

# **Ashe County**

*150 Government Circle  
Jefferson, NC 28640*



## **Meeting Minutes - Draft**

**Monday, November 17, 2025**

**9:00 AM**

**Wilkes Community College - Ashe Campus**

### **County Commission**

*Chairperson Todd McNeill*

*Vice Chair Jerry D. Powers*

*Commissioner Russell Killen*

*Commissioner Wes Greene*

*Commissioner Mike Eldreth*

**WORK SESSION - Capital Projects**

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

**I. 9:00 AM - Meeting Called to Order at Wilkes Community College-Ashe Campus**

*Chairman McNeill called the November 17th, 2025 Work Session to order at 9:00 am.*

**II. Pledge of Allegiance/Opening Prayer**

*Chairman McNeill led the Pledge of Allegiance and Vice Chairman Powers offered the Opening Prayer.*

**III. Those In Attendance:**

*Todd McNeill, Chairman  
Jerry Powers, Vice Chairman  
Russell Killen, Commissioner  
Wes Greene, Commissioner  
Mike Eldreth, Commissioner  
Adam Stumb, County Manager  
Nick Farmerie, Community Development Director & Assistant County Manager  
Neil Emory,  
Don Adams,  
Missy Seivers, Clerk to the Board  
Sandy Long, Finance Officer  
Teresa Bare, Finance  
Patty Gambill, Emergency Management Coordinator  
Candace Barker, Director Ashe Medics (along with Paramedics & EMT's from Ashe Medics)  
Kevin Anderson, Parks & Rec Director  
Trey Oakley from YMCA  
Edward Hinson from Skyline/Board Member of YMCA  
Johnny Burleson from Creative Funding*

**IV. Ashe County Capital Projects Discussion**

*Overview and Updates on Key Capital Projects*

- EMS/Central Base: Project added to capital improvement plan; will be discussed in more detail later.*
- DSS Building: Needs assessment led by engineering and architectural teams; aim to unify split offices, conceptual design completed, estimated at \$33 million.*
- Landfill Project: Permitted and ready to bid late this year or next; construction targeted for spring 2026 due to urgent space needs post-hurricane.*
- Environmental Services Building: Design phase nearly complete; budget estimates expected by December with construction plans for early next year.*
- Recreation Center: Parks and Rec Committee working with potential community partners; discussion scheduled for lunch session.*
- Animal Shelter: New centrally located property under one-year lease for due diligence; engineering firms being vetted, contract award anticipated December 1st. Emphasis on safer, more accessible design for volunteers and staff.*
- Courthouse Renovations: Contingent on DSS relocation; includes mechanical upgrades*

- (HVAC, chiller, air circulation) and possible space reallocation for county departments.
- Industrial Park:** Over-budget shell building bid requires additional Golden Leaf funding; EDA grant applications underway; focus on infrastructure and shell buildings to attract business.
  - Northwest Recreation & Community Center:** Old middle school site to be repurposed; community meetings planned for input; transfer expected in two years after school relocation.
  - Law Enforcement Center:** Third floor unfinished; possible future training/offices but low current priority.
  - CDBG Disaster Recovery:** Ongoing housing initiatives for single and multi-family units; funding rules pending from the state, two active sites under consideration for development.
  - Riverview Community Center:** Flood damage led to shift from relocation to repair; funding through insurance, FEMA, and grants anticipated.

#### *Financial Considerations*

- Current and upcoming debt service obligations limit immediate capacity for new large-scale projects until 2027 or later.
- General fund and enterprise fund distinctions discussed; anticipated need for additional county revenue or tax increases to fund future projects.
- Emphasis on aligning project timelines with future budget years and debt service roll-offs.

#### *Planning, Community Engagement, and Next Steps*

- Importance of frequent plan updates and flexible scheduling to accommodate evolving needs and funding cycles.
- Plans for multiple community meetings, especially around repurposed school sites and recreation facilities, to gather input and build support.
- Due diligence, permitting, and regulatory compliance are critical first steps ahead of construction, especially for the animal shelter and community center projects.
- Board consensus to proceed with high priority projects while monitoring grant opportunities and keeping lower priority projects on future agendas.

