

Ashe County

*150 Government Circle
Jefferson, NC 28640*



Meeting Minutes - Draft

Monday, October 20, 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**

Chairman McNeill called the October 20th, 2025 Regular Session Meeting to order at 9:00 am.

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 Greene led the Pledge of Allegiance and Vice Chairman Powers offered the opening Prayer.

III. Consent Agenda

Vice Chairman Powers 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 25-28](#) October 6, 2025 Regular Session Minutes

Attachments: [10-20-2025 October 6, 2025 Regular Session Minutes](#)

[PRES 25-146](#) Monthly Tax Report, September 2025

Attachments: [10-20-2025 Monthly Tax Report September 2025](#)

[PRES 25-139](#) Request to authorize tax collector to write-off 2015 delinquent tax bills (insolvents) per NCGS-373(g) and NCGS 105-378(a)

Attachments: [10-20-2025 2015 Insolvents](#)

[APP 25-14](#) Appointment for High Country Rural Planning Organization (RPO) Rural Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC)

Attachments: [10-20-2025 Letter Requesting Reappointment to RPO-RTAC](#)

IV. Adoption of Agenda

Commissioner Greene made the motion to adopt the October 20th, 2025 agenda. Commissioner Killen 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 Public Comment at 9:03 AM.

Charles Stafford from Fleetwood, NC, representing Down Home opened his comment by apologizing to the commissioners for a previous negative encounter between Down Home members and the commissioners. The apology covered any inappropriate conversation, contact, or bad behavior on the part of Down Home. Charles expressed appreciation for the work commissioners do for the community, acknowledging the difficulty and tirelessness of their job. Charles invited the commissioners to a community meeting hosted by Down Home on October 22 at Poe Hall from 6:00 to 8:00 PM. The meeting is intended for citizens to discuss key concerns, particularly areas where government and budget decisions have an impact. Topics expected to be discussed include affordable housing, jobs, education, and law enforcement issues. Charles shared an account of a recent phone call with Aaron Israel from Boone about a family member facing immigration issues—having his green card and passport confiscated and being incarcerated in Florida. He emphasized that while these issues may not be present in Ashe County, they are relevant to the discussions and concerns of the community.

No further comments were offered by those in attendance. Chairman McNeill then closed the floor for Public Comment at 9:06 AM.

VI. Presentations

[PRES
25-140](#)

9:04 AM - Tracie McMillan, DSS Director - DSS Statistics for August 2025

Attachments: [10-20-2025 DSS Statistics August 2025](#)

Tracie touched briefly on the DSS Statistics for August 2025. Foster care numbers are steady, possibly slightly down from peak average due to several recent reunifications or adoptions. No significant changes noted in this month's statistics. Questions from board members were addressed; all expressed appreciation for the stability in numbers and DSS staff work.

Tracie also recognized Nancy Jones, Food and Nutrition Services supervisor, is retiring after working with the county since September 5, 1996. Tracie described Nancy as shy and was not present, but Nancy expressed her gratitude for the commemorative plaque. Tracie invited Commissioners to a celebration for Nancy's retirement.

Tracie spoke on the federal shutdown and the affects on DSS operations, with a chart provided to board members outlining program status. Some programs are on hold, while others continue; staff are divided between essential and non-essential. A major concern is the SNAP (food stamps) funding only secured through end of October; no assurance for November benefits unless federal action is taken. Local food banks are listed on the DSS website and suggested as a resource. Community Resource tab has this information.

Applications for SNAP will still be processed locally, even if federal funds are paused; October applicants receive prorated payments for that month only. Tracie stated that Medicaid benefits are not impacted, though some CMS staff may be furloughed and response delays are possible.

Tracie also spoke on Energy Assistance Programs. She stated that the State is obligated to provide interim funding for some mandatory services; NC DHHS is already acting, particularly for energy assistance. LIEAP payments will be automatic for eligible recipients over 60 who received it last year if circumstances haven't changed. No new LIEAP funds for other applicants unless federal government resumes funding.

