

# MEETING MINUTES

WATAUGA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Tuesday, December 2, 2025

The Watauga County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Tuesday, December 2, 2025, at 5:30 p.m. in the Commissioners' Board Room located in the Watauga County Administration Building in Boone, North Carolina.

## **1. CALL REGULAR MEETING TO ORDER**

Chairman Eggers called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. The following were present:

PRESENT:                Braxton Eggers, Chairman  
                              Tim Hodges, Commissioner  
                              Ronnie Marsh, Commissioner  
                              Deron Geouque, County Manager  
                              Katie Hancock, Clerk to the Board

*[Clerk's Note: Vice-Chairman Castle, Commissioner Greene, and County Attorney Miller were unable to attend due to a funeral.]*

Commissioner Marsh offered the prayer and Chairman Eggers led the Pledge of Allegiance.

## **2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Chairman Eggers presented the November 18, 2025, regular and closed session minutes.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the November 18, 2025, regular meeting minutes as presented.

VOTE: Aye – 3 (Eggers, Hodges, Marsh)  
       Nay – 0  
       Absent – 2 (Castle, Greene)

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the November 18, 2025, closed session minutes as presented.

VOTE: Aye – 3 (Eggers, Hodges, Marsh)  
       Nay – 0  
       Absent – 2 (Castle, Greene)

### **3. BOARD ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS**

#### ***A. Election of Officers***

County Manager Geouque called for nominations for Chairman.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to nominate Commissioner Eggers as Chairman of the Watauga County Board of Commissioners.

**VOTE:** Aye – 3 (Eggers, Hodges, Marsh)  
Nay – 0  
Absent – 2 (Castle, Greene)

The meeting was then turned over to Chairman Eggers.

Chairman Eggers called for nominations for Vice-Chairman.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Chairman Eggers, moved to nominate Commissioner Castle as Vice-Chairman of the Watauga County Board of Commissioners.

**VOTE:** Aye – 3 (Eggers, Hodges, Marsh)  
Nay – 0  
Absent – 2 (Castle, Greene)

#### ***B. Staff Appointments***

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to reappoint the following:

- Deron Geouque as County Manager
- Katie Hancock as Clerk to the Board
- Monica Harrison and Macy Chirco as Substitute Clerks to the Board
- Miller & Johnson, PLLC, as legal counsel for Watauga County
- Reeves diVenere Wright as legal counsel for the Watauga County Department of Social Services

**VOTE:** Aye – 3 (Eggers, Hodges, Marsh)  
Nay – 0  
Absent – 2 (Castle, Greene)

### ***C. Fidelity Bonds***

The following individual fidelity bonds were presented for approval:

| <u>Position</u>                            | <u>Bond Amount</u> | <u>Statutory Requirement</u>  |
|--|--------------------|---|
| Finance Director                           | \$1,000,000        | Amount equal to 10% of the annual budgeted funds, up to \$1,000,000 (G.S. § 159-29)                         |
| Deputy Finance Director/<br>County Manager | \$50,000           |   |
| Tax Collector                              | \$50,000           | Amount considered reasonable by the Board of County Commissioners (G.S. § 105-349 (c))                      |
| Register of Deeds                          | \$50,000           | At least \$10,000, but no more than \$50,000 (G.S. § 161-4)   |
| Sheriff                                    | \$25,000           | Amount considered reasonable by the Board of County Commissioners, but no more than \$25,000 (G.S. § 162-8) |

Chairman Eggers, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to approve the individual fidelity bonds as presented.

**VOTE:** Aye – 3 (Eggers, Hodges, Marsh)  
Nay – 0  
Absent – 2 (Castle, Greene)

### ***D. Commissioner Appointments to Boards & Commissions***

Chairman Eggers requested that the commissioners review the last year's list (see below) of Commissioner Appointments to Boards & Commissions and advise him of any requested changes. No changes were requested.

