

Ashe County

*150 Government Circle
Jefferson, NC 28640*



Meeting Minutes - Draft

Monday, June 1, 2026

10:00 AM

FY 2026-27 Budget Session

2nd Floor Conference Room (Register of Deeds)

County Commission

Chairperson Todd McNeill

Vice Chair Jerry D. Powers

Commissioner Russell Killen

Commissioner Wes Greene

Commissioner Mike Eldreth

BUDGET SESSION**I. 10:00 AM - Meeting Called to Order at the Ashe County Courthouse**

Chairman McNeill called the Budget Session to order at 10:00 am. In attendance with Commissioners were County Manager Adam Stumb, Finance Officer Sandy Long, Assistant County Manager & Community Development Director Nick Farmerie, Human Resource Coordinator Kelsey Wagoner, Asst. Finance Officer Teresa Bare, Deputy Finance Officer Ashley Lambert and Clerk to the Board Missy Seivers.

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

PRES
26-101

EMS Transition and Budgetary Planning

The meeting opened with Adam presenting a draft of the future EMS budget, projecting approximately \$3.6 million in operational expenses against \$1.9 million in revenues from ambulance fees. A significant point of discussion was the \$20 million placeholder for a new building, which Chairman McNeill criticized as excessive, noting that neighboring Caldwell County built a facility for \$5.2 million. While the official takeover isn't until 2028, Commissioner Eldreth emphasized the need for an "eight-month readiness plan" in case the current provider, Ashe Medics, ceases operations early. The committee discussed hiring an EMS Director this year with a salary range scale of \$71,275 to \$103,000 to begin establishing protocols and managing the transition.

The board reviewed a "second cut" of the overall county budget, aiming to reduce expenditures by roughly 2.5% to accommodate a tax rate reduction. A firm decision was made to preserve the 3% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for the county's 245 employees, with participants agreeing that staff should not suffer due to the economy. Conversely, the board discussed potentially reducing the school board's request for 5% raises to match the county's 3% standard. Adam noted that they still needed to identify roughly \$75,000 in additional cuts to reach their target.

The board moved through a line-by-line review of several departments to find savings:
Administration & Legal: Both departments saw a \$25,000 reduction in professional services.

Tax Administration: The hiring of a new administrator position was delayed until January 1, 2025, and office supplies were cut by \$2,000.

Board of Elections: \$8,000 was cut across office supplies, travel, and training. The board deferred a request for electronic poll books until they receive state certification.

Register of Deeds: The board voted to reduce the training overlap for the incoming registrar from five months down to two months, saving \$15,000.

IT: \$25,000 was cut from equipment expenses.

Public Buildings: A \$51,000 cut was made to maintenance and professional services. A proposed \$84,200 key fob system for Law Enforcement was "put on hold" pending a discussion with the Sheriff.

The group discussed the Social Services (DSS) budget, specifically addressing a \$93,000 cut proposed by Adam. Sandy clarified that out of this amount, only \$55,000 comes from 100% county expenditure items, while the rest involves complex funding ratios. The participants noted that even with a \$100,000 cut to the county share, the DSS budget would still be higher than the previous year. Commissioner Powers expressed

frustration over what he perceives as excessive staffing, comparing Ashe County's 86 DSS employees to Watauga County's 54, despite Watauga having a higher income level and fewer people on welfare.

The group reviewed requests from various community centers and local organizations. For Generations, the participants decided to level-fund them at last year's amount of \$758,691, rounded down to \$750,000 for "easy math." They emphasized that the facility is running in the red and needs to find a way to become sustainable or close. A \$350,000 request for the Ag Center was significantly reduced to \$90,000, with an additional \$10,000 later added to fix a road damaged by trucks during Helene cleanup, bringing the total to \$100,000.

Several smaller agencies saw budget adjustments to align with a goal of approximately 3% growth over the previous year:

The hospital's funding was reduced to \$350,000 from \$400,000, with the reasoning that they are a business and should understand tight financial times.

"Safe Home for Everyone" had \$5,000 cut from their \$30,000 request, with participants noting expensive recent additions to their building, such as a high-end electronic sign and a patio.

The Helton Community Center's request was reduced back to its previous level of \$10,500. The group questioned a request for renovations and heat pumps, especially after hearing reports of a \$100,000 "King Ranch" truck purchase by a related food bank entity.

The Farmers Market "double bucks" program (\$5,000) will be paid out of the current year's remaining budget rather than the upcoming fiscal year.

The participants reviewed internal department budgets, including Veterans Services and the Library. For Veterans Services, travel and subsistence were reduced to \$1,000, and special events were cut to \$2,000. The Library's budget was cut by \$16,608, effectively providing them with level funding plus a small half-percent increase. Debt service and fund transfers were marked as "committed" and could not be changed.

MISC 26-12 Governing Body

2026/2027 Recommended Budget = \$283,834

MISC 26-13 Administration

2026/2027 Recommended Budget = \$450,574

MISC 26-14 Finance

2026/2027 Recommended Budget = \$706,718

MISC 26-15 Tax Administration

2026/2027 Recommended Budget = \$1,679,261

MISC 26-16 Legal

2026/2027 Recommended Budget = \$85,434

MISC 26-25 Courts

2026/2027 Recommended Budget = \$5,560

MISC 26-26 Board of Elections

2026/2027 Recommended Budget = \$331,273

MISC 26-27 Register of Deeds

2026/2027 Recommended Budget = \$549,618

MISC 26-28 Information Technology Services

2026/2027 Recommended Budget = \$877,564

MISC 26-29 Public Buildings

2026/2027 Recommended Budget = \$3,226,177

MISC 26-61 Environmental Services (Collections)

2026/2027 Recommended Budget = \$3,534,305

Environmental Services Fee Changes/Increase Recommended:

*From: Disposal Tax – \$150.00 per household per year, \$62.00 per ton commercial,
\$52.00 per ton industrial*

LCID \$42.00 per ton commercial/industrial

*TO: Disposal Tax – \$150.00 per household per year, \$75.00 per ton commercial, \$65.00
per ton industrial*

LCID \$55.00 per ton commercial/industrial

MISC 26-60 Environmental Services (Disposal)

2026/2027 Recommended Budget = \$3,751,238

MISC 26-30 Emergency Management

2026/2027 Recommended Budget = \$411,387

MISC 26-31 Fire

2026/2027 Recommended Budget = \$213,154

MISC 26-32 Inspections

2026/2027 Recommended Budget = 481,744

MISC 26-33 Medical Examiner

2026/2027 Recommended Budget = \$28,750

MISC 26-34 Ambulance & Rescue

2026/2027 Recommended Budget = \$1,858,879

MISC 26-35 Animal Control

2026/2027 Recommended Budget = \$462,800

The group discussed the animal control budget, noting that requests for two new positions and an increase in part-time hours were not recommended for approval. A proposed vehicle replacement for the director, Joe, was cut from this upcoming years budget, saving approximately \$43,600 for the truck and \$5,500 for the upfit. The spay and neuter program, currently funded at \$24,000, was discussed; the group noted that while expenditures are high, the county recoups costs through adoption fees.

II. Recess

Recess called at 5:00 pm. Session to resume June 2nd, 2026 at 9:00 am.

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.

Todd McNeill, Chairman

Missy Seivers
Clerk to the Board