The county received about \$88,000 in CIP (Crisis Intervention Program) funds to help those in energy crisis.

DSS collaborates with local charities, including Operation Roundup, churches, "Keep Ashe Warm," Michael Sexton's food bank, and Ashe Really Cares, to provide additional support.

PRO 25-3

9:07 AM - Tracie McMillan, DSS Director - Adoption Awareness Month and National Adoption Day 2025 Proclamation

Attachments: [10-20-2025 Proclamation Adoption Awareness Month-National Adoption Day](#)

Tori Logel, the Licensing and Adoptions Social Worker, presented a proclamation to the board. The proclamation highlights the need for loving, stable families for children, citing that 10,611 children are in foster care in North Carolina, with 2,416 awaiting adoption. Ashe County currently has 29 minors in foster care; two were adopted in the last year. The document encourages community participation in recruiting adoptive families. November 2025 was proclaimed as Adoption Awareness Month and November 22, 2025 as National Adoption Day in Ashe County. Vice Chairman Powers made the motion to adopt the proclamation. 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

PRES 25-141

9:10 AM - Jordan Sellers, Northern Peaks State Trail Coordinator Blue Ridge Conservancy - Northern Peaks State Trail Update

Jordan introduced David Ray as the new Executive Director for Blue Ridge Conservancy (BRC), joining two months ago. He stated that David brings extensive conservation experience, including work in Western North Carolina and with Low Country Land Trust in South Carolina. David spoke expressing enthusiasm for returning to the region and building relationships with local officials and the community. Jordan began by speaking on the Northern Peaks State Trail Progress. Approximately 64 acres added to Mount Jefferson State Natural Area; biological survey completed and trail alignment work underway. Partnership with the town of Jefferson to develop Foster Tyson Park as a trailhead, with plans for parking, pavilion, shelter replacements, and restrooms despite an initial grant application being unsuccessful. Five key properties near Elk Knob are needed for further connections; progress noted but some areas present more complexity due to commercial development. Feasibility study finished for the West Jefferson to Jefferson segment; plans to phase the costly two-and-a-half-mile section into manageable pieces. Paddy Mountain Park highlighted as a crucial success, with over 8,000 hikers using the trail and a reported economic benefit of nearly \$300,000 to Ashe County in the past year. Awaiting official Northern Peaks State Trail designation for Paddy Mountain Park section; signage will follow upon approval. Trail usage discussed, with summer weekends seeing as many as 300-400 visitors, and current averages at 30-80 visitors daily. Jordan also spoke on Trail Construction and Grants. Three Top Mountain section under construction, with 12-13 miles planned (about a quarter of the total trail). \$100,000 Recreational Trails Program grant awarded for phase one; trail construction paused during hunting season and to resume when conditions allow. \$150,000 Great Trail State Program grant awarded for phase two, with permits pending approval. Trail crosses 3,200-acre game land; hunting permitted in certain areas. State parks have approved preliminary planning for the segment between Elk Knob and Three Top; engaging with landowners for further acquisitions or easements. Over \$5 million allocated for Northern Peaks Trail investment in Elk Knob State Park; projects

temporarily paused due to storm recovery but remain a priority. Groundbreaking in Boone at Rivers House Park on November 7th for new trailhead development, supported by another Recreational Trails Program grant. Jordan talked about Community Engagement and Related Projects. Over \$250,000 in public grants and \$77,000 in private donations secured for the trail this year. More than 15 community hikes led to encourage engagement and feedback. BRC received \$316,000 for expansion of Lansing Creeper Park, planning to acquire 50-60 acres and add a mile of creek frontage. He said Blue Ridge Conservancy and project leaders expressed gratitude for county and community support, particularly for the pivotal Paddy Mountain Park project. Commission members highlighted the value of trail projects in encouraging outdoor activity and reducing screen time for youth. Ongoing encouragement for continued collaboration and support for conservation and recreation projects in the region.

