

Ashe County

150 Government Circle
Jefferson, NC 28640



Meeting Minutes - Draft

Monday, January 5, 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**

Present: 4 - Vice Chairman Jerry D. Powers, Commissioner Mike Eldreth, Commissioner Russell Killen and Commissioner Wes Greene

Absent: 1 - Chairperson Todd McNeill

II. Pledge of Allegiance/Opening Prayer

Commissioner Killen led the Pledge of Allegiance and Commissioner Greene 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.

Approved

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

[MIN 25-34](#) December 15th, 2025 Regular Session Minutes

Attachments: [1-5-2026 December 15th, 2025 Regular Session Minutes](#)

[MIN 25-35](#) December 15th, 2025 Executive Session Minutes

[MISC 25-38](#) Reinstatement of Annual Leave Accrual, Sick Leave Balance, and Prior Longevity Step for Jennifer DeSpain

Attachments: [1-5-2026 Employment History for Jennifer DeSpain](#)

IV. Adoption of Agenda

With the removal of Presentation 25-174 (Sheriff Howell) at the Sheriff's request, Commissioner Killen made the motion to adopt the Agenda. Commissioner Greene seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Adopted

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

V. Public Comment**VI. Presentations**

[PRES 25-171](#) 9:05 AM - PUBLIC HEARING - Nick Farmerie, Community Development Director & Assistant County Manager - Shell Building Project Ordinance (Update)

Attachments: [1-5-2026 Public Hearing Notice for Expendature of Local Funds for Economic Development](#)

A Public Hearing was held on the proposed 15,000 sq. ft. shell building for the industrial park, expandable to 30,000 sq. ft. Nick spoke stating that the shell building will include utilities, landscaping, parking, and the building exterior, but not interior finishes, allowing flexibility for future tenants. Project location is site three, southeast property of the industrial park. Total project budget: \$4,128,918; construction contract not to exceed \$3,963,418. Funding details include \$2.5 million from Golden Leaf (recently increased), \$870,000 from REDLG funds (a zero percent, ten-year loan), capital reserve appropriations, and \$525,000 from the general fund balance. Withers Ravenel, the engineering firm, designed the building and solicited bids; Vannoy Construction is the lowest responsive (and only) bidder. Construction expected to complete by fall 2026. Target lot is the second largest in the park, estimated at 22 acres, with the building positioned on a highly visible site with good views. Commissioner Eldreth expressed reservations about committing funds without certainty of tenant interest, noting local challenges such as workforce shortages, lack of daycare, and affordable housing. Charles Stafford a citizen from the Fleetwood area asked a couple of questions in regard to the cost to complete the structure and ownership of the structure, if a company showed interest. Nick stated that ownership remains flexible and depends on negotiations between the company and the county. The county retains the option to continue owning and leasing the land and building, or to sell it outright if they choose. Future ownership and completion would involve various factors such as grant requirements and building costs, which are currently not fully known. No other citizens in attendance offered comment. Commissioners questioned advertisement of the industrial space. Nick stated that marketing can begin immediately after project approval, utilizing platforms like Zoom Prospector to attract interest from expanding or relocating companies statewide. Most project requests require an existing building; having a shell is seen as a competitive advantage. Workforce availability remains a concern for attracting industry, with commissioners noting that the local labor pool is small and many new residents are retirees. With no other comments being offered Commissioner Killen made the motion to close the public hearing at 9:12 am. Commissioner Greene seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval. Nick stated that two motions are required if the project is to be authorized. First motion, made by Commissioner Greene to update the existing project ordinance to increase revenues and expenditures to \$4,128,918 for the Shell building project. Commissioner Killen seconded the motion to approve the updated ordinance; all voted in favor. Second motion was made by Commissioner Killen to authorize staff to enter into a construction contract with Venoy Construction, not to exceed \$3,963,418. It was clarified that Venoy Construction was the only bidder, despite the project being advertised twice. Commissioner Greene seconded the motion to authorize the contract; all voted in favor.

Approved

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

[PRES
25-172](#)

9:10 AM - PUBLIC HEARING - Nick Farmerie, Community Development Director & Assistant County Manager - Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Relief Funds

Attachments: [1-5-2026 Public Hearing Notice for CDBG-DR](#)

A Public Hearing was held today as a requirement before applying for any CDBGDR (Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery) grant funding. Commissioner Killen made the motion to open the Public Hearing. Commissioner Greene seconded the

motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval. Nick stated that once an application is submitted, another public hearing will be needed, making this the initial requirement for accessing these funds. Economic development and infrastructure funding is anticipated to be released in the spring. Funding for affordable and multi-family housing is expected to become available in the summer or fall. Money from Commerce is expected soon, but most program rules have not been made yet, except for the Renew NC single family housing program. There are currently no specific requests; this is a procedural step to ensure the county is prepared to apply for future funding opportunities. No citizens in attendance offered comment on the CDBGDR (Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery) grant funding. No action taken today. Commissioner Greene made the motion to close the Public Hearing. Commissioner Killen seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

No Action Taken

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

PRES
25-173

9:15 AM - Sheriff Phil Howell & Sergeant Brian Blanco - Purchase of L.E.A.D. Training Material (Quotes) and Budget Amendment

Attachments: [1-5-2026 Sheriff Agenda Request](#)

At the request of Sheriff Howell his item was removed from today's agenda.

