

# Ashe County

150 Government Circle  
Jefferson, NC 28640



## Meeting Minutes - Draft

Wednesday, January 23, 2019

8:00 AM

Special Meeting with Senator Ballard & Representative Russell

Second Floor Conference Room

### County Commission

*Chairperson Todd McNeill*  
*Vice Chair William Sands*  
*Commissioner Larry Rhodes*  
*Commissioner Paula Perry*  
*Commissioner Larry Dix*

## I. 8:00 AM - Meeting Called to Order at the Ashe County Courthouse

*Chairman McNeill called the Special Meeting of the Ashe County Board of Commissioners to order in the second floor conference room at the Ashe County Courthouse.*

**Present:** 5 - Commissioner Todd McNeill, Commissioner William Sands, Commissioner Larry Rhodes, Commissioner Paula Perry and Commissioner Larry Dix

## II. Pledge of Allegiance/Opening Prayer

*Commissioner Dix led the Pledge of Allegiance and Vice Chairman Sands offered the opening prayer.*

## III. Meeting with Senator Ballard and Representative Russell

*The purpose of the Special Meeting was to discuss issues of concern in Ashe County with the Ashe County Board of Commissioners, Senator Ballard, and Representative Russell.*

*Board Members Present: Chairman McNeill, Vice Chairman Sands, Commissioner Dix, and Commissioner Perry. Board members absent: Commissioner Rhodes*

*Others Present: Senator Deanna Ballard and Representative Ray Russell*

*The floor was opened for questions and concerns from the commissioners.*

*Commissioner Dix asked Senator Ballard which committees she is currently serving on. Senator Ballard answered that she serves on the following committees: co chair of Education and Higher Education Policy and Appropriations; Healthcare; Transportation, and the Rules Committee.*

*Vice Chairman Sands stated concern that in Ashe County when a sheriff leaves office before their term has ended, General Statute mandates that the county commissioners must appoint a replacement. In other counties, the party of the departing sheriff recommends a replacement for the position. Representative Russell stated that a resolution needs to be approved by the commissioners supporting legislation to change the General Statute requirement in Ashe County.*

*Vice Chairman Sands also spoke regarding the amount of time that employees spend answering requests for public records. In working for the Sheriff's Office on cases, and with a court order, some organizations have the ability to charge for a request for records. He would like for counties to be able to charge for the time spent by employees to provide the requested information. Representative Russell stated that there is a law allowing counties to recoup some of the associated expenses. Senator Ballard stated that time spent by employees on requests for public records needs to be tracked and submitted to her.*

*Commissioner Perry spoke regarding citizen's concerns with school delays and closings due to weather. Senator Ballard addressed the difficulties faced by the school superintendent with road conditions in rural counties. She also updated the commissioners regarding ongoing legislation with school calendars.*

*Commissioner Perry explained issues and concerns surrounding difficulties for cattle*

farmers. She explained that livestock has to be transported across the state line to markets which means a loss of weight for livestock and a loss of revenue for our farmers. Commissioner Perry stated that a scale to weigh livestock is needed in Ashe County. Chairman McNeill added that the cattle industry is a \$12 million industry in Ashe County. The County and Cooperative Extension are working on grants to help with funding for a facility to be built here in Ashe County. The Cattle Association is interested in having a multi-use facility built in Ashe County to alleviate the problems with cattle transport. In addition, the Animal Control Department has no place to hold large animals that they seize. Commissioner Dix stated that he would be grateful for anything that can be done to help Ashe County farmers including grants for a facility to be built in the County. Commissioner Dix will reach out to Senator Ballard and Representative Russell regarding letters of support for grants from the Agricultural Trust Fund and the Golden Leaf Fund. Senator Ballard stated that it is a priority to find a location for a facility. Representative Russell stated that a driving force is needed to work behind the scenes and the community needs to come together and work for this to happen.

Representative Russell spoke regarding a flexible school calendar. People who oppose this include the Chamber of Commerce, summer camp programs, the tourism industry, and anyone that would be negatively affected by a shrinking summer. Two bills passed in the House last year on the flexible calendar. If Ashe County wants to get behind a flexible school calendar, a resolution is needed showing support. He added that Watauga County just passed a resolution in favor of flexible school calendars.

Interim County Manager Adam Stumb stated that the federal government shutdown has impacted the USDA construction loan for the fire training facility. There is an interim loan with the bank and they cannot pay the contractor without approval by the USDA.

Due to the absence of Commissioner Rhodes for a doctor's appointment, Interim County Manager Adam Stumb mentioned items of concern for Commissioner Rhodes. He stated the importance of transportation funding thanking our state representatives for the Highway 221 widening project and airport improvement funding projects. Commissioner Rhodes believes it is important to work with Watauga County in partnership regarding economic development projects in the Deep Gap area. Representative Russell stated that the Highway 221 project and available land opportunities gives Ashe County and Watauga County the opportunity to work together on economic development projects.

Commissioner Dix spoke about the importance for development of a strategic plan for economic development. Ashe County has one of the best fiber optic networks in the State. This would be a good area to work with Watauga County on. Interim County Manager Adam Stumb spoke regarding tourism and the work that is being completed on the Northern Peaks Trail that will run from Boone to downtown West Jefferson.

Senator Ballard asked for updates on Christmas tree farmers and if veterans' needs are being met in Ashe County.

Commissioner Dix stated appreciation that the deficit was reduced by \$2 billion. He also spoke of the importance of small business, requesting help for small businesses in Ashe County. Senator Ballard told the commissioners that there are inconsistencies in paperwork processes across the State. She is providing leadership to the Department of Revenue through her involvement on the Rules Committee. Senator Ballard is providing oversight and engaging with different departments in an attempt to reduce burdens and barriers for small businesses.

Chairman McNeill stated the importance of Ashe Memorial Hospital to our community and

*the impact it would have if we lost the hospital. Senator Ballard stated that a hospital is the lifeline for rural counties and is a priority to her. Representative Russell spoke about positive discussion regarding some type of Medicaid expansion being passed this year which would be of great assistance to small hospitals. He also spoke of the many needs surrounding psychiatric care services.*

*Senator Ballard questioned school safety in Ashe County. Chairman McNeill stated that the Ashe County School Board guaranteed that when built, the new Ashe County Middle School will have the latest technology for safety. Ashe County already has a school resource officer in each school.*

*Cooperative Extension Director Travis Birdsell provided an update on the proposed Agricultural Center which is currently in the planning and feasibility stage. Future plans are to work with the High Country Council of Governments on grants, funding, and a possible location. The Agricultural Center would be a shared-use facility as a livestock handling facility. Long range plans include meeting space, small business incubators, and a commercial kitchen at the same location.*

#### **IV. Adjournment**

*Vice Chairman Sands made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:38 a.m. Commissioner Dix seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.*

**Approved**

**For:** 4 - Commissioner McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Perry and  
Commissioner Dix

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