PRES
25-142

9:20 AM - Lonnie Jones and Jerry Brown, Cemetery Committee - Update

Lonnie Jones and Jerry Brown from the Cemetery Committee were present today to give the Board an update on the committee's activities. Appreciation expressed for the ground-penetrating radar machine, which is being used almost weekly due to high demand from various cemeteries and individuals. Recent use of the radar resulted in finding 48 graves at a nearly lost African American slave cemetery in Nathan's Creek area. The committee has a pool of 20-25 volunteers who assist with cemetery projects as needed. There are efforts to clean up abandoned cemeteries and find people or groups to "adopt" and maintain them after initial restoration. Success stories include community members and entities, such as the hospital, adopting and maintaining previously neglected cemeteries. The county is estimated to have between 1,300 and 1,400 cemeteries, with 330-350 abandoned cemeteries currently identified. Breakdown of known cemeteries: 835 private, 107 church, 22 community, 20 slave cemeteries, 114 with Confederate graves, 8 with Revolutionary War graves, and 15 Native American cemeteries. Some cemeteries are classified as epidemic (flu) graves, linked to the 1918 Spanish Flu. Ten cemeteries are known to be completely destroyed, and there are 100 cemeteries yet to be located with GPS and photos. The committee's webpage has 2,200 members, and their posts on cemetery updates have received large public engagement (e.g., 37,000 and 15,000 views on specific posts). Six additional historical cemeteries have been added to the county list in the past two weeks. Many cemeteries are overgrown and difficult to access, requiring significant cleanup and ongoing maintenance. There are issues with funding for major restoration, especially after natural disasters (e.g., cemeteries blocked by fallen trees with no funds available for removal). The process of adopting a cemetery involves finding committed individuals or organizations to maintain the site after initial cleaning. Example given of a cemetery with a headstone for a woman who lived to 114 years, whose stone was found and unearthed by volunteers. Committee members respond to community questions and offer to assist landowners in adopting and caring for neglected cemeteries. The committee's work is being noticed widely through social media and community outreach. Continue efforts to locate and document all county cemeteries, especially the 100 not yet GPS-located. Further community outreach to find more volunteers or organizations to adopt and maintain abandoned cemeteries. Seek additional funding or resources for restoration and cleanup, particularly for sites impacted by natural disasters.

PRES
25-143

9:30 AM - Amanda Roten, Executive Director ACTA - FY2026 Rural Operating Assistance Program (ROAP) Funds

Attachments: [10-20-2025 FY2026 ROAP Funds](#)

Amanda from Ashe County Transportation Authority presented the annual request for

Rural Operating Assistance Program (ROAP) funding. The ROAP funds include EDTAP (for citizens 60 and older), employment (to assist citizens with transportation to/from work), and RGP (for the general public under 59).

In the previous year, the authority drove 654,554 miles with 19 vehicles and performed 61,469 trips.

5,663 trips were funded by EDTAP and 9,989 by RGP and employment funds. The total funding allocation for this year is \$115,662. Questions were raised regarding the number of individuals assisted and specifics about the funding requirements. Vice Chairman Powers asked why, if a federally funded community transportation system exists in the county, funding isn't directed solely to that. Amanda clarified that Ashe County Transportation is not federally funded but is a non-profit funded primarily through state funds routed via the county. Some federal funds come in, but not directly; they are passed through state or county channels. Commissioner Killen made the motion to approve the Rural Operating Assistance Program (ROAP) funding. 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
25-144

9:37 AM - Michelle Pelayo, Migrant Education Program Coordinator -
Farmworker Health Education Program Presentation

Fellow school staff, faith leaders, and community members highlighted Michelle's compassion, professionalism, and the breadth of her outreach (including confidential situations and after-hours support).

Michelle is credited with helping the local economy by supporting the families who provide essential farm labor.

