

Ashe County

*150 Government Circle
Jefferson, NC 28640*



Meeting Minutes - Final

Monday, April 6, 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 April 6th, 2026 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 Chairman McNeill offered the opening Prayer.

III. Consent Agenda

Vice Chairman Powers made the motion 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 26-8](#) March 16th, 2026 Regular Session Minutes

Attachments: [4-6-2026 March 16, 2026 Regular Session Minutes](#)

[MIN 26-9](#) March 16th, 2026 Executive Session Minutes

[PRES 26-48](#) DOT Letter Approval 2026

Attachments: [4-6-2026 Blue Ridge Brutal DOT Letter 2026](#)

[PRES 26-50](#) Letter of Support for Potential Land Acquisitions on the Blue Ridge Parkway in Ashe County.

Attachments: [4-6-2026 Letter of Support for Potential Land Aquisitions U.S. Department of the Interior](#)

IV. Adoption of Agenda

Commissioner Greene requested adding an agenda item to discuss the Capital Improvement Project Plan for coming years, specifically related to EMS delivery. Chairman McNeill suggested placing the new discussion item alongside/after Nick's presentation (26-47) regarding the EMS base. Chairman McNeill then asked if the placement suited everyone; the response was affirmative. Commissioner Killen made the motion to adopt the agenda as amended. 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

Beth Sorrell (Fleetwood) shared info on a new initiative, Energy Funds for All, focused on promoting energy-saving programs and improving equitable access to energy efficiency. She highlighted Energy Saver NC rebates that help qualifying residents replace/upgrade appliances (including HVAC), potentially covering close to 100% of the cost depending on income. Beth also noted income thresholds are "quite high," and many Ashe County residents may qualify for at least some rebate. She stated that she would be at the library 11:00–1:00 to help people apply (especially those less comfortable with computers). Website: energyfundsforall.org; phone: 336-902-8611.

Joanne Kuszaj (Glendale Springs/Jefferson area), Ashe County public member and chair of the Partners of Public Health Board, asked commissioners to closely review the proposed budget and consider increased funding for APP Healthcare. APP Healthcare described as a district serving Ashe, Alleghany, and Watauga counties, with federally qualified health clinics in Ashe and Alleghany. Mentioned two school-based health clinics located at the middle school in Ashe County and the middle school in Alleghany County. She emphasized the department provides federally mandated and state-mandated services, but county funding has been about 10% of the budget and has not kept pace with rising healthcare costs. She stated that over 50% of patients/clients are self-pay, uninsured, or Medicaid; noted pressures from Medicaid cuts and state budget issues. She also warned expense-cutting decisions coming "this week" could create significant community ripple effects. Cited NC Local Health Department Accreditation Program ranking: APP Healthcare is second from the bottom in the state for funding. She suggested like-sized county comparisons indicate the district could warrant about \$3M more across the three counties.

Jim Cocke (Pine Swamp) thanked the county for committing funds toward resurfacing Ashe Park tennis courts and noted support from the Asheville Tennis Association. Acknowledged uncertainty around potential USTA funding, but urged that uncertainty not prevent pursuing a higher-quality, longer-term solution. He shared that while the county may have up to ~17 courts including school facilities, they're not fully public; said Ashe County has two regulation public tennis courts. He compared access disparity to Forsyth County (one regulation public court per 3,700 vs. Ashe's one per 12,700 residents). He requested the county "take one more look" and consider a short delay if it leads to doing the project "right," without necessarily spending more than already committed.

Terry Bowman (Luther Rd., Jefferson) echoed concerns that Ashe Park courts are not built to spec (tight space/runoff; players can hit fencing), and supported delaying to meet proper specifications. Bowman referenced Hap Davis (former teaching pro and USTA staff member) as also urging a delay to get the courts done properly.

Steve Reeves (Jefferson; retired Army; former USPTA pro) described Ashe County's tennis community as unusually motivated and strong. Rays offered "sweat equity," noting he has heavy equipment (excavator) and is willing to help with improving the courts.

Terry Hartley (Boone; president, High Country Tennis Association for Ashe/Watauga/Avery) said USTA-related grant resources may be available for court construction and youth lessons. Hartley emphasized tennis benefits for youth (attendance/grades/graduation rates), lifelong participation, and potential tournament tourism revenue (example: a Watauga tournament projected around 300 participants). Hartley encouraged partnership with the county and noted local players are willing to volunteer labor to support improvements.

