wells seconded the motion and it was carried unanimously.

Board Appointments

Chair Edwards noted that Board appointments would resume in January 2025.

Closed Session

Curt Euler, County Attorney read the motion to go into closed session to consult with an attorney employed or retained by the public body in order to preserve the attorney-client privilege between the attorney and the public body, which privilege is hereby acknowledged to consider and give instructions concerning the handling of a lawsuit in Buncombe County Superior Court, GE Interim Solutions, et al, v. Buncombe County, et al, 23 CVS 4414 and for personnel. He noted that no formal action taken at this time.

Commissioner Whitesides made the motion to go into closed session; the motion was seconded by Commissioner Moore and carried unanimously.