

Ashe County

*150 Government Circle
Jefferson, NC 28640*



Meeting Minutes - Draft

Monday, October 16, 2023

9:00 AM

Commission Meeting Room

County Commission

*Chairperson Todd McNeill
Vice Chair Chuck Olive
Commissioner William Sands
Commissioner Jerry D. Powers
Commissioner Mike Eldreth*

BUSINESS SESSION

Present: 5 - Vice Chairman Chuck Olive, Chairperson Todd McNeill, Commissioner William Sands, Commissioner Jerry D. Powers and Commissioner Mike Eldreth

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

Chairman McNeill called the October 16th, 2023 Regular Session Meeting to order at 9:00 am at the Ashe County Courthouse.

II. Pledge of Allegiance/Opening Prayer

Vice Chairman Olive led the Pledge of Allegiance and Commissioner Sands offered the opening Prayer.

III. Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Sands made the motion to approve the October 2nd, 2023 Regular Session Minutes, October 2nd, 2023 Executive Session Minutes and the October 2nd, 2023 Special Meeting Minutes (Airport). Commissioner Powers seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved

For: 5 - Vice Chairman Olive, Chairperson McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Powers and Commissioner Eldreth

[MIN 23-28](#) October 2nd, 2023 Regular Session Minutes

Attachments: [10-16-2023 October 2nd, 2023 Regular Session Minutes](#)

[MIN 23-29](#) October 2nd, 2023 Executive Session Minutes

[MIN 23-30](#) October 2nd, 2023 Special Meeting Minutes (Airport)

Attachments: [10-16-2023 Special Meeting Minutes-Airport](#)

IV. Adoption of Agenda

Vice Chairman Olive made the motion to adopt the October 16th, 2023 agenda. Commissioner Sands seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Adopted

For: 5 - Vice Chairman Olive, Chairperson McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Powers and Commissioner Eldreth

V. Public Comment

Chairman McNeill opened the floor for the Public Comment portion of the October 16th, 2023 Regular Session meeting at 9:02 AM.

Nancy Weaver-Hoffman from Warrensville took the podium and began by saying "we've always heard it said that in Ashe County we take care of each other and we mind our own business." She stated that this is how we have survived as a community tucked away in

the hills for so long but, it's changed a little bit as we get less isolated, we become more out of touch with our neighbors. She stated that Ashe County has citizens who are living in squalor and terrified to ask for help, after all a bad place to live is better than none. She said "how is it that this is a surprise to anyone? Why is the housing crisis in Ashe County not a top priority? Why can't Ashe County lead the way in creative problem-solving around this issue?" She spoke of homes where there's water running through the outlets in the wall when it rains, where you can see bare ground through holes in the floor, raw sewage running into the creek behind a house and there are tenants that have to turn the breaker off and on to run the heat. These are things that people are dealing with every day here in Ashe County. She stated that most tenants are terrified to complain because the outcome is their homes get condemned then they're still in the same situation so they live in it and they suffer. She stated that children suffer the elderly suffer. She said we must work together to create solutions that will help owners better keep up with their properties, and more importantly, provide protection for the people who live in them, we have to make this happen. She continued by saying that we all know the issues that owners of long-term rentals face, but this is nothing compared to not having a safe place to lay your head at night. She asked the commissioners to work with them to create a solution that is equitable for all. She stated that there are solutions that are being used by communities all over the country. Saying it's important that we work together to solve this crisis that affects many Ashe County residents.

Beth Sorrell from Fleetwood took the podium and stated she worked for Ashe County Habitat for Humanity and that she is a member of Down Home NC. She said that she was here to support affordable housing standards. She stated that she has had several jobs in her 20 years living here in Ashe County where she's been able to visit people in their homes and she's been able to see firsthand just what people are living in, broken down trailers with drafty, moldy, leaky walls. Floors falling in and they're living in this day to day. She stated that many of these families have young children that are growing up with asthma and other health problems that are related to these conditions. She said we are paying for all of these problems through health care, through education and through the economy. She said that their quality of life is suffering and part of our job and the commissioner's jobs is to help provide quality of life for the people of Ashe County. She stated that many cities and counties across North Carolina are taking action to combat the problem of affordable housing and that we can't say that it's not our job, and you can't believe that you can't do anything about it. This is just a small step that we can take to acknowledge the problem and join other counties in enforcing minimum housing standards. She stated that it is working in other counties and that it can work here too.