Partnerships extend to churches and other organizations, notably her work with the Ashe County Children's Christmas Project and the Ministerial Association. Community members and parents see Michelle as an irreplaceable advocate and a bridge between the Hispanic community and schools. Her efforts are recognized as fostering inclusion, safety, and a sense of belonging for migrant families. Michelle is employed by Ashe County Schools, funded through Title I, Part C (Migrant Education Program). Her work supports not only migrant children and their families but also broader sectors in Ashe County, particularly in agriculture (Christmas tree and pumpkin industries). Funding for Michelle's position is uncertain beyond the current school year due to federal changes, prompting community discussions about sustainability and succession. Michelle works with migrant families and H-2A workers, assisting with a wide range of needs—enrollment in schools, food banks, and more. She builds trust and lasting relationships with Spanish-speaking families, providing guidance, advocacy, and support. Her responsibilities include compliance with federal laws (Title IV, Civil Rights Act, IDEA), ensuring language access and equitable education for all students.

Michelle provides essential interpretation services, participates in IEP meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and district events. She is recognized for strengthening family engagement, improving student attendance, behavior, and achievement. Her role is seen as a local necessity, both cost-efficient and crucial due to Ashe County's rural location. Migrant children often attend multiple schools in a year, creating educational gaps and challenges. Michelle and her program provide continuity by tracking students, enrolling them in appropriate classes, and offering tutoring support to prevent dropouts. She maintains contact with families even after they leave the area, helping with transitions and long-term outcomes. There has been steady growth in the number of migrant students pursuing higher education, though some continue in agricultural work due to family circumstances. Dr. Eisa Cox spoke saying current funding covers Michelle's role this year, but future financial support is at risk due to changing federal

allocations. The need to seek alternative funding options and consideration for succession planning in the event Michelle retires some day. Commissioners thanked and commended Michelle for everything she does.

PRES
25-145

9:42 AM - Nick Farmerie, Community Development Director & Assistant County Manager - Lease Agreement - Animal Shelter

Attachments: [10-20-2025 Lease Agreement - Animal Shelter 2025](#)

Nick presented the Board with the lease agreement between the county and Shirley Church (including her heirs and beneficiaries) for the property at 961 Highway 221 Business in West Jefferson. The term of the lease is 12 months, with the option to extend for an additional 12 months (total possible duration: 24 months). The lease amount is set at a nominal fee of \$1. The county is granted the right of first refusal to purchase the property for \$1. The agreement will allow the county to perform due diligence and gather information necessary to apply for a special use permit with the Town of West Jefferson. Nick received recognition from Commissioners for his work on the agreement. Vice Chairman Powers made the motion to approve the lease agreement. 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
25-147

9:50 AM - Adam Stumb, County Manager - Bond Council Engagement

Attachments: [10-20-2025 Limited Obligation Bonds, Series 2026](#)

Adam addressed procedural items related to the landfill project, which is expected to break ground in the spring of next year. Baird Financial has been brought on to assist with the project's financing. There is a need to engage bond counsel to handle the legal aspects of selling bonds and managing the project's financing.

Parker Poe, the law firm that worked on the previous middle school project, is recommended for the bond counsel role due to a good working relationship with their lead attorney, Scott Leo. Chairman McNeill stated that the same team (Parker Poe) worked successfully on the middle school project, with both Adam and Sandy being familiar with their work. Familiarity with the team is seen as an advantage for progressing the landfill project efficiently. Vice Chairman Powers made the motion to finalize and execute the letter of engagement with Parker Poe for bond counsel services on the landfill project. 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

RES 25-8

9:54 AM - Adam Stumb, County Manager - Reimbursement Resolution, Landfill Project

Attachments: [10-20-2025 Resolution to Reimburse Capital Expenditures](#)

Adam presented the Reimbursement Resolution for Landfill Project. The resolution allows the county to include upfront costs for the landfill project in the financing, similar to how it was handled with the middle school project.

