



**MACON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
JULY 8, 2025  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

Chairman Young called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. All Board Members, County Manager Warren Cabe, Deputy Clerk Tammy Keezer, Finance Director Lori Carpenter, and County Attorney Eric Ridenour were present, as were several county employees, media, and citizens.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

(A) Mr. Cabe announced that Joe Tallent, C.L. Hensley, Blaine Swinimer, and Tom Soch from Macon County Transit recently competed in the N.C. Public Transportation Association vehicle rodeo and placed fourth in the state. He said this was a big accomplishment and he wanted to recognize these employees.

(B) Mr. Cabe informed board members about the new application process on the website which now allows applicants to apply and submit applications online instead of the previous process through NCWorks.

(C) Commissioner Shearl thanked the employees and organizations who participated in the 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration at the park this year. He said it had been five years since the event was last held in the park and the committee worked for weeks organizing the event which was successful and they plan to continue this on into the future.

**MOMENT OF SILENCE:** Chairman Young requested all in attendance rise, and a moment of silence was observed.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Led by Commissioner Shields, the pledge to the flag was recited.

**PUBLIC HEARING(S):** None

**ADDITIONS, ADJUSTMENTS TO AND APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA:** Upon a motion by Commissioner Breeden, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted unanimously to approve the agenda, as adjusted, as follows:

- Ms. Keezer requested to add the application for Janet Shuler to the Airport Authority appointments under Item 13C Airport Authority. Ms. Shuler is a current board member requesting reappointment and was out of town and unable to submit her application by the deadline. Ms. Keezer indicated that the Airport Authority recommended Ms. Shuler's reappointment at their last meeting as verified by Commissioner Shields who was present at their meeting when the recommendation was made.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD:**

1. **Súsan Carpenter** spoke about wanting a veterans memorial monument at the Nantahala Library and Community Development Club in addition to the veterans memorial marker that is currently in place. She said the cost was about \$7,100. **Matt Jackson** spoke about an alcohol referrundum to allow sales in the County. **Laura Puckett** the owner of Fire Mountain Resort spoke about an alcohol referrundum and the cost of having to build tennis courts so they could serve alcohol to be in compliance with the current law to serve alcohol, yet the courts will never be used. **Stacy Rivers** owner of Magliocca's in Scaly spoke about not being able to serve alcohol at her fine dining Italian Restaurant. **Vickie Sanders** spoke about Burningtown Iotla Fire Department stating that if her community has to change to Cowee's district they will no longer get an insurance advantage for being within a five mile radius of the fire station.

**REPORTS/PRESENTATIONS:** None

## **OLD BUSINESS:**

**DISCUSSION WITH MACON COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH** - At 6:20 p.m., Jerry Hermanson, Chairman and General Public member of the Macon County Board of Health, called to order the Special Meeting of the Macon County Board of Health and asked board members to introduce themselves. Commissioner Young stated that some of the issues being brought up tonight were at no fault of the health board and indicated that the Commissioners are receiving a lot of complaints and he feels like the Commissioners are reaching out for help from the Board of Health. He said the Commissioners are thinking that the Board of Health does not have a channel to the general public and tonight is an opportunity to meet face-to-face, talk about some of the issues, have good healthy discussion, and see how we can help each other. Commissioner Young said board members have received a lot of feedback about inter-departmental conflicts; it is overwhelming, and we are just looking at how to make Macon County better. Commissioner Shearl said he believes it is wrong to have an appointed board appointed by this elected board to have sole authority over the health department. He said he believes the County Manager and the Board of Commissioners should have control over this agency. Commissioner Shearl described having witnessed a health department employee tell a Commissioner that they were not going to tell the employee what to do, when to do it, or how to do it; and he does not ever remember a time as an employee or business owner or ever hearing an employee tell their boss that they were not going to do what they were asked to do. He said in this circumstance, the County Manager nor the Commissioner was their boss as their boss was the Health Director and the Board of Health. Commissioner Shearl said his phone has rang off the hook with internal and external problems - people in the community very upset. He said you have to pick and choose where you are going with this, but when multiple people tell you the same thing then you have issues. Commissioner Shearl said it is both internal and external people who are dissatisfied with Macon County Health Department and he fears we may lose some good quality folks if we do not step up to the plate and address this. He said he feels the Board of Commissioners currently has no authority or control over what is happening over there. Mr. Hermanson said he is concerned that Commissioners have received complaints and no one has shared those complaints with him. He said he has had one person contact him with a complaint and they were referred to him by Mr. Cabe's office. He said if the Board of Health does not know there are problems then they cannot fix them. Mr. Hermanson said they have a confusing situation in his mind because the

