

MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'
BRIEFING MEETING OF MARCH 18, 2025.

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Briefing Meeting on March 18, 2025, in the Commission Chamber at 200 College Street in downtown Asheville, North Carolina at 3:00 p.m.

Present: Chair Amanda Edwards; Vice-Chair Martin Moore; Commissioner Terri Wells, Commissioner Al Whitesides; Commissioner Parker Sloan; Commissioner Jennifer Horton; Commissioner Drew Ball.

The following items were reviewed.

- [FCC Update](#)

Lewis with FCC provided an update on carts, route collection; call center update; service improvements; and community outreach. He explained that on December 2, 2024, FCC began delivery of multiple sized carts based on the most current subscriber list and to any new customers who wished to sign up for service and that current FCC Customer Count is 38,888. He said that FCC has ordered new bear carts, expected by 3/26/25 and that FCC continues to process new subscribers daily. Lewis added that call acceptance currently sits at 100% and that ~497 per day calls (1% of customers). He said that there are 46 call takers daily in addition to 6 local staff. The Commissioner's noted that they have seen a decline in the amount of calls they are receiving for assistance.

- [Helene Update](#)

Dane Pedersen, Solid Waste Director began the update with an update on debris. He explained that over 1.1 million cubic yards of debris have been removed from right of way in City of Asheville, Black Mountain, and unincorporated Buncombe County, including some of the largest trees and stumps ever seen in a disaster. He stated that Private Property Debris Removal (PPDR) continues through 6/30 and that all residents & local businesses must apply by April 15th to complete the application process. Currently, 4,054 applications have been received as of March 17 and that demolition requested by residents and local businesses will begin soon. Over 360,000 cubic yards have been removed from the waterways with crews are currently removing debris from Beetree Creek, Cane Creek, French Broad River, Ivy Creek, and the Swannanoa River. Pederson encouraged anyone that has debris in their yard to sign up for PPDR. Following, Deputy Federal Coordinating Officer Benji Abbott provided the FEMA update. They explained the Individuals & Households Program, in which 157,500 households are currently receiving \$404 million in FEMA Assistance. Buncombe County has 59,639 (37%) eligible applicants and \$127 million (32%) has been awarded. 13,300 applicants received Transitional Sheltering Assistance. Additionally, 6,523 applicants received funds for private road and bridge repair. He explained that there are still two Disaster Recovery Centers in the County in Fairview Public Library and Weaverville Town Hall. Nathan Greene & Lizzi Shimer provided an update on Disaster Case Management. Greene explained that there are currently 15 assigned case managers to Buncombe County and that NC Emergency Management is working

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to increase staff numbers. Shimer said that 2,057 DCM cases have been established and explained the tiered complexity of the cases. Lastly, Brad Hughes provided an update on Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. He explained that 299 applications have been received, and that staff is finalizing the communication plan for application milestones. He explained that total funding is based on a percentage of total disaster-related damages. For Hurricane Helene, North Carolina has been allocated \$1.5 billion in HMGP funding.

- [Affordable Housing Subcommittee](#)

Jonathon Jones, Community Development, provided background information on the Affordable Housing Subcommittee. He explained that on February 5, 2019 the Board created the Affordable Housing Committee (AHC) as a subcommittee comprised of three (3) Commissioners appointed by the Board. The purpose of the Committee is to engage with community partners, solicit public input and make housing affordability policy and funding recommendations to the Board of Commissioners for Buncombe County. On March 4, 2025 the Committee made a recommendation to the Board to expand to (5) five members, consisting of three (3) Commissioners and two (2) residents. The Commissioner's discussed the benefits of having two community members serving on the Board moving forward. Jones also explained that the Committee recommends the Board amend the Affordable Housing Services Program (AHSP) Guidelines so that additional funding could be available for emergency repairs for homes damaged by Hurricane Helene. Board consideration increasing Maximum Assistance from \$25,000 to \$50,000 where the home is a Helene damaged home needing Helene related repairs and the Board consideration of appropriate forgivable loan requirement for Helene damaged home repair costs. Chair Edwards noted that she was shifting away from the proposed recommendation and now leaning towards being more consistent with the current policies in place, to include a lien. Commissioner Whitesides noted he had the same concern. The Board provided guidance to staff to update the proposed recommendations before coming back to the Board for adoption in April.