Seeing no further movement from the citizens in attendance at today's meeting Chairman McNeill closed the Public Comment portion of the meeting at 9:07 AM.

VI. Presentations

PRES 23-176

9:03 AM - Tracie McMillan, DSS Director - Monthly DSS Statistics, Auditor's Report For Ashe County & Medicaid Expansion

Attachments: [10-16-2023 DSS August 2023 Stats](#)
[10-16-2023 Auditor's Report for Ashe County](#)
[10-16-2023 Medicaid Expansion Flyer](#)

Tracie McMillan, DSS Director presented a copy of the book "Local Social Services Boards in North Carolina" to each Commissioner & County Manager Adam Stumb. She stated that it was written by Kristi Nickodem a brilliant attorney. The book provides social services board members with the information that they need to understand their roles and

legal responsibilities within North Carolina's social services system. Tracie also presented to the Board the Monthly DSS Statistics for August 2023. Tracie stated she'd like to highlight that DSS had three homeless citizens that were served in the month of August. She stated that things like this does come in waves, and DSS stands ready to help any of the homeless people that want or need us to help them. Tracie also spoke about the Auditor's Report For Ashe County pointing out that DSS passed with no findings. She also updated the Board on Medicaid Expansion which is effective December 1st, 2023. She stated that the initial report said that there was somewhere between 1500 and 1800 citizens in Ashe County that might be eligible for Medicaid expansion. She said it would be best for people who are interested in the Medicaid program to come by DSS in person or to call DSS to check eligibility. She also wanted to recognize retiring staff member, Judy W. Miller, DSS, Tracie stated that she had been an exceptional employee, that she would willingly take on extra projects and that she has served Ashe County for 13 years & 4 months from June 21st, 2010 to October 31st, 2023. No action taken.

No Action Taken

ORD 23-3

9:05 AM - PUBLIC HEARING - Matthew Levi, Planning Board - Proposed Text Amendments to the Ashe County Code of Ordinance Chapter 155 Watershed Protection

Attachments: [Chapter 155 Watershed Protection with Updates](#)

Chairman McNeill opened the Public Hearing on the Proposed Text Amendments to the Ashe County Code of Ordinance Chapter 155 Watershed Protection at 9:33 AM. No comments were offered by the citizens in attendance. Chairman McNeill then closed the Public Hearing on the Proposed Text Amendments at 9:34 AM. Commissioner Powers made the motion to approve the Proposed Text Amendments to the Ashe County Code of Ordinance Chapter 155 Watershed Protection. Commissioner Sands seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved on First Reading

For: 5 - Vice Chairman Olive, Chairperson McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Powers and Commissioner Eldreth

PRES 23-182

9:08 AM - Dolly Reaves, Down Home NC Ashe Chapter - Dignity in Housing Standards, additional speakers include: Stefanie Heinrich, Tanya Robinson, Jeanine Noblett, Bryna Grig, and Jeff Land

Attachments: [10-16-2023 Living With Dignity Down Home Presentation](#)

Members of Down Home NC, Stefanie Heinrich, Tanya Robinson, Jeanine Noblett, Bryna Grig, Dolly Reaves and Jeff Land presented to the Board a Powerpoint presentation titled "Living With Dignity" which described living conditions some Ashe County citizens are faced with living in improperly maintained rental properties and the urgency they feel Ashe County has for minimum housing standards. Each above mentioned member took a turn presenting a section of the PowerPoint. They spoke about how decrepit housing negatively impacts overall property values, that substandard housing has a negative impact on health and quality of life. They stated that minimum housing standards holds landlords accountable before it escalates to civil court. They stated that by adopting minimum housing standards it would show that the county cares about housing in Ashe County. They also stated that the number of available housing units (rentals) in Ashe County decreased by 1.9% from 2010-2021. They had calculations saying that 30% of rental homes in Ashe County, the rent amount is 30% or more than the tenant's income and that 14.68% of this county's 2020 resident taxpayers moved to other counties in 2021

to seek better employment and healthier, safer rental housing. They stated they were seeking a commitment from the County Commissioners to direct County staff to begin developing Minimum Housing Standards for Ashe County. A discussion between the Commissioners and members of Down Home NC ensued. Vice Chairman Olive invited the members of Down Home NC to meet with him personally at the conclusion of today's meeting to discuss the issue further and they agreed. No action was taken today.

