

# Ashe County

150 Government Circle  
Jefferson, NC 28640



## Meeting Minutes - Draft

Monday, June 1, 2026

6:00 PM

PUBLIC HEARING

Commission Meeting Room

### County Commission

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

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**PUBLIC HEARING**

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

**I. 6:00 PM - Meeting Called to Order at the Ashe County Courthouse****II. Pledge of Allegiance/Opening Prayer****III. 6:05 PM Public Hearing on the FY 2026-27 Proposed County Budget**

*At 6:05 PM Chairman McNeill opened the floor for Citizens in attendance to have a chance to voice their concerns as Commissioners and County Staff go into Budget Sessions for FY 2026-27.*

*Sally Kinka from Todd, spoke against a proposed state constitutional amendment appearing on the November ballot that would cap property and income taxes across the state. She argued that the referendum is a "wolf in sheep's clothing" designed to benefit wealthy multi-home owners and corporations while limiting the ability of local officials to respond to community-specific needs. Sally highlighted that such a cap would tie the hands of county commissioners during emergencies like wildfires and hinder funding for essential services like EMS, police, and landfills as the population grows. She expressed concern that local officials are already struggling to find an extra \$500,000 to fund state-mandated items they were previously not responsible for.*

*Mark Beck, a property owner and owner of the historic Old Hotel in West Jefferson, highlighted the hotel's role as a major economic driver and its recognition by Main Street America CEO Erin Barnes. Beck stated that the hotel paid between \$200,000 and \$300,000 in occupancy taxes last fiscal year, which are primarily used by the Ashe County Chamber of Commerce to promote tourism. He alleged that the Chamber of Commerce does not list the hotel in its lodging guides or visitor center because the hotel was denied chamber membership. Beck claimed the membership denial was based on false statements made by the chamber's executive director and noted that he has a clean criminal record and has received the Order of the Long Leaf Pine.*

*Charles Stafford from the Fleetwood area noted that the 2026/27 budget cycle requires \$5 million from savings just to balance the general fund, which he cited as a significant concern for taxpayers. He highlighted various economic pressures, including diesel fuel prices exceeding \$5 per gallon and a \$360,000 assessment by the State of North Carolina and Aetna for employee healthcare. Stafford recommended that the county avoid new projects for a season to focus on basic needs like food security, affordable housing, education, and public safety.*

*Lou Zeller from Glendale Springs spoke against a proposed two-cent property tax increase, arguing that such taxes are regressive and place a heavier burden on low-wealth residents.*

*Dolly Reeves discussed the impact of losing state funding for healthcare subsidies and the Department of Social Services (DSS), noting that the community is already seeing layoffs due to budget cuts. She encouraged the commissioners to continue advocating at the state and federal levels to stop further funding cuts that harm public services like libraries and recreation programs.*

*Joanne Kuszaj, Chair of the APP Health Care board, requested that the commissioners*

reconsider the clinic's budget request for an additional \$180,000. Kuszaj explained that APP Health Care has already reduced its staff from 137 to 125 employees and faces an estimated \$114,000 increase in health insurance and retirement costs for its local staff.

Judy Bare spoke about the value of the agricultural facility campus in Jefferson, reporting that 850 people attended Bull Riding events there on a recent Friday and at least that many on Saturday. She requested that the commissioners look into plans for adding more bathrooms and a catering kitchen to the education room to make the facility more usable for various groups. Bare submitted a list of past events and attendee numbers to the commissioners to support her request for facility improvements.

No further comments were offered by those in attendance.

Chairman McNeill thanked the attendees for their participation and reminded the public that a second hearing for the fiscal year 2026/27 budget is scheduled for June 15th at approximately 9:00 AM.

## X. Adjournment

At 6:27 PM Vice Chairman Powers made the motion to adjourn the Public Hearing. Commissioner Killen seconded the motion. All were in agreement.

### Approved

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

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**Todd McNeill, Chairman**

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**Missy Seivers  
Clerk to the Board**