Charles Stafford (Fleetwood) addressed concerns raised about his involvement with Indivisible Ashe County (IAC), stating his work is aimed at building a stronger

community. Stafford listed community efforts he's involved in: Down Home Ashe County, Tennis for Ashe County, NC Forward Party, and local affordable housing initiatives. He described IAC as a national movement with a local chapter composed of local neighbors and taxpayers. He emphasized IAC's guiding principle: non-violence, rejection of intimidation/violence, and training in de-escalation. He drew a distinction between protesting national issues and working together locally, noting Ashe County government is not the federal government. He referenced democratic traditions of peaceful assembly and contrasted that with groups involved in January 6, stating that is a line IAC does not cross.

VI. Presentations

[PRES 26-44](#) 9:04 AM - Nick Farmerie, Assistant County Manager & Community Development Director - Recognition of Ashe County Junior Fire Department & Rescue Squad Volunteers

Nick led a special recognition for Ashe County Junior Fire Department and Rescue Squad volunteers.

Josh Steelman (Fire Marshal) and Ernie Eldreth (Deputy Fire Marshal) were introduced as helping present certifications. Volunteers were called in alphabetical order by department, with names, years of service, and training hours. Each volunteer was invited to come forward to receive a certificate and challenge coin, then line up in front of the commissioners for photos; families were encouraged to take pictures.

Ashe County Rescue Squad honorees: Mason Brown: 2 years; 162 training hours. Christopher Klein: 3 years; 280 training hours. Wyatt Klein: 3 years; 280 training hours and Noah Osborne: 4 years; 30 training hours.

Volunteer fire/rescue department honorees: Glendale Springs Volunteer Fire Department: Austin Cox: 1 year; 8 training hours. Ava Cox: 5 years; 180 training hours. Leia Cox: 5 years; 180 training hours. Lansing Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department: Wesley Blevins: 3 years; 150 volunteer training hours. Laurel Springs Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department: Walker Johnson: 9 months; 15 training hours. New River Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department: Henry Hernandez: 1 year; 45 volunteer training hours. Brent Jenkins: 1 year; 51 volunteer training hours. Willow Wood: 1 year; 39 volunteer training hours. Pond Mountain Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department: Hayden Mahala: 1 year; 36 volunteer training hours. Todd Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department: Hannah Ring: 2 years; 72 volunteer training hours. Warrensville Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department: Jacob Dollar: 9 months; 49 volunteer training hours. Alexis Eldreth: 1 year; 73 volunteer training hours; also volunteered 250+ hours prior to joining, helping with supply distribution. Kayla Eldreth: 1 year; 54 volunteer training hours; also volunteered ~250 hours during Hurricane Helene assisting with multiple tasks. Kristen Shumate: 2 years; 84 volunteer training hours; volunteered 250+ hours during Hurricane Helene providing leadership and organizing supply distribution. West Jefferson Volunteer Fire Department: Ellie Osborne: 1 year; 39 volunteer training hours. Levi Walters: 3 months; 8 volunteer training hours. Appreciation was expressed for the volunteers' service and the time invested in supporting the community. Commissioners came around and shook hands; additional congratulations and "well done" comments were shared.

No Action Taken

[PRES 26-45](#) 9:14 AM - Nick Farmerie, Assistant County Manager & Community Development Director - Updated GE Aerospace Incentive Agreement

Attachments: [4-6-2026 Project Pandora A Company Incentive Agreement](#)

Nick presented several minor language updates to the GE Aerospace Incentive Agreement, prompting the group to revisit and approve the revised version. Because the contract language had changed since the version announced a few months earlier, the updated agreement must also be taken back to the Board of West Jefferson for their approval. The most notable adjustments included redefining "abandonment" to 20% for jobs and 50% for capital investment, as well as shortening the indemnification period from two years to one. Nick explained that abandonment represents the company's obligation threshold before the county begins paying incentives. He also noted that the 2013 GE agreement set both abandonment thresholds at 20%, making the new terms more favorable to the county.

Other elements of the agreement remained unchanged, including the incentive schedule and the overall incentive amounts and structure. The group characterized the updates as minor definition clarifications rather than substantive shifts. During discussion, the chair emphasized how fortunate the community is to have GE as a long-standing employer and manufacturing presence. A motion to approve the updated agreement was made by Commissioner Greene and seconded by Commissioner Eldreth, with no questions raised. The group voted in favor, and the chair thanked Nick for his work. The next step is to present the revised agreement to the Board of West Jefferson for their approval.

