MEETING MINUTES

WATAUGA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Tuesday, August 4, 2026

The Watauga County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Tuesday, August 4, 2026, 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
Tim Hodges, Commissioner
Ronnie Marsh, Commissioner
Nathan Miller, County Attorney
Deron Geouque, County Manager
Madison Mathis, Clerk to the Board

[Clerk's Note: Commissioner Greene was not in attendance due to a prior engagement.]

Commissioner Marsh offered the prayer and Commissioner Hodges led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Eggers presented the July 21, 2026, regular meeting and closed session minutes.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the July 21, 2026, regular meeting minutes as presented.

VOTE: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Greene)

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the July 21, 2026, closed session minutes as presented.

VOTE: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Greene)

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairman Eggers called for additions or corrections to the August 4, 2026, agenda.

County Manager Geouque requested the following additions:

- Modify Agenda Item 10 – Miscellaneous Administrative Matters
  - 10 E. Board of Elections Salary Increase
  - 10 F. Boards and Commissions
  - 10 G. Announcements
- Add Item Under Closed Session to include:
  - Acquisition of Real Property per G.S. § 143-318.11(a)(5)

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to approve the August 4, 2026, agenda as amended.

VOTE: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Greene)

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

The following people spoke during public comment:

- **Kathryn Watson –** an Appalachian State University employee and Deep Gap resident, spoke regarding a new initiative to connect university researchers with local policymakers. She asked Commissioners to share child and family policy challenges they are hearing about in the community so that the information can help inform related research.

5. INTERNATIONAL OVERDOSE AWARENESS DAY REQUESTS AND PROCLAMATION

Ms. Mary McKinney, Founder of *Just Love* and *Purple Pantries*, requested approval of temporary placement of the Remembrance and Hope interactive installation and use of the green space at the Watauga County Human Services Center for the August 28, 2026, International Overdose Awareness Day remembrance event. She also requested consideration of permanent placement of a Purple Pantry at the facility and adoption of a proclamation recognizing August as Overdose Awareness Month and August 31, 2026, as End Overdose in Watauga Day.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the temporary placement of the Remembrance and Hope interactive installation in the green space at the Watauga County Human Services Center for approximately one month; approve use of the

green space for the International Overdose Awareness Day remembrance event on August 28, 2026; approve permanent placement of a Purple Pantry at the Watauga County Human Services Center; adopt a proclamation recognizing August as Overdose Awareness Month and August 31, 2026, as End Overdose in Watauga Day; and waive the fee for a license agreement.

VOTE: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Greene)

6. COOPERATIVE EXTENSION PROGRAM UPDATES AND FUNDING REQUESTS

Dr. Jim Hamilton, Cooperative Extension Director, and Ms. Kendra Phipps provided updates on Cooperative Extension programs and recent accomplishments, including improvements to the greenhouse and Agricultural Center, shared-use agricultural equipment, 4-H programming, agricultural disaster recovery assistance, and the statewide Ag Leads initiative.

Dr. Hamilton presented the proposed design for an agricultural-themed steel mosaic to be installed at the Agricultural Center and requested Board approval of the design. He also requested approval to accept a $36,900 North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund grant for the purchase of additional shared-use agricultural equipment, which would increase the required County match from $6,000 to $6,512.

The Board discussed the staffing model, agricultural disaster recovery funding and deadlines, and the number of farms being lost each year. Commissioner Marsh requested information regarding the number of farms lost annually.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to approve the proposed design for the agricultural-themed steel mosaic and accept the $36,900 North Carolina Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund grant, with the required County match increased to $6,512.

VOTE: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Greene)

7. ADMINISTRATION BUILDING HVAC REPLACEMENT UNITS REQUEST

Mr. Robert Marsh, Maintenance Director, presented a request to replace three failed HVAC units serving the Commissioners' Board Room, Conference Room, and County Manager's Conference Room. Staff recommended replacement due to the age and condition of the units. Mr. Marsh presented a proposal from Edmisten Heating and Cooling in the amount of $48,360.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to approve the purchase of HVAC replacement units from Edmisten Heating and Cooling in the amount of $48,360 and approve the transfer of funds from the Maintenance Capital Improvement Program to the Maintenance budget.