- [Strategic Plan 2023 & Helene Recovery Plan](#)

Kathleen Blackney, Strategy and Innovation, provided background information on the 2023 Strategic Planning process and introduced the Helene Recovery Plan. She explained that the Strategic Plan aligns with comprehensive plan and drives the annual budget; Serves as the North Star for Buncombe County; Sets priorities, objectives & goals spanning the entire scope of county government operations. Additionally, she explained the proposed recovery plan which will help a community rebuild and recover after a major disaster. Blackney further explained the process for implementing both plans with the proposed timeline. Formal adoption of both plans is expected to be in Fall of 2025.

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REGULAR MEETING OF MARCH 18, 2025.

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Regular Meeting on March 18, 2025, in the Commission Chamber at 200 College Street in downtown Asheville, North Carolina at 3:00 p.m.

Present: Chair Amanda Edwards; Vice-Chair Martin Moore; Commissioner Terri Wells, Commissioner Al Whitesides; Commissioner Parker Sloan; Commissioner Jennifer Horton; Commissioner Drew Ball.

Chair Edwards opened the meeting and provided opening remarks.

Consent Agenda

Commissioner Whitesides made the motion to approve the agenda as presented along with the Consent agenda items. Commissioner Moore seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously.

1. [Approval of the Combined March 4, 2025, Briefing and Regular Meeting Minutes](#)
2. [Representative Payee Fund Adjustment](#)
3. [Resolution to Adopt the 2025 LOBS Approving Resolution](#)

Public Comment

Dr. Leila Lewis, with Liberty and Health Alliance, expressed gratitude to the commissioners for the opportunity to speak and shared her organization's mission to provide free healthcare services. Liberty and Health Alliance will host a Mega Clinic in Asheville from June 1-8, offering a wide range of medical, dental, vision, and mental health services, as well as free meals, clothing, and legal assistance. The event aims to serve around 1,500 patients, with 500 volunteers assisting, and will also support local restoration efforts. Dr. Lewis emphasized the organization's dedication to providing accessible healthcare to all, especially in the wake of Hurricane Helen's impact.

Reverend Sarah Wilcox, Pastor and advocate for public schools, expressed concerns about recent shifts in tax policy that could divert funds from school capital projects to other public projects, potentially harming education funding. She called for transparency and intentional support for public schools.

Susan Schiemer, Chair of the Home and Community Care Block Grant Advisory Committee, advocated for maintaining the \$500,000 supplemental aging fund in the county's FY 26 budget. She highlighted the impacts of Hurricane Helen on older adults, including increased demand for services like financial counseling, support for marginalized communities, and adult day care.

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Annie Marcel de Hermanas, speaking from Black Mountain, urged the commission to issue a public proclamation affirming support for the safety, dignity, and worth of all community members, especially vulnerable groups such as the poor, elderly, Black, brown, LGBTQ+, and religious minorities. She emphasized the importance of demonstrating democratic values and protecting these groups.

Casey Gilbert, Vice President of Public Policy for the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce, thanked the commission for their continued support and advocacy for small businesses affected by Hurricane Helen. She highlighted the success of the Mountain Strong Fund, which raised nearly \$4 million for businesses, and urged the commission to consider additional contributions to the Asheville-Buncombe Rebuilding Together Fund as the county receives state disaster recovery funds. Gilbert expressed gratitude for the efforts of local staff in managing the crisis and supporting the business community's recovery.

Presentations

1. Red Cross Month Proclamation

Commissioner Ball read the Proclamation to Jerri Goldberg noting that the American Red Cross and its partners provided more than 3.3 million meals and snacks and nearly 56,500 overnight shelter stays, which reached an estimated 464,200 people with disaster relief and recovery services, the vast majority of which were in North Carolina. Goldberg thanked the Board and Community for their continued support and urged people to volunteer.

Manager's Report

Manager Pinder introduced Dr. Carter, new Director Public Safety Communications Director.

New Business

1. Resolution to establish the America 250 NC Committee in Buncombe

Jason Hyatt, Library Director, provided background information on America 250 NC Committee. Hyatt introduced Glen Stach from STACH PLLC. Stach explained that under the leadership of the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, is North Carolina's commemoration of the 250th anniversary of our state in the development of the United States. North Carolina will recognize the 250th anniversary of the Revolution with a multi-year commemoration beginning April 12, 2024. Each county in the state may have one officially recognized committee made up of community members working in a volunteer capacity to organize and coordinate activities. A committee must be officially recognized as the central county body coordinating the local activities through a resolution passed by the County Commissioners. Official recognition allows the committee to access grant funds provided through NCDNCR. He noted that there is no financial obligation to Buncombe County Government and that pending the Board's authorization, the Committee has already been awarded grant money from the State A250 Committee.

