

Ashe County

150 Government Circle
Jefferson, NC 28640



Meeting Minutes - Draft

Monday, February 16, 2026

9:00 AM

Commission Meeting Room

County Commission

*Chairperson Todd McNeill
Vice Chair Jerry D. Powers
Commissioner Russell Killen
Commissioner Wes Greene
Commissioner Mike Eldreth*

BUSINESS SESSION**I. 9:00 AM - Meeting Called to Order at the Ashe County Courthouse**

Chairman McNeill called the February 16th, 2026 Regular Session meeting to order at 9:00 am.

Present: 5 - Chairperson Todd McNeill, Vice Chairman Jerry D. Powers, Commissioner Mike Eldreth, Commissioner Russell Killen and Commissioner Wes Greene

II. Pledge of Allegiance/Opening Prayer

Commissioner Eldreth led the Pledge of Allegiance and Chairman McNeill offered the opening Prayer.

III. Consent Agenda

Vice Chairman Powers made the motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Commissioner Greene seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved

For: 5 - Chairperson McNeill, Vice Chairman Powers, Commissioner Eldreth, Commissioner Killen and Commissioner Greene

[MIN 26-2](#) January 20th, 2026 Regular Session Minutes

Attachments: [2-2-2026 January 20th, 2026 Regular Session Minutes](#)

[MIN 26-3](#) January 20th, 2026 Executive Session Minutes

[PRES 26-13](#) 2026 Ashe Bash County/Facility Grounds Use Approval

Attachments: [2-2-2026 Ashe Bash 2026 Facility-Grounds Use Policy \(Request\)](#)

[MISC 26-2](#) Reinstatement of Leave & Longevity for Allory Hooper

Attachments: [2-16-2026 Employment History for Allory Hooper](#)

[PRES 26-18](#) Monthly Tax Report - January 2026

Attachments: [2-16-2026 Monthly Tax Report January 2026](#)

[MISC 26-3](#) Budget Amendments (Sandy Long)

Attachments: [2-16-2026 Budget Amendments-General Fund](#)

IV. Adoption of Agenda

Commissioner Killen made the motion to adopt the February 16, 2026 Agenda. Commissioner Greene seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Adopted

For: 5 - Chairperson McNeill, Vice Chairman Powers, Commissioner Eldreth, Commissioner Killen and Commissioner Greene

V. Public Comment

Chairman McNeill opened the Public Comment portion of today's meeting at 9:03 am.

Charles Stafford from Fleetwood addressed the board, thanking them for their service and referencing an article he previously sent about current actions by the state legislature on tax revenue. Highlighted legislative goals include reducing corporate income taxes to zero by 2028 and lowering personal income tax to 2% in the coming years. Stafford drew a comparison to Kansas' 2017 tax policy, which also cut income and corporate taxes; he noted the negative consequences there, including suffering for public services, education, and vulnerable community members, which led to a reversal of the policy. He argued that while tax cuts are often promoted as beneficial, the gains frequently benefit executive pay and stock buybacks rather than creating more jobs or directly helping the broader community. Emphasized the importance of supporting services for vulnerable groups, specifically mentioning efforts for isolated senior citizens who rely on community programs for nourishment and support. Challenged the board to prioritize care for the community's most vulnerable, stating that this is as important as other responsibilities they manage.

Harry Corpening introduced himself as a resident of West Jefferson and a daily driver for Meals on Wheels at Generations. He emphasized his role as the only driver who shows up every weekday and knows all 85 recipients personally. Beyond delivering hot meals, he highlighted the importance of welfare checks for recipients, sometimes being their only daily contact. Harry shared personal experiences where his welfare checks saved the lives of two recipients, as confirmed by EMTs. He stated that Generations is a significant asset to the community and provides more than just meal delivery. Generations provides a range of services including cognitive support, daycare, and care for individuals with mental challenges, offering relief to their caregivers. The organization offers housing for those in need and specifically for individuals with Alzheimer's-related diseases. Daily attendance for cognitive programs reaches up to 40-50 people. Harry anticipated that Patricia Calloway would soon be requesting a loan from the county on behalf of Generations. He encouraged decision-makers to provide funding directly rather than as a loan, to support the expansion of Generations' services. He outlined that Ash County benefits from significant revenue from second homes, which do not demand services but contribute through taxes and local spending. Emphasized that supporting Generations financially is both feasible and beneficial for the county.

There were no more comments offered by those citizens in attendance. Chairman McNeill then closed the floor for public comment at 9:08 am.