No Action Taken

PRES
23-183

9:15 AM - Laura McPherson, Ashe County Librarian - Annual Report
FY-2022-23

Attachments: [10-16-2023 Ashe County Library Year in Review](#)
[10-16-2023 Ashe County Library Statistics](#)

Laura McPherson, Ashe County Librarian presented to the Board the Ashe County Library's Annual Report & Statistics for FY-2022-23. Laura shared Library statistics for FY 22-23 such as a 38% increase in visitors to the library compared to the previous fiscal year. There were 91,962 visitors this fiscal year. The library had 510 participants in the Summer Reading Program with 6,380 hours of reading. The library's 21 computers were used 6,007 times and a total of 201,792 items were checked out. Laura stated that the library hosted 339 events with over 10,000 attendees total for all events combined. She spoke of two grant-funded projects "On the Road with on the Same Page" (National Endowment for the Humanities) and "Saving Seeds, Saving Stories (South Arts). And, the American Rescue Plan Act Funds received and administered by the State Library of NC has provided new shelving, a redesigned teen space and a new reading nook. The library is open 56 hours per week for a total of more than 2,500 hours a year. The library has 8 full time staff, 8 part time staff, 3 MLS librarians and 6 Programming librarians. She also stated that the Ashe County Library will be the first library in North Carolina to receive a "Mamava" lactation space for breastfeeding mothers. Mamava lactation pods are freestanding, mobile suites for mothers to pump or breastfeed in public places or while at work.

Following Laura McPherson's presentation Chairman McNeill called a five minute recess at 10:35 AM and the return to session at 10:40 AM.

No Action Taken

PRES
23-184

9:19 AM - Devon Houck, Board of Elections - Elections Update

Attachments: [10-16-2023 Elections ID Drive Library](#)
[10-16-2023 Elections Open House 23](#)
[10-16-2023 VoterIDPoster 23](#)

Devon Houck, Director, Ashe County Board of Elections presented the Board with an Elections Update. Devon stated that they will be hosting a "Voter ID Drive" at the Ashe County Library Tuesday, October 24th, 2023 from 10:00 AM until 1:00 PM. All Ashe County voters welcome. She also stated that the Ashe County Board of Elections will host an Open House at the Ashe County Courthouse Thursday, October 26th, 2023 from 3:00 PM until 7:00 PM. Refreshments will be served, attendees can get a free voter ID card, register to vote or update registration, meet the Election Board and staff and check out the voting equipment. Elections staff will also be on hand to answer any questions. Devon also talked about the photo ID requirement. Voters will be asked to show photo ID when voting in North Carolina. Devon stated that this is mandated by the state of North

Carolina not the county. Most voters will simply show their driver's license. But there are many other acceptable photo IDs. If a voter does not have an acceptable photo ID, they can get one for free from their county board of elections. Voters can also get a free ID card from the N.C. Division of Motor Vehicles (NCDMV). Devon also stated that all voters will be allowed to vote with or without a photo ID. If a voter cannot show photo ID when voting in person, they can still vote by filling out an ID Exception Form. If absentee-by-mail voters are unable to include a copy of their photo ID with their ballot return envelope, they can also fill out an ID Exception Form with their ballot. If the voter does not show an acceptable ID, the voter may proceed to vote in one of the two following ways, either complete an ID Exception Form and then vote with a provisional ballot, or vote with a provisional ballot and then return to their county board of elections office with their photo ID by the day before county canvass. Acceptable Photo IDs for Voting include any of the following that is unexpired, or expired for one year or less:

