

Ashe County

*150 Government Circle
Jefferson, NC 28640*



Meeting Minutes - Draft

Monday, August 3, 2026

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 August 3rd, 2026 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 Killen led the Pledge of Allegiance and Chairman McNeill offered the opening Prayer.

III. Consent Agenda

Commissioner Killen made the motion to approve the Consent 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

MIN 26-23 July 20, 2026 Regular Session Minutes

Attachments: [8-3-2026 July 20, 2026 Regular Session Minutes](#)

MIN 26-24 June 1, 2026 Budget Session Minutes

Attachments: [8-3-2026 June 1, 2026 Budget Session Minutes](#)

MIN 26-25 June 2, 2026 Budget Session Minutes

Attachments: [8-3-2026 June 2, 2026 Budget Session Minutes](#)

MISC 26-55 GIS Contract with HCCOG FY2026-27

Attachments: [8-3-2026 The Provision of GIS Services for Ashe County's Public Web Mapping Application Data Maintenance](#)

MISC 26-56 Jefferson NC Extension Lease

Attachments: [8-3-2026 USDA Lease Amendment](#)

APP 26-8 Ashe County Public Library Advisory Board Local & Regional Board Member Appointment Requests

Attachments: [8-3-2026 Ashe County Public Library Advisory Board Appointment Requests](#)

APP 26-9 Ashe County Community Advisory Committee Reappointment of Mary Sexton

Attachments: [8-3-2026 Reappointment Request Ashe County Joint Community Advisory Committee](#)

MISC 26-57 Reinstatement of Leave & Longevity for Jared Hohman & Maria Ham

Attachments: [8-3-2026 Employment History for Jared Hohman](#)
[8-3-2026 Employment History for Maria Ham](#)

MISC 26-58 2026 County Register of Deeds Records Retention & Disposition Schedule

Attachments: [8-3-2026 - County Register of Deeds Records Retention & Disposition Schedule](#)

MISC 26-59 Letter of Support for the Lost Province Center for Cultural Arts - CDBG-DR Grant

Attachments: [8-3-2026 Letter of Support for the Lost Province Center for Cultural Arts - CDBG-DR Grant](#)

MISC 26-63 Hanger Lease: Gary Whitman

Attachments: [8-3-2026 Hanger Lease Gary Whitman 2026](#)

IV. Adoption of Agenda

Vice Chairman Powers made the motion to adopt today's 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 today's meeting at 9:03 am.

Lou Zeller, Glendale Springs said that during the July 20 Ashe County Commissioners meeting, resident Kevin Calhoun made complaints about an "immigrant center", noise and loud music and used language portraying immigrants negatively. Although commissioners had stated they would not respond to public comments, Vice Chairman engaged with Calhoun asking him if he lived inside Jefferson town limits and directed him to follow up with the county manager. Zeller said that the concern lies not in Calhoun's protected speech but in the commission's willingness to involve county staff and resources in response to Mr. Calhoun's complaint which Zeller felt was racially motivated.

Dolly Reeves, Creston argued that an Ashe County resident, Kevin Calhoun, during the July 20 meeting, used his public-comment time to make remarks laced with racist implications, and instead of enforcing the rules or shutting down inappropriate targeting, the Vice Chairman allowed him to go over the time limit and engaged him in discussion. She asked commissioners to recognize the impact of this action and to refuse this behavior in future meetings.

Andrew Cox, Chief of the Glendale Springs Fire Department, invited commissioners and the community to the department's 50th-anniversary celebration on Saturday, August 29th, from 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM, featuring food, activities for children, and a helicopter demo.

No further comments were offered by those in attendance. Chairman McNeill then closed the Public Comment portion of today's meeting at 9:09 am.

VI. Presentations

PRES 26-123

9:03 AM - Nick Farmerie, Assistant County Manager & Community Development Director - West Jefferson Water Well Easement Agreement

Attachments: [8-3-2026 Deed of Easement Well Site Tract 5 Industrial Park](#)

Nick presented a proposal for a water well easement at the Ashe Industrial Park (Site 5) to increase the town's municipal water capacity. After some discussion Vice Chairman Powers made the motion to approve the easement for well and waterline for the Town of West Jefferson and allow staff to execute the recording of easement and plat. 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 26-124

9:05 AM - PUBLIC HEARING - RBZ, LLC Property Purchase Contract

Attachments: [8-3-2026 BZD LLC Offer to Purchase Contract and Agreement](#)

Nick said that before we move into public hearing, I'd like to briefly outline the key components of the proposed agreement for Site Five (5), the property we discussed earlier.

The purchaser, BZD LLC, has agreed to a \$500,000 purchase price for the parcel. This reflects a \$195,000 difference from current market value, which will be recouped through a committed investment of \$7 million over a seven-year incentive agreement.

Under this agreement, the company will construct a 50,000-square-foot facility within the industrial park and create 35 new jobs. All positions are projected to pay above the area median income, which is currently about \$48,000 annually.

Nick said if the Board is inclined, I will step back and open the floor for public hearing. You are welcome to offer comments, ask questions, or share any concerns regarding this proposed agreement. Chairman McNeill opened the floor for the Public Hearing at 9:15 am. No comments were offered by those in attendance. Chairman McNeill closed the Public Hearing at 9:16 am. Commissioner Eldreth made the motion to approve the offer to purchase. 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
26-126

9:13 AM - Brian MacHarg, Director Cooperative Extension - Introduction

Adam introduced Brian MacHarg as the new Cooperative Extension Director, a position that had been vacant for nearly two years. Brian MacHarg discussed the Extension's current priorities, including supporting Christmas tree farmers, hiring a livestock agent, managing the commercial kitchen incubator, and overseeing 4H clubs like the robotics and marksman groups.

