

Ashe County

*150 Government Circle
Jefferson, NC 28640*



Meeting Minutes - Draft

Monday, December 15, 2025

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**

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 Killen led the Pledge of Allegiance and Chairman McNeill offered the Opening Prayer.

III. Consent Agenda

Commissioner Greene made the motion to approve the Consent Agenda. 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

[MIN 25-33](#) December 1, 2025 Regular Session Minutes

Attachments: [12-15-2025 December 1, 2025 Regular Session Minutes](#)

[MISC 25-37](#) Monthly Tax Report for November 2025

Attachments: [12-15-2025 Monthly Tax Report November 2025](#)

IV. Adoption of Agenda

With the addition of an Executive Session Commissioner Killen made the motion to adopt the 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 floor for the Public Comment portion of the meeting at 9:02 am.

James Michael Badger shared his recent emergency medical experience, emphasizing he's a lifelong resident and first-time commissioner meeting attendee. On December 5th, during a regular check-up, his blood pressure was found to be dangerously high (237/109), indicating a possible stroke. After assessment by Dr. Watson, he was urgently sent to the Ashe Memorial emergency room, where he received six different blood pressure medications (three IV, three oral). He spent approximately nine hours in the ER as staff worked to transfer him to Winston-Salem for specialized care. There was difficulty arranging ambulance transport via ASHE Medics, who reportedly said they do not transport after 8:00 pm—something Mr. Badger criticized as implausible and concerning. Ultimately, an ambulance from South Hospital was dispatched to transfer

him, but Mr. Badger highlighted his frustration and concern that the public is paying for underperforming emergency services. He urged commissioners to address this gap in medical transport coverage, stating the community deserves better after-hours support. Commissioners acknowledged Mr. Badger's experience, apologized, and assured him the issue would be addressed.

Judy Bare, Jefferson informed the board of an upcoming veterinary event on January 9th at the AG Center, with appointments available via asheagriculture.com. Noted that other veterinarians are reaching out to potentially fill additional spots, aiming to enhance local services. This information was provided for general awareness.

There were no other comment offered by those in attendance. Chairman McNeill then closed the Public Comment portion of today's meeting at 9:09 am.

Approved

VI. Presentations

[PRES](#) [25-163](#)

9:05 am - Kelsey Wagoner, Human Resources Coordinator - Social Media Policy Adoption

Attachments: [12-15-2025 Social Media Policy](#)

Adam spoke on Kelsey's behalf. Adam stated that the social media policy, which is part of a set of policies attached to the personnel policy, is under review and update. The policy regulates how employees interact and communicate on the county's social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), prohibiting the expression of personal opinions on official pages. Public record standards for maintaining posts and comments are addressed. It includes guidelines on the use of personal social media to avoid conflicts of interest or harm to professional credibility. The policy was recently reviewed and approved by the personnel committee and was ready to be presented to the full board. Not all departments use social media; noted ones include sports (communication with parents), animal control, and emergency management. Administration also has an active presence. Negative feedback has been received in the past year, especially unrelated or inappropriate comments. The policy provides tools to manage inappropriate comments or offensive language. Monitoring is conducted by IT and administration staff. An external service is used to archive Facebook posts and comments, ensuring records for public access requests. The service operates continuously and archives all content. The possibility of activating automatic mechanisms to detect keywords or sensitive topics related to Ashe County public policies was raised; it was agreed to investigate if the service allows this. Coordination exists between social media managers and IT teams to report incidents. The policy covers both social media and official county and departmental websites. It allows individual sanctions on social media according to infractions. The boundary between personal and professional was discussed, including examples of inappropriate representation on personal accounts. Additional training or sending information to employees to clarify the policy was suggested. Commissioner Killen made the motion to adopt the Social Media Policy. 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](#) [25-164](#)

9:08 AM - Kelsey Wagoner, Human Resources Coordinator - EMS Personnel Study Proposal

Attachments: [12-15-2025 Proposal Submission EMS Piedmont Triad Regional Council](#)

Chairman McNeill stated his involvement with all 16 regional councils in North Carolina and announced an abstention from this voting item due to this connection. County Manager Adam Stumb spoke for Kelsey again stating that the board had previously put out a request for proposals (RFP) to study current EMS staffing, personnel compensation, pay structure, and job classifications. Multiple proposals were received, ranging in price from \$30,000 to \$40,000. Evergreen Solutions, who previously conducted a pay and compensation study, submitted a proposal, as did three others. Adam said that Piedmont Tri-Regional Council of Governments' proposal was favored because they could meet the urgent timeline (completion by March) and their price was competitive (\$13,750). The study will review Ashe medics' current pay, benchmark against nearby counties (e.g., Watauga, Avery, Wilkes), and similarly sized counties, and assess job classifications and organizational structure for recommendations. After some discussion Commissioner Killen made the motion to approve Piedmont Tri-Regional Council of Government to study current EMS staffing, personnel compensation, pay structure, and job classifications. Commissioner Greene seconded the motion. The motion was approved with unanimous approval.