| BOARD/COMMISSION   | MEMBER              |
|--|---------------------|
| Appalachian District Health Department   | Castle              |
| Appalachian Theatre Board of Trustees Ex-Officio Member  | Greene              |
| AppalCART Authority  | Marsh               |
| Blue Ridge Resource Conservation & Development Area  | Eggers              |
| Children's Council   | Greene              |
| Child Protection Team  | Greene              |
| Cooperative Extension Advisory Leadership Board  | Castle              |
| Economic Development Commission  | Hodges              |
| Educational Planning Committee (2 appointees)  | Eggers & Castle     |
| EMS Advisory Committee   | Marsh               |
| High Country Council of Governments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Executive Board</li> <li>Rural Transportation Advisory Committee</li> </ul> | Eggers              |
| Juvenile Crime Prevention Council (JCPC)   | Marsh               |
| Humane Society   | Castle              |
| Library Board  | Greene              |
| Motor Vehicle Valuation Review Committee   | BCC                 |
| New River Service Authority Board  | Marsh               |
| Northwest Regional Housing Authority (five-year term expires 12/13/2029)   | Pat Vines           |
| POA Advisory Committee (Home & Community Care Block Grant)   | Eggers              |
| Sheriff's Office Liaison   | Eggers & Marsh      |
| Vaya Regional Board (Region 3)   | Eggers & Castle     |
| Social Services Advisory Board   | Hodges              |
| Watauga County Arts Council (added February 2020)  | Greene              |
| Watauga County Fire Commission   | Marsh               |
| Watauga County Personnel Advisory Committee  | Chair or Vice-Chair |
| Watauga County Recreation Commission   | Eggers & Castle     |
| Watauga Medical Center Board of Trustees   | Castle              |
| W.A.M.Y. Community Action  | Hodges              |
| Watauga Opportunities, Inc.  | Hodges              |
| Workforce Development Board  | Chairman            |

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to approve the appointments as presented.

**VOTE:** Aye – 3 (Eggers, Hodges, Marsh)  
Nay – 0  
Absent – 2 (Castle, Greene)

#### ***E. Regular Meeting Schedule***

Chairman Eggers stated that the Board of Commissioners' regular meetings are currently scheduled for the first and third Tuesdays of each month at 5:30 p.m.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to retain the regular meeting schedule for the Watauga County Board of Commissioners, set for the first and third Tuesdays of each month at 5:30 p.m.

**VOTE:** Aye – 3 (Eggers, Hodges, Marsh)  
Nay – 0  
Absent – 2 (Castle, Greene)

#### **4. APPROVAL OF DECEMBER 2, 2025, AGENDA**

Chairman Eggers called for additions or corrections to the December 2, 2025, agenda.

There were none.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to approve the December 2, 2025, agenda as presented.

**VOTE:** Aye – 3 (Eggers, Hodges, Marsh)  
Nay – 0  
Absent – 2 (Castle, Greene)

#### **5. PUBLIC COMMENT**

- **Emma Hyatt**, spoke regarding the ordinance passed at the last meeting that criminalizes panhandling. She stated that while safety is important, the ordinance may do more harm than good. Ms. Hyatt noted that panhandling is often the result of circumstances beyond an individual's control and can make it more difficult for those experiencing homelessness to obtain employment. She also mentioned that panhandling is protected under the First Amendment. Ms. Hyatt encouraged the Board to consider facts and personal stories that might lead to reconsideration of the ordinance.
- **Alana Baird**, a resident of the Meat Camp District, spoke regarding attorney-client matters related to an election lawsuit that were discussed in closed session. She questioned why the matter was addressed behind closed doors rather than in a regular meeting and noted that another resident had called without receiving an answer. Ms. Baird expressed hope that the Board is considering not funding the lawsuit.

#### **6. 2025 GOVERNOR'S VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARD PRESENTATION**

Rebecca Hall, Executive Director of the High Country United Way, presented the 2025 North Carolina Governor's Volunteer Service Awards. The 2025 award recipients are Kay

Borkowski, Martha Gentry, Christy McKinney, Joyce Creed, Loyce Warren, and George Bartholomew.

Ms. Hall noted that the Governor's Volunteer Service Award recognizes individuals and groups who demonstrate outstanding volunteer service and make a significant contribution to their community. Each awardee was highlighted with a brief summary of their nomination.

The presentation was for informational purposes only; no action was required from the Board.

## **7. MIDDLE FORK GREENWAY SECTION 3A – STREAM RESTORATION BID RECOMMENDATION**

Carrie Caviness of Interface Environmental Consulting, LLC presented the bidding results for the Middle Fork Greenway Section 3A Stream Restoration project and recommended awarding the contract to Baker Grading & Landscaping, Inc. Seven firms submitted bids, with the three lowest as follows: Baker Grading & Landscaping – \$421,000; Wildlands Construction – \$599,728.54; North State Environmental – \$628,881.20. All bidders met licensure, insurance, and bid bond requirements.

In response to a question from Commissioner Marsh regarding the difference in the lowest bid, Ms. Caviness explained that the bids were priced per structure, taking into account material availability and the lowest price per cubic yard of dirt to move. She noted that construction will begin after the trout moratorium.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to award the bid in the amount of \$421,000 to Baker Grading & Landscaping, Inc.