Approved

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

[PRES 26-46](#) 9:20 AM - Mack Powers, Mayor of Lansing - Lansing Update & Upcoming Budget Request 2026-2027

Mayor Mac Powers thanked the board for its continued support following Hurricane Helene and shared that Lansing's recovery is progressing well. Several infrastructure projects that were already underway before the storm have continued with minimal disruption, including major upgrades to the town's water and sewer plant funded by a pre-Helene grant. FEMA assistance is helping repair park facilities and restore damaged stream banks, with restoration planned from the center of town down to the sewer plant to improve long-term resilience. The mayor explained that the stream work is not intended to widen or deepen the creek but to stabilize banks and guide water flow more effectively, reducing the risk of overtopping. Additional resilience measures include raising the wastewater treatment plant to the elevation of Teaberry Road and constructing a second water tank on the east side of the creek to strengthen system redundancy and fire protection.

Powers also highlighted Lansing's growing role as a countywide asset, noting that trail use, the dog park, and local businesses continue to draw visitors from across Ashe County. The town is working to expand its outdoor recreation offerings, including adding roughly a mile of new trail along Big Horse Creek and incorporating more than 50 acres of donated land into the existing park. A major need is a new bridge connecting the west-side railroad bed to the campground, which would create continuous trail loops and link current parkland to future northern expansions. Because Parks and Recreation Trust Fund grants require a dollar-for-dollar match, the mayor requested that the county allocate \$50,000 to strengthen Lansing's application and help launch the project. Estimated costs for the bridge and related engineering range from \$600,000 to \$700,000, with the broader effort potentially reaching \$1 million. The county acknowledged the request as part of its ongoing budget discussions, and board members expressed interest in visiting Lansing for a site walk to better understand the proposed improvements.

No Action Taken

[PRES 26-47](#) 9:30 AM - Nick Farmerie, Assistant County Manager & Community Development Director - Ashe County EMS Base Prefinal Agreement

Attachments: [4-6-2026 Agreement for Engineering Services Ashe County EMS Base](#)

Nick presented a pre-final agreement outlining all phases of developing a new county EMS base, from site selection through design, construction documents, and bidding. The projected schedule targets bidding in August 2027 and construction beginning in October 2027, with staff returning to the board at key milestones for scope and vision approvals. McGill Associates, the county's on-call engineering firm, will lead the work alongside Moseley Architects, bringing extensive experience in Western North Carolina, mountainous site design, and prior Ashe County projects.

Only the site selection phase is being priced now, at \$100,000, funded through the current fiscal year's EMS tax revenue with no new appropriation. Once a site is chosen, staff expects to amend the contract to include full design services and present a project budget ordinance. Construction management is not included in the current agreement but could be added later and awarded with the construction contract.

The board approved the EMS base agreement with a motion from Commissioner Greene, seconded by Commissioner Killen and also discussed long-term service delivery. Wes voiced concerns about the 2028 Highway 88 West straightening project and prompted a proposal for an EMS substation in Warrensville, especially with the middle school property expected to revert to county ownership in 2028. The board voted to add a Warrensville substation as a high-priority item in the capital improvement plan and directed staff to evaluate the concept and obtain cost estimates.

Approved

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

[PRES 26-49](#) 9:40 AM - Drew Plettner, Regional Planner - Jefferson- Streetscape Encroachment

Attachments: [4-6-2026 Encroachment Agreement Town of Jefferson Streetscape Improvements](#)

Drew Plettner of the High Country Council of Governments presented the Jefferson Streetscape Project on behalf of the Town of Jefferson, noting that the plan has been in development for several years with High Country's support. Some improvements will occur on county property near the Ashe County Museum, and commissioners reviewed updated renderings that were well-received. The project is nearly ready to go out to bid but requires an encroachment agreement with the county. Design clarifications included confirmation that existing monuments will remain and be protected, the "brown area" represents brick pavers, and the wheelchair ramp will be located on the east side.

The total project cost is approximately \$1.077 million, funded through three grants, Town of Jefferson contributions, and an additional \$100,000 state allocation. Commissioners expressed appreciation for ARC, the Department of Commerce, and other funders supporting Ashe County. With no further questions, a motion to approve was made by Commissioner Eldreth, seconded by Commissioner Killen, and passed by all. Drew thanked the board, and commissioners thanked him in return.