Approved

For: 4 - Vice Chairman Powers, Commissioner Eldreth, Commissioner Killen and Commissioner Greene

Abstain: 1 - Chairperson McNeill

PRES
25-165

9:11 AM - Patty Gambill, Emergency Management Coordinator - Hurricane Helene FEMA Funded Project

Attachments: [12-15-2025 Approval of RFP for Grounds Repair Riverview Community Center](#)

Patty Gambill, Emergency Management Coordinator presented to the Board a request for proposal (RFP) related to ground work at Riverview Community Center . Project scope includes renewing grounds and replacing outdoor equipment damaged or lost due to Hurricane Helene. The project is fully funded by FEMA.

The purpose is to seek approval to proceed with advertising for proposals. After a brief discussion Vice Chairman Powers made the motion to approve the advertising for RFPs. 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
25-166

9:14 AM - Patty Gambill, Emergency Management Coordinator - Procedure for Letting of Public Contracts

Attachments: [Request for Approval of Electronic Advertising of Public Contracts](#)

Patty began the discussion centered on North Carolina General Statute 143, which allows counties to use various advertising methods: electronic platforms, paper, or a combination. The proposal is to permit the county to advertise exclusively through the county website, email, and social media when appropriate.

Utilization of electronic advertising could apply to recently approved RFPs and waivers of bidding requirements, depending on context. A discussion on situations where paper advertising may be preferable were discussed, such as RFPs with many potential local

bidders took place with specific mention of large projects, like a landfill, where a broader or paper-based outreach might be more effective. The need to reach a wider local audience was cited as a reason for retaining paper advertising in some cases. Commissioners suggested the need for a case-by-case evaluation of advertising methods, with individual scrutiny to decide if newspaper (paper) advertising should be included. Also, a proposal for Adam (County Manager) to determine when electronic-only advertising is suitable, with paper used as necessary. Motion made by Vice Chairman Powers to proceed with this stipulation on advertising decisions. 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
25-167

9:18 AM - Tracie McMillan, DSS Director - DSS Monthly Report for October 2025, USDA Guidance on SNAP, Child Support Subsidy Report and Right to Inspect Unlicensed Facilities.

Attachments: [12-15-2025 DSS Statistics October 2025](#)
[12-15-2025 SNAP Benefits Issuance Letter](#)
[12-15-2025 Subsidized Child Care Assistance Letter](#)
[12-15-2025 Notice - Unlicensed Facility or Residence](#)

Tracie gave the Board a DSS update. She stated that the number of children in foster care has decreased due to family reunification, guardianship with relatives, or adoptions, which is positive news especially before the holidays. The SNAP benefits issuance letter has been released, confirming the release of federal funds. In case of issues with funds on EBT cards, individuals should contact their local worker. The subsidized childcare assistance program showed an accuracy rate of 98.57%, with no repayments to the State. Those needing childcare help are encouraged to apply and be placed on the waiting list. The authority of the local department to inspect residences or assisted living facilities operating without proper licensing or registration was reminded. No active cases reported in the county, but monitoring continues. There is \$18,450 left in the Crisis Intervention Program (CIP) fund for energy assistance (electricity, wood, propane, etc.), and these funds are expected to be exhausted soon. The county received \$122,030.38 in CIP funds, more than expected.

There was a federal delay in receiving LIEAP funds (low income energy assistance program), but \$120,000 is now available, with about \$90,000 remaining. Initially for those over 60, then for the rest of the population based on income eligibility. APS essential funds for vulnerable adults: \$30,000 available, with a spending deadline of June 30, 2026. Used for housing deposits, rent, stabilization, and other supports. CPS essential funds for families and children with child protection reports: total of \$122,000, with \$20,000 remaining, aimed at stabilizing families and providing services to children in foster care. Tracie also said that the Children and Family Specialty Program went live December 1st: manages Medicaid for foster children and youth up to age 26 who were in foster care, focusing on comprehensive physical and mental care. North Carolina is the first state to implement this system. Individuals who have aged out of foster care and meet criteria should be encouraged to apply for coverage. She talked about the homeless and housing situation saying that the Outreach Coordinator at Hospitality House contacts homeless individuals in camps to offer help and supplies; this organization is the only night-by-night shelter in the region. Homeless individuals are provided mobile phones to maintain contact and facilitate housing applications. County churches and organizations like the Ashe County Coalition for Helping collaborate with funds and resources for the homeless.