ORD 26-1

9:18 AM - SECOND READING: Chapter 159: Ashe County Cemetery Ordinance

Attachments: [8-3-2026 FINAL Cemetery Ordinance- Removed Section 4.1](#)
[FINAL Cemetery Ordinance](#)

Nick stated that this constitutes the second reading of the ordinance. At this stage, a simple majority vote of the Board is sufficient to enact it. Before you are two versions of the ordinance. The first is the version formally approved by the Planning Board. The second version differs only in Section 4.1 on page four, which was the basis for the Planning Board's decision to table that version for six months.

Aside from that single distinction, the ordinance has undergone multiple reviews through the Planning Board over the past six months, and today marks its second presentation before the Board of Commissioners. Commissioner Eldreth made the motion to adopt Chapter 159, Ashe County Cemetery Ordinance. Commissioner Killen seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Adopted on Second Reading

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

RES 26-15

9:21 AM - Nick Farmerie, Assistant County Manager & Community Development Director - Amendment to CDBG-DR application (Resolution)

Attachments: [8-3-2026 Resolution CDBG-DR Funding Commercial District Revitalization Program](#)

Nick explained that this is the CDBG-DR Community Revitalization Grant that Judson from the COG presented at the previous meeting. The overall project scope required adjustment because the initial proposal exceeded the maximum allowable funding. As a result, the section connecting Paddy to downtown West Jefferson was removed.

The revised application now covers the portion beginning in West Jefferson and extending to Midtown. An additional benefit of this modification is the opportunity to work with Jordan Sellers of Blue Ridge Conservancy to utilize an existing utility easement that runs diagonally across the area. Because the town already controls this easement, it offers a significantly more cost-effective option than the originally proposed sidewalk segment.

Overall, this change positions us for a stronger project should the grant be awarded, and removing the Paddy-to-downtown section was the most practical adjustment. This resolution authorizes submission of the grant application with that revision. Vice Chairman Powers made the motion to adopt the amended resolution. Commissioner Greene seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved as Amended

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

[PRES](#)
[26-129](#)

9:25 AM - Bethany Hendren, NCACC Strategic Project Coordinator - Community Engagement Process for the Future Reuse of the Former Middle School Property

Bethany reported that, over the past several weeks, she has worked with Ashe County staff to develop a community engagement process regarding the future reuse of the soon-to-be former Warrensville Middle School property. As the county begins evaluating potential opportunities for the site, the goal is to ensure residents can share their ideas, priorities, and concerns before any decisions are made.

Beginning today, August 3, Ashe County is launching an online community survey to gather input on community needs, desired amenities or services, and overall priorities for the property. In addition to the survey, the county will host an in-person, station-based community input session on Thursday, September 10 at the Warrensville Middle School site, allowing residents to engage at their own pace and speak directly with county staff.

A promotional flyer with a QR code linking directly to the survey will be shared on the county website, social media platforms, and posted throughout the county. Once the survey closes and the input session is complete, all feedback will be compiled, summarized, and shared with county staff, the Board of Commissioners, and the public to inform future discussions.

Bethany emphasized the importance of broad community participation and asked for assistance in spreading the word to ensure the engagement process reflects the needs and perspectives of as many residents as possible.

GENERAL SESSION

Recessed at 9:47 am and moved to the second floor conference room behind the Register of Deeds office. The purpose of the move was for Bryce Griffin's Internship Project presentation. Meeting reconvened at 10:00am. Sheriff Howell and members of his staff were also present.

[PRES](#)
[26-127](#)

Bryce Griffin, Administration Intern - SMCP Presentation

Attachments: [8-3-2026 Corrections Facilities Cost Analysis](#)

Bryce Griffin, an intern from Appalachian State University, presented an educational cost analysis of Ashe County's corrections facility. Commissioners were not expected to take action; the presentation was part of Bryce's internship project. Bryce examined the Statewide Misdemeanor Confinement Program (SMCP), Ashe County's inmate costs, and revenue from housing inmates for Stanley, Wilkes, and Alleghany counties. He converted calendar-year data into fiscal-year format to align with county budgeting. Identified two main revenue sources: inmate phone calls and daily housing fees. Daily Housing Rates are as follows:

SMCP: \$40/day (recently increased to \$50/day)

Stanley County: \$60/day,

Wilkes County: \$55/day,

Alleghany County: \$45/day

Bryce calculated that Ashe County spends about \$200/day per inmate when including fixed costs, variable costs, and staff salaries/benefits.

Average inmate counts: 11-12 local inmates/day, 47 out-of-county inmates/day. The Sheriff objected to Bryce's data being posted online before his office could review it, arguing that the cost model was misleading because it included staff salaries and benefits even though the jail must operate regardless of inmate numbers. He stated that his own calculations show a profit of \$18.08 per SMCP inmate at the former \$40 rate and \$28 per day for other out-of-county inmates, and noted that the new \$50 SMCP rate will further increase revenue. Overall, he emphasized that SMCP income is essential for a facility that must remain staffed and operational regardless of population. Nick defended the project as a valuable learning experience for Bryce, emphasizing that he worked with the finance department (Adam and Sandy) to compile the numbers.

VII. Commissioner Comments

VIII. Announcements

IX. Executive Session

X. Adjournment

Vice Chairman Powers made the motion to adjourn at 10:47am. 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

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.