

**MINUTES OF THE BUNCOMBE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS’
SPECIAL MEETING OF MARCH 20, 2025.**

BE IT REMEMBERED: That the Board of Commissioners met to hold a Special Meeting to hold a budget work session and a Board Retreat on March 20, 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 provided opening statements. Rachael Sawyer, Recovery Lead for the County, provided an overview of post-Hurricane Helene landscape and other factors will affect the fiscal year 2026 (FY26) budget. She announced Staff’s intention to officially launch a long-term recovery plan in September with projects focused on continued work and various areas in need of revitalization. Potential projects include:

- Creation of a Small-Area Plan for unincorporated Swannanoa to guide land use, zoning, infrastructure, transportation, design, and community development.
- Construction of a housing development on County-owned property to create rental housing units affordable to households at or below 80% of Area Median Income.
- Redevelopment of a County park that was extensively damaged by the storm.
- Activating property acquired through the hazard mitigation buyout program for greenways or other passive recreation.

She explained that since Hurricane Helene, the County has also implemented a hiring freeze that currently has 183 positions vacant with 64 of those in the Sheriff’s Office and the rest spread across other County departments. That hiring freeze will start to relax with a phased approach for some public safety-related positions, social worker vacancies, and other frontline jobs as determined by County management. Staff is looking at all potential revenue sources at the local, state, and federal levels. Some grants have already been approved, others are in the application process, and staff continue to research other potential grants, relief programs, and other ways to fund recovery efforts.

John Hudson, Budget Director provided an update on federal funding. He explained that money from the federal government makes up a significant part of Buncombe County’s budget, especially for positions in our Health and Human Services (HHS) Department. Currently, Buncombe County gets \$188 million in federal funding for 13 departments, which helps fund more than 480 jobs. In all, federal funding. He explained that there is a possibility that some of that funding could be cut. While the loss of funding is not imminent at this time, staff is providing Commissioners with an analysis of how potential scenarios could affect operations and staffing.

Hudson went on to provide a revenue overview. He explained that the County’s revenue comes from multiple sources with largest being money collected from property taxes. Based on the most recent data available, County staff projects that total revenues for FY26 will total \$413.1 million. The County’s revenue FY26 budget for all major sources has decreased in the

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aftermath of Hurricane Helene. Overall revenues are projected to be \$83.5 million less than originally anticipated due to various issues stemming from Hurricane Helene, most notably due to the delay of the County property reevaluation.

He further explained that County staff is conducting due diligence by also looking at other potential sources of revenue and will provide more information to Commissioners in upcoming budget work sessions.

The second half of the day was a Board retreat facilitated by Amy Bason and Kevin Leonard with the NC Association of County Commissioners. The Commissioners reviewed their Ethics Policy that was adopted in 2010 and then did a facilitated Real Colors exercise.