There is an estimated deficit of 1,400-1,500 housing units in Ashe County and nearly 5,000 in Watauga County, impacting housing and creating various solutions. Funds and donations are used for supplies like tents, sleeping bags, and weatherproof clothing for those living outdoors. Some have successfully exited homelessness and moved into apartments; work with donated campers and hurricane funds continues to repair damaged homes. Tracie said that the Ashe County Food Council was formed, bringing together leaders from food pantries and organizations to coordinate efforts, reduce duplication, and cover food needs. A website and Facebook page have been created to inform about meal programs and food resources. Recipes and workshops are being developed with the extension agency to help families make better use of donated food.

No Action Taken

PRES
25-169

9:28 AM - John Pence - Keep Ashe Beautiful Update

John Pence with Keep Ashe Beautiful gave the Board a KAB update. The group's main activities include litter sweeps, litter prevention, beautification projects, student education, and community awareness initiatives. John spoke on education and beautification efforts in the county. He said they participated in in-class educational programs and supported the annual Caboose Kids event with Imagination Ashe. Initiated the "Golden Trail of Ashe" project, planting daffodils throughout the county; recent plantings include over 2,200 bulbs near the courthouse and thousands more in local parks and natural areas.

The goal is to plant daffodils in all corners of the county for beautification. He stated that they regularly conduct spring and fall county-wide cleanups, with increased focus on river and creek cleanups since Hurricane Helene. They have developed a new logo for community awareness, used on T-shirts for river cleanup volunteers. Significant results from cleanups: North Fork yielded 7,600 pounds of trash and 64 tires; South Fork saw 12 cleanups totaling over 24,000 pounds. Notable items removed include a ride-on lawnmower and full trailers of debris, with logistical support from the county's Environmental Services Department (dumpster provision and pickup). A trailer for collected debris was purchased through a Keep America Beautiful grant. KAB has built and distributed kiosks for river cleanup bags to state parks and outfitters ahead of the August Clean River Month; have repeatedly refilled these due to high demand. They conducted an annual Community Appearance Index in April and have since 2022, measuring roadside litter volume at set county locations with consistent routes and scoring. Noted a decrease in litter score in 2023, but a less favorable outcome in 2024. New trash trap initiative to be installed at Buffalo Creek near North Fork on school property, intended as both a litter collection device and educational tool for students, scheduled for May 12, 2026. In 2025, 34 cleanups were conducted with 659 volunteers, totaling 2,422 volunteer hours, collecting over 85,000 pounds of trash and debris, 3,200 pounds of recyclables, and 364 tires (mostly from the New River). Commissioners expressed amazement and gratitude for the group's impact, especially noting the scale of trash removed (85,000 pounds, nearly double the prior year). Discussion included emphasis on the importance of communicating these results to the broader public. Mr. Pence expressed appreciation for the county's partnership and reiterated their commitment to ongoing efforts.

No Action Taken

PRES
25-170

9:35 AM - Steve Trinkle - Riverview Community Center Update

Steve Trinkle updated the Board on the Riverview Community Center and FEMA Coordination. Steve said that the center initially intended to replace the flood-damaged

facility but shifted focus to repairing and mitigating the current building due to land and funding challenges. FEMA prefers either repairing or replacing but not both; the repair and mitigation route is more feasible and easier to gain FEMA's support.

The new approach includes making the facility more resilient to future flooding rather than relocating.

Partnership with the New River Conservancy and other organizations has been productive (noted: 100,000 pounds of trash removed from the river post-Hurricane Helene). Current secured funding includes half a million dollars in flood insurance, \$104,000 for roofing, and significant FEMA grants for contents replacement.

The gym's renovation, with community support including the Charlotte Hornets and Lowe's team member, is almost complete and has become a county showpiece. A recent entrance repair was fully funded by Second Harvest. Steve spoke on three additional grant applications that are pending, targeting kitchen upgrades, bathroom rebuilds, and major flood mitigation projects, with decisions expected in the upcoming months.

The estimated total needed for repairs and flood mitigation is around \$4 million. He said extensive effort has been spent researching mitigation strategies: options include flood-proof doors and windows, and possibly a flood wall. Concerns exist that fully sealing the building may create structural risks if exterior water pressure is not balanced, potentially leading to structural failure. A structural engineer's assessment is sought as the first step in determining the best mitigation approach. The planned HVAC upgrade will involve moving to roof-mounted heat pumps for better efficiency and flood safety. He spoke on Septic and Fire System Projects. He said the building's septic system is a mix of old terracotta and newer cast iron pipes; its condition post-flooding is not fully known. Scoping the entire septic system was quoted at \$36,000, but there is hope to secure a lower local price; FEMA may reimburse this expense. Full replacement of the septic system could cost up to \$1 million, so the scope assessment is seen as a necessary proof point. The current fire detection system is inadequate, generating frequent false alarms and not suited for the building's size; it needs to be replaced with a hardwired, professionally monitored system (\$57,000–\$60,000 estimate). The fire system upgrade will align with county standards and monitoring practices for similar facilities.