VI. Presentations

[PRES 26-14](#) 9:04AM - Allison Kemp-Sullivan - Middle School Change Order

Attachments: [2-2-2026 Change Order #2 Exhibit #1 Middle School](#)

Allison presented a change order request for the middle school project, noting it's a credit to the contract of \$59,320. There are 14 items on the list, with ongoing negotiations on further changes (up to item 19).

Approval for the change order was requested, school board gave it's approval last Tuesday. Commissioners appreciated the credit change direction, emphasizing cost

savings. Allison spoke on weather-related delays, but weather days had been anticipated and built into the schedule. Vannoy is currently adjusting the project schedule to account for lost days. Construction resumed the previous Tuesday after a period of inclement weather. The target move-in is set for the 2028 school year, allowing time for transition, building furnishing, commissioning, and systems testing. Commissioner Greene made the motion approving the change order. Commissioner Killen seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved

For: 5 - Chairperson McNeill, Vice Chairman Powers, Commissioner Eldreth, Commissioner Killen and Commissioner Greene

[PRES 26-16](#) 9:12 AM - Tracie McMillan, DSS Director - DSS Statistics December 2025, Ed Hurst Retirement Recognition, FNS Administration Reimbursement Rate Reduction, Clarification on Contracted Services, Home Management Certificate for Level I Service.

Attachments: [2-16-2026 DSS Statistics December 2025](#)
[2-16-2026 NCDHHS Documentation](#)
[2-16-2026 Ed Hurst Retirement Recognition](#)

Tracie began with the recognition of Edward Hurst, Ashe DSS foster care supervisor since 2005 and a veteran of more than 30 years in the field, is retiring March 31, 2026. Commissioners honored him with a plaque for his decades of individualized, impactful service to children and families. He thanked county leaders, staff, and the community for their strong support.

The board was also notified of a federal reduction in North Carolina's FNS/SNAP reimbursement rate due to the state's high error rate, though Ashe County itself achieved a rare 0% error rate. The change will affect the county's indirect cost plan, prompting efforts to expedite submissions. Staff highlighted full staffing, experienced supervision, and strengthened quality control.

Ashe County passed its level one adult services home management audit, with Danielle recognized for her effective client support. DSS also adopted a policy prohibiting AI use for processing confidential information. Foster care numbers are slightly declining, though wards remain higher than expected. Commissioners praised staff for accuracy, adaptability, and strong case management under evolving regulations.

No Action Taken

[PRES 26-21](#) 9:19 AM - Devon Houck, Elections Director - Elections Update

Devon stated that Early voting is underway for the March 3rd primary, and the elections office is open, including on President's Day. There has been steady turnout at the polls so far; about 365 people have voted since early voting began on Thursday. Sample ballots are available on the elections office website and in the office itself. Absentee ballots by mail have had a low turnout, with only around 60 sent out (including overseas and military voters). The deadline to request an absentee ballot by mail is 5:00 PM tomorrow, which is now two weeks before Election Day (moved up from one week since 2024). Election Day polls will be open from 6:30 AM to 7:30 PM as usual. Voters can check their polling place via the elections office website, where all precincts and a map are available, or by using the State Board's website to look up their registration details. The elections office phone number is 336-846-5570, and staff are available for assistance. Devon also spoke on the estimated 1,500 Ashe County voters that received

letters from the state requesting Social Security or driver's license numbers to complete voter records. These letters were sent due to a state project to update voter records for those registered before 2002 (when HAVA began), who were not originally required to provide these numbers. The request is not mandatory for pre-2002 (legacy) voters, but it is for those registered or updated after 2002. Many voters were concerned or confused by the request, fearing potential identity theft or ineligibility to vote. The office clarified that failing to respond does not affect the ability to vote or receive a regular ballot. If voters respond, the office will update their records, but it is not necessary to vote. Voters can call, visit the office, or bring the requested information to polling sites if they choose to provide it. She stated that North Carolina requires photo ID for voting; the ID can be expired for up to one year. Many forms of ID are accepted, and staff verify that names and IDs are correct. Additional behind-the-scenes measures are in place to check citizenship and other eligibility aspects.

PRES 26-15 9:22 AM - Adam Stumb, County Manager - Audio Visual Repairs to Board Room

Attachments: [2-2-2026 Audio Visual Board Room Scope of Work \(SOW\)](#)

Adam began by stating that the existing audio visual equipment in the room is around 25 years old and has generally served well, but is now outdated and experiencing problems, especially with microphones and streaming. There are currently three cameras, with ongoing issues particularly concerning podium microphones, making it difficult for multiple speakers to be heard clearly. Some of the equipment, such as the mixer and camera controls, is not visible in the room and is considered higher-end in the replacement quote. The speaker system is not included in the initial replacement quote, and its compatibility with new microphones needs to be checked. Adam said that a quote has been received for replacing the cameras and some audio equipment; additional pricing for new speakers will also be sought. There is consideration for installing a new ceiling-mounted microphone with a wider pickup range. Monitors at the front of the room are also old and could be upgraded. A suggestion was made to consider touch screen monitors for interactive presentations.