- North Carolina driver's license
- State ID from the NCDMV (also called "non-operator ID")
- Driver's license or non-driver ID from another state, District of Columbia, or U.S. territory (only if voter registered in North Carolina within 90 days of the election)
- U.S. Passport or U.S. Passport card
- North Carolina voter photo ID card issued by a county board of elections
- College or university student ID approved by the State Board of Elections
- State or local government or charter school employee ID approved by the State Board of Elections

Devon stated for more information and other forms of acceptable photo ID's citizens can call them at the Ashe County Board of Elections. Also more information can be found at the North Carolina State Board of Elections website a <https://www.ncsbe.gov/>

No Action Taken

PRES
23-185

9:25 AM - Adam Stumb, County Manager - Resolution Directing the Expenditure of Opioid Settlement Funds

Attachments: [10-16-2023 Resolution To Direct The Expenditure Of Opioid Settlement Funds](#)

Adam Stumb, County Manager presented to the Board the Resolution Directing the Expenditure of Opioid Settlement Funds. Adam stated that this is an additional reporting step needed for the Opioid Settlement Funds. He said this resolution includes the funds that have already been appropriated and includes AppHealth's mobile health unit, and the grant administration and planning they are doing for the opioid funds. Commissioner Powers made the motion to approve the resolution. Vice Chairman Olive seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved

For: 5 - Vice Chairman Olive, Chairperson McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Powers and Commissioner Eldreth

PRES
23-187

9:27 AM - Adam Stumb, County Manager - Project Updates

Adam Stumb, County Manager presented to the Board updates on several ongoing county projects. He began with the Health Department saying that on Thursday, October 19th, 2023 at 2:00 PM the County will open bids for the remodel / repairs of health department and that three bids are necessary to continue with that project. It will be brought back before the Board at the November 6, 2023 Commissioner's meeting for

contract approval and notice to proceed.

Adam then briefly spoke on the Agriculture Building stating that the Board had approved to proceed with the contract with Vannoy Construction. Adam stated that Vannoy is preparing two contracts. The first contract will include design and the second contract will include construction.

Adam then updated the Board on the Middle School saying a survey has been provided to Blue Ridge Electric where the design team has highlighted potential impacts on service poles and underground power infrastructure. We have requested an estimate of costs associated with these impacts. Frontier Gas has provided a formal letter of commitment to extend the gas service to the new middle school, ensuring service for heating, hot water, and backup generator services. Adam stated he has been working with the school staff in review of proposed HVAC equipment, water heating systems and seeking their input regarding food service equipment. This is an ongoing process in soliciting feedback for the Design Development plans. Adam said we are basing the finance schedule on the information we are getting from Vannoy and the Construction Team. They are anticipating three different bids or portions of the project. One for Site Development (grading) around mid November to December 2023. Also an Early Foundation - Steel package hopefully around mid March - April 2024 and the Building Package in mid May - June 2024. A Public Hearing will be held May 20, 2024 on the financing.

Adam then spoke on the Landfill and the closing on the new property purchased for the landfill and that they are nearing some movement on the permitting of the next phase. Adam said that the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NC DEQ) has given their approval on addressing their concerns over older cells and that he and Scott Hurley, Director of the Department of Environmental Services are to meet with Municipal Engineering in the next few weeks.

Adam lastly spoke on the Recreation Center / Family Central saying that he and Kevin Anderson, Director of Parks & Rec met last week to talk about planning and are trying to divide up the project. Adam said this is going to be a big project and it's not going to happen overnight, that there are a lot of pieces to it but we're getting the process started. Adam said that the YMCA is a part of the discussion. Meetings with Mt. Jefferson Child Development Center and other tenants at Family Central are to take place.