Engineering costs for landfill permitting and approval, as well as potential architectural

costs for the environmental services building, can be rolled into the overall 20-year financing package. There is no obligation to spend the full \$15 million requested; the resolution only provides the authority to cover necessary costs as they arise. Public clarification was made that approving the \$15 million does not require spending the entire amount. Commissioner Greene made the motion to adopt the Reimbursement Resolution for Landfill Project. Commissioner Killen seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Adopted

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

PRES
25-148

10:00 AM - Adam Stumb, County Manager - State Health Plan Surcharge Discussion

Attachments: [10-20-2025 Letters-Documents-State Treasurer](#)

Adam stated that the state health insurance plan is facing a \$1.4 billion shortfall over the next few years, prompting premium increases and new cost-saving measures. House Bill 125, approved on August 6, introduces a 2.4% surcharge on public employee insurance costs, applied to local governments participating in the plan. Many local entities, including Ashe County, were unaware this surcharge would affect them due to unclear language in the bill. The surcharge amounts to an unanticipated \$340,000 bill for Ashe County for the current fiscal year. Other impacted groups include the health department and the library system. The surcharge is intended for funding the health plan mandate, though some question whether the funds could be redirected in the future. Ashe County joined the state health plan in 2016 because it was no longer feasible to be self-insured with a small pool of 300 employees and rising costs. The larger state pool offers cost advantages, but increased unexpected charges like the new surcharge create significant budgeting challenges. Local governments must approve budgets by July 1, making unannounced cost increases such as this particularly difficult to absorb. Caldwell County is facing a \$900,000 impact from the same surcharge. Kelsey Wagoner, Human Resources Coordinator spoke saying the average age of county employees is currently about 42, while average retiree age is typically 55+, meaning retiree insurance obligations can last a decade or more. Chairman McNeill said the County Commissioners Association and League of Municipalities were surprised by the surcharge and are now lobbying for relief. The Association of County Commissioners has requested at least a one-year delay or extension on the surcharge. Chairman McNeill will sign letters to the state treasurer and legislators (e.g., Ralph Hise and Ray Pickett) to request waivers for late fees and to defer implementation to July 1, 2026, for better budget planning. There was consensus among the group to support and sign advocacy letters seeking relief from the surcharge impact.

PRES
25-149

10:05 AM - Karen Wolford & Christina Best, Mt. Jefferson Child Development Center - Center Highlights

Attachments: [10-20-2025 Mt. Jefferson Child Development Center Purpose and Goals](#)

Karen Wolford and Christina Best presented highlights from Mount Jefferson Child Development Center. A family survey was distributed to gather feedback, receiving positive responses from parents. The center serves approximately 100 children but is currently not at full capacity, with 30 open spots available. Ongoing efforts to fill these spots include newspaper ads and Facebook promotion. The center is fully staffed and in good shape operationally but seeks more income through increased enrollment. Staff diversity includes someone fluent in Spanish who assists with communication for

Hispanic families. A recent new student from Japan has successfully begun learning English at the center. They spoke on challenges the center faced. The center lost access to its food reimbursement program due to administrative transitions and address issues. Letters regarding program renewal were sent to outdated addresses, so staff didn't receive critical information in time.

Currently, the center is paying \$700 per week out-of-pocket to provide food, while meeting USDA and CACFP standards. Restoring the food program is in progress, with legal and administrative efforts underway; it is anticipated the program will return within a month. They discussed finances and enrollment. Monthly tuition averages \$985 per child, with a 10% discount for families with two children. There is presently a freeze on subsidies; families can only receive subsidy if a spot opens from someone dropping out. High tuition is believed to be a major barrier to filling open spots, despite a long local waiting list for daycare subsidies.

There was a discussion about ways to attract more children, but cost is a significant deterrent for many families. The center experienced flooding during Hurricane Helene, resulting in damage to two classrooms.

Repairs and replacements have been made, including a new playground and fencing.

GENERAL SESSION

VII. Commissioner Comments

VIII. Announcements

IX. Executive Session

X. Adjournment

At 10:46 am Vice Chairman Powers made the motion to adjourn the October 20th, 2025 Regular Session meeting of the Ashe County Commissioners. 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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