Integration of any new monitors or touch screens with the proposed system needs to be confirmed. There is funding available in the current year's public buildings maintenance budget to address these AV upgrades.

Scheduling upgrades will require coordination with the court system to ensure technician access to the room at appropriate times. All were in agreement to proceed.

PRES 26-19 9:27 Am - Adam Stumb, County Manager - EMS Project Update

Adam stated that the committee continues regular discussions on the EMS transfer, with a human resources and compensation study underway to compare medic pay with surrounding counties. Medics have already completed a Council of Governments survey, and weather-delayed one-on-one consultant interviews are now moving forward. Preliminary findings from the HR study are expected in late March or April. The current operational plan is to lease the existing EMS facility until a new one is built.

Two possible sites for the future facility—Government Circle and the old Jefferson School property—are being evaluated. The committee reviewed proposals from four consulting firms and is scheduling interviews with Brec and McGill & Mosley to assess their EMS and fire facility experience, project timelines, and ability to quickly evaluate the two sites. Neighboring counties Wilkes and Watauga have recently completed or are constructing EMS facilities, and the committee plans to learn from their processes. Brec's prior work on the Wilkes facility may offer additional insight and opportunities for site visits.

[PRES 26-20](#) 9:32 AM - Patty Gambill, Emergency Management Director - Ambulance Purchase

Attachments: [2-16-2026 Quote from Northwest Emergency Vehicles](#)

Patty made the request for approval to purchase two new EMS units from Northwestern Emergency Vehicles, an authorized AEV dealer. Each unit costs \$285,957, totaling \$571,914 for both. Specifications for the units were developed with input from medics and meetings at Wilkes Community College. Units will be Ford F-450 chassis, silver color, liquid suspension, four-wheel drive, and equipped with automatic snow chains. Stretchers and mounts are not included yet due to pending equipment decisions; mounts to be added before completion. Commissioner Eldreth asked if the Units will have built-in GPS, Patty stated that to her knowledge it's not offered by the dealer. EMS transition planned for July 1, 2028; recommendation to receive units by April or early May 2028 to allow time for decals and outfitting. Commissioner Greene made the motion to approve the purchase of the two new EMS units from Northwestern Emergency Vehicles. Commissioner Killen seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved

For: 5 - Chairperson McNeill, Vice Chairman Powers, Commissioner Eldreth, Commissioner Killen and Commissioner Greene

[RES 26-1](#) 9:35 AM - Adam Stumb, County Manager - Resolution Authorizing the Negotiation & Installment Financing Contract

Attachments: [2-16-2026 Resolution Authorizing Negotiation of Installment Financing - Landfill. new](#)

Adam stated that this Resolution is the first step toward moving forward with the landfill environmental services building project. Estimated total financing needed is approximately \$16 million. Formal bids for the landfill are scheduled for February 26th at 2:00 PM; exact figures will be available after bids are received. Environmental services building cost is currently estimated at about \$8 million, with further refinement pending. Public hearing for financing is scheduled for the March 16th meeting, where finalized numbers will be shared and the exact finance amount set. The new expansion will connect to the existing two landfill sales from the early 1990s and is not moving to a new location yet. He said this expansion is anticipated to meet county needs for another 15 to 20 years. There may be additional space for one more expansion on the same side of the hill, especially in areas currently used for land clearing debris. Over the years, adjacent properties have been purchased for potential future landfill growth. The new financing will take over as debt from the jail is retired, providing consistent payment structure. Final debt service projections will be prepared and discussed once all final numbers are available. Vice Chairman Powers made the motion to adopt the resolution approving the negotiation of an installment financing contract and to set the public hearing for March 16th. Commissioner Greene seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Adopted

For: 5 - Chairperson McNeill, Vice Chairman Powers, Commissioner Eldreth, Commissioner Killen and Commissioner Greene

[PRES 26-17](#) 9:37 AM - Nick Farmerie, Assistant County Manager & Community Development Director - Shell Building Project Ordinance Amendment

Attachments: [2-16-2026 Industrial Park Phase 3 Project Ordinance Amendment](#)
[2-16-2026 WithersRavenel Contract Amendment 05](#)