#### *Suggested Action Items*

- Finalize selection and contract award for animal shelter engineering firm by December 1st.
- Advance due diligence and permitting for new animal shelter property.
- Continue grant applications and funding requests for the industrial park shell building and infrastructure.
- Schedule and conduct community meetings for the Northwest Recreation & Community Center project.
- Develop a phased capital projects timeline aligning major projects with anticipated debt service roll-off and budget planning cycles.
- Separate mechanical and space renovation plans for the courthouse, advancing urgent mechanical work as a priority.

#### *EMS Transition Planning Discussion*

##### *Internal Planning and Project Schedule*

- Four internal meetings have taken place, involving key staff (Candace, Patty, Sandy, Teresa, etc.) to discuss transition details and feedback from pre-open house meetings.
- Three implementation schedules considered: long-term (end of contract in June 2030), short-term (8 months/240 days if early termination), and a medium timeline (around two years).
- Major schedule concern is the base location; construction and design require significant

lead time.

- If a shorter timeline is needed, leasing a base will be necessary since constructing a new facility is not feasible in 240 days.
- Replacement and staggering of vehicle purchases are planned to avoid future mass replacements.
- Long lead times expected for ambulances and some medical equipment, impacting schedule.
- Pay structure and recruitment strategies are under review, with plans to compare with similar-sized counties.
- The 24/72 shift schedule is favored both for retention and recruitment.
- Compressed timelines create risk for adopting less-customized policies and reduce flexibility for change.

#### *Staffing, Retention, and Operations*

- Staffing transitions are challenged by the possibility of early provider departure and current staff shortages.
- 24/72 schedule is widely supported as a recruitment and retention tool.
- Funding and schedule changes (e.g., moving to 24/72) would require additional investment (estimated \$600K–700K more/year).
- Loss of staff or inability to recruit could force a faster transition or reduce service quality.
- Community and peer recommendations (including references and social media) play a role in vetting new hires.
- Substations and remote locations are proposed to improve service equity and coverage, especially for outlying areas impacted by infrastructure changes (e.g., Highway 88 construction).
- Reducing ambulance numbers or transport roles not recommended due to increasing call volume.

#### *Base Location Options and Facility Discussion*

- Multiple properties considered for main base:

- Daymark property: county-owned, allows for future expansion, but bays are not drive-through and traffic can be an issue on distribution days.
- Courthouse-front property: county-owned, close to hospital and dispatch, but water and traffic challenges (streams crossing, requires engineering and possibly signalization).
- Agricultural Way: county-owned, but expensive sewer access, access issues, and livestock/wetlands conflicts.
- Current base: Offered for lease/purchase but is dated and requires significant updates; high utility costs.
- Other privately-owned properties under potential future sale.

Preference to prioritize county-owned properties first (Daymark and courthouse-front) and narrow to a shortlist for deeper feasibility analysis.

- Engineering and cost issues (e.g. water, road access, traffic lights) highlighted as decisive factors.
- Facility planning includes ensuring adequate number of ambulance bays, possible drive-through access, and training spaces.

#### *Equipment and Procurement*

- Ambulance and equipment purchases are urgent due to long lead times; specs for vehicles being prepared for quotes.
- Equipment purchases to be staggered to avoid future mass replacements and manage

costs.

- Early engagement with vendors and potential contractors planned.

#### *Policy, Transport Operations, and Consultant Use*

- Discussion on maintaining quality of patient care, policy alignment, and managing transition of service from current provider.
- Hospital may begin its own transport service, but EMS will still need to handle the majority of transports.
- Consideration to bring on a consultant, but concerns about procurement delays if only 240 days to transition.
- Preference to rely on internal knowledge but keep the option of a consultant open if needed.