**VOTE:** Aye – 3 (Eggers, Hodges, Marsh)  
Nay – 0  
Absent – 2 (Castle, Greene)

## **8. WATAUGA COUNTY NCDOT EXPRESS DESIGN REQUEST**

Jason Walker, Director of Planning and Inspections, presented the County's P9.0 prioritization project for the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). Watauga County may submit one project for Express Design. Based on guidance from High Country COG and NCDOT, the most competitive project without an Express Design is H111016 – NC 105 Bypass: widen to three lanes with 5-foot paved shoulders for bicycles.

Chairman Eggers and Commissioner Marsh noted that the planned widening of US 421 could create traffic bottlenecks on the NC 105 Bypass if it is constructed as only three lanes.

Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to recommend project H111016 for Express Design, with the preference that the design be for four lanes rather than three.

**VOTE:** Aye – 3 (Eggers, Hodges, Marsh)  
Nay – 0  
Absent – 2 (Castle, Greene)

## **9. MASTER AGREEMENT BETWEEN WATAUGA COUNTY AND THE NC DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES**

Michelle Kasey, Soil and Water Conservation, and Denny Norris, Board Chair for the Watauga County Soil and Water Conservation District, requested approval and signatures on the Master Agreement Amendment to add \$100,000 in funding for Hurricane Helene technical assistance, including support for the administration of Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) projects.

The funds will be provided in quarterly increments of \$25,000 and may be used to hire a temporary staff person. Unused funds will carry over, and an additional \$60,000 is expected next year through another amendment. County Manager Geouque noted that the position will need to be temporary and contracted.

Commissioner Hodges, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to approve the Master Agreement Amendment and authorize the hiring of a temporary employee.

**VOTE:** Aye – 3 (Eggers, Hodges, Marsh)  
Nay – 0  
Absent – 2 (Castle, Greene)

## **10. MISCELLANEOUS ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS**

### ***A. Boards and Commissions***

County Manager Geouque presented a request regarding the Watauga Economic Development Commission. The terms of Lee Rankin, Virginia Wallace, and Suzanne Livesay on the Watauga Economic Development Commission are expiring at the end of 2025. Each was appointed to a three-year term and is eligible to serve two consecutive terms.

Virginia Wallace and Suzanne Livesay expressed a willingness to serve another term. Lee Rankin is unable to serve another term.

This item was presented for first reading. The Board chose to utilize the first reading and did not proceed with the appointments at this time.

## ***Announcements***

Mr. Geouque announced the following upcoming events:

- *Watauga County Republican Women's Club Luncheon*
- *BREMCO Event* at CCC&TI on December 3, 2025
- *Watauga County GOP Christmas Dinner* on December 4, 2025
- *Watauga County Employee Christmas Luncheon*

The Watauga County Employee Christmas Luncheon will be held on Tuesday, December 9, 2025, at Dan'l Boone Inn, with two seating times at 11:30 A.M. and 1:00 P.M. County Manager Geouque added that this event provides an opportunity for the Board to visit with County employees.

It was noted for the record that a majority of the Board may be present at these events; however, no County business will be discussed at any of the gatherings.

## **11. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS**

- **Commissioner Hodges** expressed appreciation for the Governor's Volunteer Service Awards and noted there is much for which Watauga County can be proud.

## **12. RECESS**

At 6:15 p.m., Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to take a recess to await the arrival of County Attorney Miller prior to entering Closed Session.

**VOTE:** Aye – 3 (Eggers, Hodges, Marsh)  
Nay – 0  
Absent – 2 (Castle, Greene)

At 6:28 p.m., Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to reconvene the meeting.

**VOTE:** Aye – 3 (Eggers, Hodges, Marsh)  
Nay – 0  
Absent – 2 (Castle, Greene)

## **13. CLOSED SESSION**

At 6:29 p.m., Commissioner Marsh, seconded by Commissioner Hodges, moved to enter Closed Session pursuant to G.S. § 143-318.11(a)(3) to discuss matters protected by attorney-client privilege, including Case No. 5:25-cv-157, and pursuant to G.S. § 143-318.11(a)(5) to consider matters related to the acquisition of real property.

**VOTE:** Aye – 3 (Eggers, Hodges, Marsh)  
Nay – 0  
Absent – 2 (Castle, Greene)



At 7:27 p.m., Chairman Eggers, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to resume the open meeting.

**VOTE:** Aye – 3 (Eggers, Hodges, Marsh)  
Nay – 0  
Absent – 2 (Castle, Greene)

#### **14. ADJOURN**

At 7:48 PM, Chairman Eggers, seconded by Commissioner Marsh, moved to adjourn the meeting.

**VOTE:** Aye – 5  
Nay – 0

**Braxton Eggers, Chairman**

**ATTEST:** Katie Hancock, Clerk to the Board