Nick discussed two amendments, one to the contract with WithersRavenel (engineering firm) and one to the project ordinance for the shell building in the industrial park. Amendment adds review by WithersRavenel of construction drawings covering utility access (water, sewer), storm water control, and driveway access from the public street to the shell building. WithersRavenel will also conduct periodic on-site reviews to verify construction matches approved plans, intended to reduce liability and ensure proper utility connections and stormwater controls. These reviews and verifications are considered best practice but were not included in the original contract or project ordinance, necessitating this amendment. The amendment will increase expenditures by \$12,000. Nick clarified role and responsibilities saying WithersRavenel is responsible for engineering design, stamping construction documents, and verifying completed work matches the plans.

Vannoy serves as general contractor, responsible for the physical construction and day-to-day project management. Discussion clarified that WithersRavenel is not performing full construction management, but focused verification of their engineering scope. In case of issues with the infrastructure, WithersRavenel (as the engineering firm with the stamp) would hold liability. Vannoy, as the contractor, is responsible for executing the work according to engineering plans. Utility discussion noted that gas service (should it be required in the future) would be provided by Frontier, contingent on occupancy of the building. Chairman McNeill pointed out that the funding breakdown for the project is detailed further in meeting documents (including contributions from Golden LEAF and economic development funds). Commissioner Killen made the motion to approve both amendments, the Industrial Park Phase 3 Project Ordinance Amendment and the WithersRavenel Contract Amendment. Commissioner Greene seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved

For: 5 - Chairperson McNeill, Vice Chairman Powers, Commissioner Eldreth, Commissioner Killen and Commissioner Greene

[PRES 26-12](#) 9:42 AM - Patricia Calloway, Executive Director Generations Ashe - Request for Contingency Support

Generations Ashe, Patricia Calloway reported rising demand for aging services as Ashe County's older adult population grows. The organization provides essential programs—home-delivered meals, nutrition services, in-home aid, transportation, case management, senior center activities, and intergenerational daycare—but inflation and post-COVID pressures have pushed costs beyond reimbursement levels. Revenue covers direct service costs but not infrastructure, debt service, or administrative overhead.

A major financial strain comes from significant property-related debt, especially tied to the assisted living facility. COVID-19, a hurricane, and ongoing census instability worsened losses, particularly because Medicaid reimbursement rates fall far below private-pay levels. Monthly debt service totals roughly \$31,000. Immediate facility repairs costing \$7,000–\$22,000 are also required.

Generations Ashe has reduced administrative costs by over \$265,000 annually through vacancies, consolidations, and eliminated positions. Staff are covering multiple roles to protect frontline services. Two grants (\$50,000 for meals and \$100,000 for broader services) are pending.

The organization requested from the county up to \$300,000 in short-term contingency support through June (about \$75,000/month), to be used only as needed. Commissioner Greene emphasized that the current assisted living model is unsustainable and requires structural change. They also noted the statewide underfunding of aging services, leaving counties to shoulder the burden.

The board discussed establishing a \$300,000 line of credit with month-to-month drawdowns, secured by a deed of trust—secondary to USDA's existing claim. They acknowledged that the property likely has little remaining equity. Closure of the assisted living facility would displace 46 residents and eliminate about 40 jobs, with few regional alternatives.

Commissioners committed to advocating for USDA loan forgiveness, requiring monthly updates from Generations Ashe, and supporting ongoing restructuring efforts. Generations Ashe continues working with the Regional Council of Government, noting that neighboring counties face similar challenges. After a lengthy discussion Commissioner Greene made the motion to approve a \$300,000 line of credit with month-to-month drawdowns, secured by a deed of trust—secondary to USDA's existing claim, to include monthly updates to commissioners. Commissioner Eldreth seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved

For: 5 - Chairperson McNeill, Vice Chairman Powers, Commissioner Eldreth, Commissioner Killen and Commissioner Greene

GENERAL SESSION

VII. Commissioner Comments

VIII. Announcements

IX. Executive Session

Commissioners entered into Executive Session at 11:10 am. At 11:35 am they returned from Executive Session.

[ES 26-4](#)

G.S. 143-318.11 (a)(3) Legal

X. Adjournment

Commissioner Killen made the motion to adjourn today's meeting. Commissioner Greene seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved

For: 5 - Chairperson McNeill, Vice Chairman Powers, Commissioner Eldreth, Commissioner Killen and Commissioner Greene

Citizens with disabilities requiring special needs to access the services or public meetings of Ashe County Government should contact the County Manager's Office three days prior to the meeting by calling (336) 846-5501.