#### *Suggested Action Items*

- Develop a shortlist (2–3) of preferred base locations, focusing first on county-owned options.
- Begin preliminary engineering studies for top locations, especially regarding water/traffic issues.
- Finalize vehicle specifications and begin procurement process for ambulances and equipment.
- Establish 24/72 shift and pay structure, using benchmark data from peer counties.
- Monitor staffing levels closely and develop contingency plans for accelerated transition if provider exits early.
- Evaluate the operational impact and cost implications of maintaining current transport volumes.
- Stay engaged with DOT on access and traffic signalization for proposed sites.

#### *Possible YMCA Partnership Discussion*

##### *Recreation Center Project Overview*

- Project focused on establishing a new recreation center for the community, a vision led by Kevin and the board for several years.
- Progress has included preliminary drawings, a preliminary capital fundraising plan, and enlisting Johnny Burleson for fundraising support.
- Connection established with the Avery County YMCA to explore partnership opportunities for the project.
- Drafted a preliminary agreement (MOU) to guide collaboration, now under review and moving forward.

##### *Fundraising and Community Engagement*

- Data collection included pulling property records and conducting a wealth screen, identifying top donor prospects largely among local second homeowners.
- Seven community listening sessions were held with diverse groups (chamber, AsheVision, Lansing, Jefferson Landing, pickleball, basketball league, high school swim team parents) to collect feedback and gauge interest.
- Upcoming interviews with top 30-40 prospective donors to inform the campaign strategy.
- Next steps include drafting a compelling case statement for donors, especially integrating the YMCA partnership benefits.
- Community and early donor feedback indicate excitement and strong support for the

project.

#### *YMCA Model and Regional Experience*

- Trey, Executive Director, detailed the Avery and Mitchell County YMCA experiences, including overcoming significant early debt and growing membership.
- Avery YMCA now operates with 3,000 members, expansive facilities (pool, gyms, wellness, daycare, etc.), and strong community programs.
- Funding for Mitchell's new facility involved substantial local and legislative support, with additional value engineering to manage costs.
- Emphasis on local ownership: each community has its own YMCA, budget, and board representation under the broader YMCA of the High Country association.
- YMCAs manage multiple programs: 21st Century, afterschool care, West View Network (WIN) for teen mental health, and extensive aquatic initiatives.

#### *Childcare, Membership, and Financials*

- Full-time daycare and drop-in childcare operate in Avery and soon in Mitchell, with plans to expand as community needs evolve.
- Partnership with Mayland Community College to train and accredit future childcare staff.
- Family membership: ~\$700/year or \$74/month, with \$350,000 in annual scholarships/subsidies offered in Avery based on need.
- Daily rates: \$10/adult and \$5/child; many memberships covered by third-party insurance payers.
- Annual budget sits at \$6.2M, with \$2.2M raised locally; majority of funds from membership, significant portion from fundraising and programs.

#### *Facility Features, Programming, and Community Needs*

- Avery: indoor pool, gyms, wellness areas, group exercise, daycare, golf simulators, indoor turf, and community event spaces.
- Mitchell: competition pool, splash pool, exercise studios, child development center, with expansion underway for more indoor rec space and courts.
- SPLASH aquatic program teaches all K-2 students to swim, at no cost, during the school day; aims to carry the program to other counties.
- YMCAs supplement, not compete with, local rec or childcare services, focusing on needs like healthcare, childcare, and wellness.
- Massive demand for gym/recreation space highlighted (e.g., 25 Ashe County youth basketball teams, 144 games scheduled), with current facilities at capacity and indoor recreation shortages cited.

#### *Partnership, MOU, and Next Steps*

- Commissioner Greene made the motion to approve the MOU between the county and YMCA of the High Country. Vice Chairman Powers seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

- Agreement is non-binding but facilitates collaboration on funding, design, and future operations.
- Anticipated state funding is crucial; communications with local officials and legislators ongoing.
- Commitment to transparent public messaging and managing expectations, emphasizing this is a long-term endeavor.
- Focus on developing site plans, engaging architects, and being "shovel-ready" as funding aligns.

**V. Adjournment**

*At 12:56 pm Vice Chairman Powers made the motion to adjourn today's Work Session. Commissioner Greene seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.*

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**Todd McNeill, Chairman**

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**Missy Seivers**  
**Clerk to the Board**