VOTE: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Greene)

8. EMERGENCY SERVICES REPLACEMENT VEHICLE REQUEST

Mr. Will Holt, Emergency Services Director, requested approval to purchase a 2027 Ford F-450 AEV ambulance from Northwestern Emergency Vehicles to replace a 2020 Emergency Services ambulance from the legacy Watauga Medics, Inc. fleet. The total cost of the vehicle and upfit is $311,369.00, with funding budgeted in the Emergency Services Capital Improvement Program.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the purchase of a 2027 Ford F-450 AEV ambulance from Northwestern Emergency Vehicles in the amount of $311,369.00 and approve the transfer of funds from the Emergency Services Capital Improvement Program to the Emergency Services budget.

VOTE: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Greene)

9. CHAPTER 11 GATED COMMUNITY ACCESS GATE PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

Mr. Jason Walker, Planning and Inspections Director, presented proposed amendments to Chapter 11 of the Watauga County Code of Ordinances regarding the installation and maintenance of electronic access gates for gated communities. The proposed amendments were reviewed and recommended by the Watauga County Planning Board and include

updates to emergency access provisions, radio transceiver gate activation, fail-open and manual override requirements, dual key lock boxes, gate identification placards, and maintenance and inspection standards.

Mr. Walker explained that the proposed changes would address delays experienced by public safety personnel and provide for gates to remain open during emergency events until the event has concluded. Commissioners discussed the process for updating existing gates and communication with gated communities regarding the proposed requirements. Vice-Chairman Castle asked whether a list of gated communities was available for purposes of notifying affected communities.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to schedule a public hearing for September 15, 2026, to consider the proposed amendments to Chapter 11 of the Watauga County Code of Ordinances.

VOTE: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Greene)

10. MISCELLANEOUS ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

A. *Goforth Road Closure Proposed Resolution*

Mr. Deron Geouque, County Manager, presented a proposed resolution requesting that the North Carolina Department of Transportation remove the identified portion of Goforth Road from the State Maintained Road System and complete the necessary procedures to formally close the roadway. The Board had previously approved the petition requesting closure of the roadway segment. Staff noted that NCDOT subsequently advised that a resolution was required to proceed with the request.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to approve the Resolution Requesting Abandonment of a Portion of Goforth Road from the State Maintained Road System and authorize submission of the request to the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

VOTE: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Greene)

B. *North Caldwell District EMS Coverage Agreement*

The County Manager presented a revised agreement between Watauga County Emergency Services and Caldwell County Emergency Services for EMS coverage in a portion of the North Caldwell District following the relocation of Caldwell County's EMS unit from Blowing Rock. The revised agreement removes the requirement that all Watauga County ambulances be committed before Caldwell County mutual aid assistance would be provided, increases the annual service fee from $15,000 to $20,000, and adds an annual Consumer Price Index (CPI) adjustment.

County Attorney Miller asked whether Caldwell County had approved the revised agreement. Mr. Geouque confirmed that Caldwell County had approved the agreement.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the revised agreement between Watauga County Emergency Services and Caldwell County Emergency Services for EMS coverage in the designated North Caldwell District service area.

VOTE: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Greene)

C. *Watauga County Ambulance Franchise Proposed Ordinance*

The County Manager presented the revised Watauga County Ambulance Franchise Ordinance for Board review and discussion. The proposed ordinance establishes requirements for ambulance service franchises within Watauga County, including application and operational requirements, vehicle and equipment standards, reporting requirements, enforcement provisions, and continuation of the EMS Advisory Committee. The revisions reflect the transition from a private ambulance provider to a County-operated EMS system.