Approved

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

PRES 26-51 9:47 AM - Down Home NC - Resolution on Federal and State Budget Impacts

Attachments: [4-6-2026 Down Home NC Resolution Requiring Transparency on Federal and State Budget Impacts](#)

Patty Miller, a member Of Down Home NC, introduced herself as an Ashe County native with deep family roots. Members of Down Home NC were also present and presented a proposed resolution for the Board of Commissioners to adopt. The resolution cited potential budget uncertainty driven by federal actions (including H.R. 1) and state-level fiscal/tax policy changes that could reduce revenues and pressure county services starting July 1. The stated goal was to ensure residents receive clear, factual information about where funding changes originate, how local budgets are affected, and how county leaders plan to respond. What the resolution asked the county to do: "Maintain publicly available information (including on the county website) explaining major federal/state funding changes affecting Ashe County. Identify which programs/services may experience fiscal pressure and distinguish whether changes are federal, state, or local. Provide plain-language summaries and outline strategies to maintain essential services where feasible. Hold at least one public hearing during the current budget process focused on known/anticipated funding impacts and collecting input/testimony from residents, service providers, educators, healthcare workers, and other stakeholders. Publish a summary report within 30 days describing key funding risks, testimony themes, potential impacts on residents/services, and quantified impacts (SNAP/WIC risk counts, school nutrition impacts, Medicaid service disruptions, public school funding/service effects, and infrastructure/service delivery impacts). Document real-life impacts residents are experiencing due to budget uncertainty and planned county actions, including intergovernmental advocacy. Transmit the resolution to the county's state/federal legislative delegations and request increased transparency on downstream local impacts. Publish an official statement opposing federal cuts resulting from H.R. 1 passed by the 119th U.S. Congress. Coordinate with other NC counties to amplify advocacy efforts. Dolly Reeves with Down Home NC asked audience members who support the resolution to briefly stand. Dolly emphasized two priorities: naming specifically where cuts are coming from and the intergovernmental advocacy components." Patty argued residents need to understand what could be cut locally (e.g., teachers' aides, law enforcement retention) and called on elected leaders to advocate upward for adequate funding. Dolly noted that beyond fully funding essential services, additional budget capacity enables community amenities (tennis courts, green spaces, pools) and county-funded hurricane relief. Chairman McNeill agreed with the need for transparency and plain-language explanation, and noted local governments dislike unfunded mandates and service cuts. He also cited a known state mandate: a 2.5% required increase in the county contribution to fund the state health plan, estimated at about \$350,000 for Ashe County. Commissioners stated the county already exceeds the minimum public-hearing requirement (two hearings per month with only one being required) to increase accessibility. Commissioners said many impacts tied to H.R. 1 remain unclear and may be premature to formalize in a resolution; they anticipated limited immediate impacts this year, with DSS primarily facing staffing/compliance implications. Chairman McNeill and others expressed discomfort with the resolution's advocacy language as "pointed/aggressive," citing concern about straining relationships with state and federal partners. Chairman McNeill stated he had already reached out to the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) to request a staff member present locally on what H.R. 1 means for Ashe County/WNC, including effective dates and likely impacts. He stated that the National Association of Counties (NACo) is

advocating for potential waivers/delays/carve-outs for North Carolina and other states because NC counties administer certain federal programs (unlike many states where the state administers them).

When asked directly whether they would sign the resolution, Chairman McNeill said he personally was not comfortable doing so; Commissioner Green and others echoed they could not support it without clearer facts/figures from the state. Commissioners pledged to work on getting clearer information to the public and to pursue outside resources (NCACC) to help explain the situation. Patty Miller asked where budget meeting/hearing notices are published; commissioners/staff said notices are shared via cameras/online, the county website, Ashe Post & Times newspaper, radio, and an email list. Staff encouraged attendance at the first budget public hearing before budget sessions begin; exact dates were not yet set. Attendees were invited to add their emails to a mailing list to receive public notices at the same time commissioners receive them.

No Action Taken

GENERAL SESSION

VII. Commissioner Comments

VIII. Announcements

IX. Executive Session

Vice Chairman Powers made the motion to enter into Executive Session at 9:45 AM. Commissioner Eldreth seconded the motion. All in favor.

Vice Chairman Powers made the motion to return from Executive Session at 11:14 AM. Commissioner Eldreth seconded the motion. All in favor.

Approved

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

[ES 26-8](#)

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

X. Adjournment

Vice Chairman Powers made the motion to adjourn the April 6th, 2026 Regular Session meeting at 11:14 AM. Commissioner Eldreth seconded the motion. All in favor.

Approved

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