Commissioner Wells Motion to pass a resolution officially establishing the America 250 NC Committee for Buncombe County. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Horton and passed unanimously.

2. Coxe Avenue Memorandum of Understanding with Harmony Housing

Matt Card, Community Development, provided background information. He explained that from July 2024 to September 2024 the School of Government's Development Finance Initiative (DFI) and Buncombe County conducted a solicitation for developer proposals to find a private development partner for the Coxe Avenue affordable housing project. After reviewing proposals and conducting interviews with selected developers, County staff recommend Harmony Housing as the development partner for the project.

Commissioner Sloan made the motion to authorize the County Manager to enter negotiations with Harmony Housing to develop a Memorandum of Understanding. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Whitesides and passed unanimously.

3. Comments on the State of North Carolina's CDBG-DR Plan

E.B Odderstol provided background information. She explained that the State of North Carolina received notice of award for \$1.4 Billion in Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds on January 15th. These funds were allocated to the state for the long-term Helene Recovery in Western North Carolina. As part of the CDBG-DR award process, the state published their Draft Action Plan on February 18th and opened the 30-day public comment period. Buncombe County Government seeks to comment on the Draft Action Plan as one of the Most Impacted and Distressed Areas identified in the plan. She explained that CDBG-DR will benefit 3 funding areas: Housing, Infrastructure, and Economic Revitalization and identified each of these buckets with the staff recommendations for each. For Housing, staff recommends: Support state-centric Reconstruction & Rehabilitation model but reduce funding to \$693M; Increase program funding to support renters relative to community impact (29% rental/71% owners); Increase Multifamily Construction Program funding to \$280M; Increase Multifamily Construction per project maximum assistance to \$25M; Include \$25M for Rental Assistance; and ensure geographic distribution of funds based on Helene housing impact data.

Commissioner Sloan expressed concerns in the proposed document related to the limiting nature. The Board discussed and requested Staff strike the language completely from page 87 of the document.

For infrastructure, Staff's recommendations included: Consider HMGP and FEMA PA timelines for launch of grant programs; Define the eligible projects: • Emergency operation center and response facilities • Communications resilience • Emergency sheltering • Community Resource Centers • Water system improvements • Sewer expansion • Flood mitigation and detection.

For Economic Revitalization, Staff's recommendations included: State support for broad definition of Commercial Areas; For grants, request inclusion of planning, public services,

mitigation, streetscaping, accessibility, and placemaking activities; Include funding for small business grants; and include funding for agriculture recovery

The Commissioners discussed sending the letter far and wide.

Commissioner Moore made the motion to authorize the County Manager to submit Buncombe County Government comments on the North Carolina CDBG DR Draft Action Plan with the proposed edits as discussed. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Sloan and passed unanimously.

4. Department of Social Services Relief Funding from the State

John Hudson, Budget Director, provided background information. He explained that the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) has allocated funding to cover the county portion of costs after the Disaster Food and Nutrition Program (DSNAP) was conducted in October 2024. \$48,889 of funding will be used to cover operating expenses related to this event. Additionally, NCDHHS also allocated funding from the Hurricane Helene Relief Fund to provide essential services and support for recovery efforts to individuals within the adult services and child welfare systems who were impacted by Hurricane Helene. \$445,520 of funding will be used to support Adult and Child programs for these clients.

Commissioner Wells made the motion to approve the budget amendment as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Horton and was approved unanimously.

Board Appointments

Chair Edwards noted that almost 30 applications were received for the Planning Board and she recommended that the Board send their top 5 picks to the Deputy Clerk by Tuesday, March 25. The Deputy Clerk will compile and move forward when scheduling interviews for the top 10 candidates on April 8, 2025.

In addition to Planning Board interviews, the Board requested interviewing the two applicants for the Historic Resources Commission on April 8, 2025.

Board Updates

Commissioner Sloan inquired with the Board as to advertising the two upcoming citizen seats on the Affordable Housing Committee; the Board discussed and decided to hold off until the two seats are formally created at the following meeting on April 1.

Adjourned at 6:21 p.m.