After a lengthy discussion Commissioner Eldreth made the motion to approve up to \$36,000 for septic system scoping. Commissioner Killen seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

After further discussion Commissioner Greene made the motion approving up to \$60,000 for the fire detection and monitoring system replacement. 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
25-168

9:40 AM - Patricia Calloway, Executive Director Generations Ashe -
Update on Generations Ashe

Patricia updated the Board on operations and funding at Generations Ashe. She stated that they completed daycare enrollment with over 500 eligible participants. Eight volunteers provided daycare counseling during a busy Medicaid and Medicare open enrollment period. Tax aid program will restart in June, offering free tax assistance, also staffed by volunteers. She spoke on Employee Health Insurance and Workforce. She said recent renewal saw significant increases and changes to employee health insurance plans.

Shifted from a group plan to an ICHRA (Individual Coverage Health Reimbursement Arrangement), effective December 1, with the new plan starting January 1. Generations covers about 74.62% of employee premiums, but costs vary by gender and age. Approximately 48 employees qualify for health insurance, though some opt for other

coverage or decline due to high costs. Example: A low-wage employee faces over \$1,200/month in insurance costs, with \$900 covered by the agency, still leaving a large personal cost for limited coverage. Efforts underway to help employees find alternative, affordable health options. Retention and hiring in assisted living remain challenging, with ongoing reliance on expensive contract staffing. A 2.8% pay increase was implemented for assistant superintendents and food services managers. Senior center recent fundraising included dinner theater (\$3,500 profit), Christmas bazaar, Saturday event, and auction (almost \$2,000 each). The center's program funds are limited (about \$13,000-\$15,000 annually); relies on county dollars and foundation campaigns (annual letter campaign raises ~\$10,000). \$12,440 raised this year for client assistance (mostly from individuals and churches). Two pending grant applications: \$50,000 from Sisters of Mercy Foundation (support for Home With Wheels program), and \$100,000 from NC Community Foundation Disaster Recovery Fund (case management, respite, transportation for older adults). Recent hurricane underscored vulnerabilities of older adults; grants aimed at building senior resiliency for future events. Received a \$25,000 matching gift from Marty Messer, matched through community and board donations, totaling \$50,000.

No Action Taken

RES 25-10

9:45 AM - Nick Farmerie, Community Development Director & Assistant County Manager - Helene Recovery Grant Part-F Application Resolution

Attachments: [12-15-2025 Shelter, Playground, Splash Pad](#)
[12-25-2025 Resolution Ashe Park](#)

Nick began the presentation saying that the project involves replacing the old brick concession stand at Ashe Park with a new 40x40 shelter in the same location. Planned amenities include a splash pad between the new shelter and current concession stand, and an additional playground for children. The splash pad features various elements such as fountains, dump bucket, spinning fountain, and has a non-slip, rubberized surface for safety. The team has visited other splash pads to confirm safety and maintenance standards. The existing shelter is considered a liability due to broken glass and disrepair; its removal is already arranged. Also present was Kevin Anderson, Director of Parks & Recreation. They discussed the two grants that are being considered: the Helene Recovery Grant and the Part F (Parks and Recreation Trust Fund) grant. Helene Recovery Grant application is specific to leak-damaged counties, with a smaller funding pool; Park F is statewide but has more funds available. Only one grant will be accepted if both are awarded; they will not combine funds from both sources. Both grants require a 50% local match, amounting to \$300,000 from Ashe County for a total \$600,000 project budget. Helene Recovery Grant decisions are expected by March, Park F decisions by May. Previous public input highlighted strong demand for a splash pad and more seating. Also present for this presentation was Intern Bethany Hendren who read the resolution. The resolution authorizes Parks and Recreation to apply for both grants and commits to the local match if selected. The county will only accept one grant and will not split the project between the two funding sources. The resolution aligns with the county's master plan and goals for community wellness and recreation. Commissioner Killen made the motion to approve the resolution. 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

GENERAL SESSION

VII. Commissioner Comments**VIII. Announcements****IX. Executive Session**

Executive Session was added to today's meeting for:

G.S. 143-318.11 (4) Economic Development

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

Vice Chairman Powers made the motion to enter into Executive Session at 10:55 am.

Commissioner Killen seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Vice Chairman Powers made the motion to return from Executive Session at 11:37 am.

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

X. Adjournment

Vice Chairman Powers made the motion to adjourn at 11:37 am. 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

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