No Action Taken

GENERAL SESSION

MISC 23-7

For Review/Discussion - NC General Statute Chapter 130A-196. Notice and Confinement of Biting Animals, County Ordinance 90.35 Animal Bites and County Ordinance 90.66 Responsibilities of Animal Control (As requested by Commissioner Sands at the 10/2/2023 BOC Meeting)

Attachments: [10-16-2023 NC GS. Chapter 130A-196 Notice and Confinement of Biting Animals, County Ordinance 90.35 & 90.66](#)

At the request of Commissioner Sands during the 10/2/2023 BOC Meeting a Review/Discussion on NC General Statute Chapter 130A-196. Notice and Confinement of Biting Animals, County Ordinance 90.35 Animal Bites and County Ordinance 90.66 Responsibilities of Animal Control was held. They discussed the notification process in cases of animal bite and rabies.

No Action Taken

MISC 23-8 For Review/Discussion - County Policies on County Property (as requested by Commissioner Powers)

Attachments: [10-16-2023 County Policy Chapter 32](#)

At the request of Commissioner Powers the Board reviewed and discussed the County Policies on County Property. Commissioner Powers had concerns about wording in a certain portion of the policy. The policy was reviewed by the Board and concerns were addressed.

No Action Taken

APP 23-6 Recreation Advisory Board Appointment of Cynthia Brown Price, Warrensville NC.

Attachments: [10-16-2023 Request to Appoint Cindy Price to Parks & Rec Advisory Board with Application](#)

After sending out an official email vote among the nine current Recreation Advisory Board members, it was their recommendation that Cynthia Brown Price from Warrensville become an Advisory Board member. Commissioner Powers made the motion to appoint Cynthia Brown Price to the Recreation Advisory Board. Commissioner Sands seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Appointment(s) Approved

For: 5 - Vice Chairman Olive, Chairperson McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Powers and Commissioner Eldreth

MISC 23-9 HCCOG Update to CDBG- Fair Housing Plan

Attachments: [10-16-2023 Update to CDBG- Fair Housing Plan \(HCCOG\)](#)

From Michelle Ball, Regional Planner, HCCOG is an update to the County's Fair Housing Plan for the CDBG programs to be approved. The closeout of the CDBG-NR grant has been extended until June 2024 and the current plan ends in December 2023, quarterly activities have to be added to keep within CDBG compliance. Vice Chairman Olive made the motion to approve CDBG-NR grant. Commissioner Powers seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved

For: 5 - Vice Chairman Olive, Chairperson McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Powers and Commissioner Eldreth

MISC 23-11 Updated Volunteer Advisory Board By-Laws for Approval (Sent in by Jennifer Richardson)

Attachments: [10-16-2023 Ashe County Volunteer Advisory Board By-Laws](#)
[10-16-2023 Email Request From Jennifer Richardson](#)

Jennifer Richardson, Ashe County Volunteer Coordinator, sent in updated Volunteer Advisory Board By-Laws for Approval. After review Commissioner Powers made the motion to approve the updated Volunteer Advisory Board By-Laws. Vice Chairman Olive seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved

For: 5 - Vice Chairman Olive, Chairperson McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Powers and Commissioner Eldreth

MISC 23-10

Retiree Recognition for Sammy Whicker, Maintenance Supervisor, he has served Ashe County for 28 years & 6 months from April 3rd, 1995 to October 31st, 2023.

Retiree Recognition for Judy W. Miller, DSS, she has served Ashe County for 13 years & 4 months from June 21st, 2010 to October 31st, 2023

Sammy Whicker, Maintenance Supervisor was present at today's meeting and recognized for his years of service, he has served Ashe County for 28 years & 6 months from April 3rd, 1995 to October 31st, 2023. The Board of Commissioner and County Manager Adam Stumb presented Sammy with a plaque in recognition of his service to Ashe County. A photo was taken of the presentation.

Judy W. Miller, DSS, was also recognized for her years of service. She has served Ashe County for 13 years & 4 months from June 21st, 2010 to October 31st, 2023. Judy was not present at today's meeting.

No Action Taken

VII. Commissioner Comments

VIII. Announcements

IX. Executive Session

X. Adjournment

Commissioner Sands made the motion to adjourn the October 16th, 2023 Regular Session Meeting at 11:42 AM. Commissioner Powers seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved

For: 5 - Vice Chairman Olive, Chairperson McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Powers and Commissioner Eldreth

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.