PRES
25-174

9:20 AM - Jennifer Richardson, Ashe County Volunteer Coordinator - Approval for the 2026 Volunteer Awards Program & Governor's Award Luncheon

Jennifer requested permission to host the 41st Annual Ashe County Volunteer Awards at Ashe County High School. Ceremony request letter, awards timeline, nomination form, and sample invitation letter were provided in the meeting packet. Nominations will be accepted from January through February, with the nominating board determining winners afterwards. Deadline for nominations is February 13th. Nomination forms will be distributed via mail, available online, and at Jennifer's office. Additional promotion will occur through the Happy Times show, local newsletters, the chamber e-news, Ashe Baptist Association newsletter, and the community calendar. Suggestion made to leave nomination forms at the Public Library due to high foot traffic. Jennifer also stated that Governor Josh Stein has opened nominations for the 2026 Governor's Volunteer Service Awards. The submission deadline is Friday, February 27th. With approval, Jennifer will also begin preparations for the Governor's Award luncheon, traditionally held the third Monday in May following the commissioner's meeting. Commissioner Greene made the motion for approval to move forward with the 41st Annual Ashe County Volunteer Awards and the 2026 Governor's Volunteer Service Awards.. Commissioner Killen seconded the motion. The motion pass with unanimous approval.

Approved

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

PRES
25-176

9:30 AM - Andrew Downs, New River Conservancy Executive Director - Great Trails State Grant Resolution

Attachments: [1-5-2026 Resolution Ashe County & NRC -Great Trails State Program Grant North Fork River Access](#)

Andrew stated that the New River Conservancy applied to the Great Trails State Grant Program to acquire the Deep Ford property, ultimately receiving a \$130,000 grant. An additional \$70,000 in donations was used to match the grant for a total project cost of nearly \$200,000. During the development of the grant contract, an anonymous donor covered the grant amount to expedite the project, with the understanding that recouped funds would be directed to future projects. The state has since required Ashe County to be included as a co-applicant on the grant contract, since the county will receive the land purchased through the grant. Andrew stated that project costs included survey work, environmental assessment, title work, and the property acquisition itself. Initial infrastructure plans include installing a sign or kiosk; further developments such as a pavilion will be considered in partnership with the county. Site planning for parking and access is ongoing. There is potential for about 20 car spaces at the current pull off, and possible development of better access down to the bottom area. The property fronts Deep Ford Road for nearly the length of the pull off. Most of the gravel area is included, except for a small portion at one end. Road and parking design considerations will involve working with someone experienced in road construction. The group discussed the resolution to add Ashe County as a co-applicant for the grant. Commissioner Greene made the motion to approve the resolution. Commissioner Eldreth seconded the motion. The resolution was unanimously approved.

Approved

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

PRES
25-175

9:35 AM - Nick Farmerie, Community Development Director & Assistant County Manager - Ambulance Base Request for Qualifications

Attachments: [1-5-2026 Ambulance Base RFQ](#)

Nick stated that the main agenda item was the RFQ (Request for Qualifications) to select a firm for reviewing site feasibility for a new ambulance base. Two county-owned sites were identified for initial assessment: below the county courthouse and on the backside of the food pantry. The proposed facility will be between 15,000 and 20,000 square feet, with final size depending on programming needs. The site review will address factors such as size, layout, traffic access, topography, utilities, environmental and zoning requirements, safety and security, easements, encumbrances, stormwater management, and timeline risks. The intent is to have the same selected firm carry through into the design process to expedite the project. The target is to begin interior design of the base by September. The county is not strictly limited to the two initially identified properties. Other properties can be considered if the initial sites prove unsuitable or if new opportunities arise. If additional properties are introduced later, some processes may need to be revisited or re-advertised, but efforts will be made to include flexibility in the RFQ to streamline adding new sites. The facility is not restricted to EMS use and could host multiple functions. The design committee will assess and advise on space needs and possible functions. There is consensus to keep options open for both site and building usage to maximize return on investment and community utility. No cost estimates for the feasibility study are available at this stage; these will be determined after the most qualified firm is selected through the RFQ process. Expenditure will only occur after approval of the chosen firm's contract and cost proposal. The process is governed by state law, requiring selection based on qualifications before negotiating cost. There was agreement to add a clause in the RFQ allowing for the possibility of reviewing additional properties beyond the original two.

Commissioner Greene made the motion to approve the RFQ to include the flexibility, ensuring the process is not limited to just the identified sites. Commissioner Killen seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved

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

GENERAL SESSION

A short recess was taken and the Board reconvened at 9:45 am on the 2nd floor of the Ashe County Courthouse in the conference room behind the Register of Deeds office. This too was open to the public. The purpose was to meet with Vannoy Construction to look at the design (blueprints) of the Environmental Services Building and the early budget numbers for the project. Mckenzi Willson and Kris Little with Vannoy Construction were present along with Scott Hurley, Director of Environmental Services. The meeting focused on presenting the latest design and cost estimates for a new County Environmental Services building, nearing 95-100% design completion. No approval for expenditure was sought; the session aimed to give all commissioners the first comprehensive look at the plans and budgets before a formal request for funds. The landfill project bid is expected to go out soon, with both projects to be packaged together for financing through the LGC.

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

Commissioner Killen made the motion to adjourn today's meeting at 10:19 am. Commissioner Eldreth seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved

For: 4 - 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.