The County Manager explained that the proposed ordinance is intended to update the County's requirements to reflect current EMS operations and capacity. The Board discussed the required process for adoption, including presentation at two consecutive Board meetings and a public hearing. County Attorney Miller discussed proposed changes to the EMS Advisory Committee provisions, including the appointment process by the Board of Commissioners.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to schedule a public hearing for September 15, 2026, to receive public comment on the proposed Watauga County Ambulance Franchise Ordinance.

VOTE: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Greene)

D. EMS Facility Utility Easement Request

The County Manager presented a request for approval of a permanent utility easement associated with the Watauga County Emergency Services facility. The easement will provide access to the water meter serving the EMS site and is located near the U.S. 421 entrance to the property. A proposed Deed of Easement and exhibit identifying the easement area were provided for consideration.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to approve the Deed of Easement associated with the Emergency Services facility and authorize execution of the document upon approval by County Attorney Miller.

VOTE: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Greene)

E. Board of Elections Salary Increase

The Board discussed a request to increase the Board of Elections salary line item to fund an increase in the hourly wage for two part-time Board of Elections office employees from $14.00 to $16.00 per hour. Chairman Eggers reported on his meeting with Mr. Matt Snyder, Board of Elections Director, and noted the importance of addressing the staffing needs prior to the upcoming elections. Chairman Eggers stated that he would continue to meet with Mr. Snyder regarding the matter.

Commissioners discussed the timing of the request in relation to the recently adopted budget and the County's established budget process. County Attorney Miller provided information regarding the statutory authority of the Board of Elections and Board of Commissioners concerning employee compensation and budgetary limitations, noting that the Board of Elections must operate within its appropriated budget.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to increase the Board of Elections salary line item 104170-412600 from $10,500 to $12,115, an increase of $1,615, to fund the increase in the hourly wage for two part-time Board

of Elections office employees from $14.00 to $16.00 per hour, as recommended by Director Snyder.

VOTE: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Greene)

F. Boards and Commissions

Parks and Recreation Commission

This item was presented for second reading.

Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to appoint Virginia Roseman as the Town Council representative and Katie Eppley as the Town of Boone representative to the Watauga County Parks and Recreation Commission.

VOTE: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Greene)

Library Board

This item was presented for second reading.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Vice-Chairman Castle, moved to appoint Melissa Birkhofer, Jess Bellemer, Cheryl Keller, and Jephrie Foust to the Watauga County Public Library Advisory Board.

VOTE: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Greene)

Valle Crucis Historic Preservation Commission

This item was presented for second reading.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to appoint Laura England to the Valle Crucis Historic Preservation Commission.

VOTE: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Greene)

G. Announcements

County Manager Geouque reminded the Board of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) Annual Conference, scheduled for August 20–22, 2026, and asked Commissioners to confirm their attendance so travel arrangements could be made.

11. COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

- **Chairman Eggers** expressed appreciation to Commissioner Marsh for visiting areas affected by flooding and thanked the Commissioners, County Attorney Miller, and County Manager Geouque for their work.

- **Vice-Chairman Castle** commented on flooding in Mount Airy.

- **Commissioner Marsh** provided an update on areas affected by flooding and related damage.

12. BREAK

13. CLOSED SESSION

At 6:49 p.m., Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to enter Closed Session pursuant to G.S. § 143-318.11(a)(3) to discuss matters protected by attorney–client privilege; and pursuant to G.S. § 143-318.11(a)(5) to consider matters related to the acquisition of real property.

VOTE: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Greene)

At 7:47 p.m., Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to resume the open meeting.

VOTE: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Greene)

14. ADJOURN

At 7:47 p.m., Vice-Chairman Castle, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to adjourn the meeting.

VOTE: Aye – 4
Nay – 0
Absent – 1 (Greene)

Braxton Eggers, Chairman

ATTEST: Madison Mathis, Clerk to the Board