Board of Health comes under various regulatory limits and referenced North Carolina General Statute (NCGS) 130A regarding the powers and duties of the Board of Health. He said they want to know about problems and when they know about problems he speaks directly to the Health Director about them. Commissioner Shearl said not long ago there was a serious back log of permitting and it took the Board of Commissioners listening to complaints to get it fixed and said we talked about it several times and nothing happened until the Board of Commissioners did something about it. Mr. Hermanson said permits have been an ongoing problem for at least 20 years and he appreciates the Board of Commissioners getting involved, but it still is not where it needs to be. Commissioner Shearl said when it take five, six, seven weeks to get a permit it is very frustrating so whatever we need to do to bring in extra help we are willing to do and if we cannot get this right there is a problem. Mr. Hermanson said the current wait time is around two weeks which is a vast improvement over the last time this was discussed. Commissioner Breeden said he agreed that environmental health has been an issue but we have to address the other issues as well. He said morale across the department is very low and he does not think the structure of the department is good. Commissioner Breeden said the County is the funding arm of the health department, but we have no authority. He said he is recommending that the Board of Commissioners become the board and the Board of Health become an advisory committee. Commissioner Breeden said the Board of Health members do not know about the issues because the health department policies are made so they do not know about the issues as complaints go to the Health Director. He said it is difficult for the Commissioners to take all of the complaints and try to be the problem-solvers for the county which is what the citizens expect us to do, yet we have no authority over what happens in the health department other than payroll and funding. Mr. Hermanson said the Board of Health is there to make things run smoothly to the extent that they can and asked that Commissioners and employees contact board members directly. Commissioner Breeden asked Mr. Hermanson if the Board of Health wants to handle personnel issues daily and said he did not feel like anyone at the health department was addressing the personnel problems. Commissioner Young said the Commissioners are not healthcare professionals, nor do they claim to be, and that is why we need the healthcare professionals on the Board of Health and that is why they are here. He said we have an HR Department and they help handle a lot of the issues going on right now at the Board of Health; the Board of Health has one department head, we have 24 department heads; and we also have a CEO for Macon County; my role on this board is not to handle day-to-day issues which are their job. Commissioner Young stated the Commissioners do not want to catch the complaints, but want the Board of Health to catch the complaints. Mr. Hermanson said their contact information is on the website, then Health Director Kathy McGaha corrected him that it is not. Commissioner Young said we are extending a hand and asked if they the County to handle some of the personnel issues because there is duplication. Mr. Hermanson said they fall under different rules than the rest of the County. He said they have state rules they have to follow which makes it more difficult for management staff. Commissioner Shearl stated that employees will come to the Commissioners due to fear of retaliation and these issues have been ongoing. He said having a separate board puts us in a tough position. Board of Health General Public member Steve Grissom said it sounds like most of the problem is about communication and asked if there is a way the Board of Health can stay and have Mr. Cabe be the answer for our board just like he is for every other department. He said all of the Board of Health members are willing to take a call but we are not getting them so we are thinking everything is working fine. Commissioner Breeden stated that the Commissioners are elected and get calls on a daily basis and he assumes that Board of Health members cannot address issues and complaints daily therefore issues cannot be addressed immediately, and without the Board of Commissioners being in

direct control it is really tough for us to do anything. Commissioner Breeden asked Attorney Ridenour for input on what an Advisory Board would look like. Mr. Ridenour read NCGS 153A-77 to explain. Board of Health Nurse member Angie Stone asked if there were other arms that operate like the health department. Mr. Cabe responded that the Department of Social Services is the same as the health department is now and the Sheriff's Department is a little different. He said the Planning Board is somewhat like what we are talking about as they serve in an advisory role to the Board of Commissioners. Board of Health Engineer member Garrett Higdon mentioned a Board of Health subcommittee that had discussed the complaint process and he said he would hate to reinvent the wheel but would like to relook at that process to be more efficient. Commissioner Shearl said they can still do that as an advisory board. Commissioner Breeden said the complaint part is just part of it; it is the action that happens after the complaint. He said we already have the person in place that takes the complaints and takes action on every other problem from all other departments. Commissioner Antoine asked if they were aware of the morale issues and how they have addressed it. Mr. Higdon said they were not aware of those issues. Board of Health Dentist member and Vice Chair Dr. Matt Corbin said the Board of Health had discussed the complaint process and board members want to be contacted about them. He said they have not had a board meeting since the discussion to finalize and discuss the details of the process. Board of Health General Public member Dr. Nathan Feibleman said he is new to the board and this information is new to him. He said as a doctor he wants to be an advisor and does not want to be involved in the structure of the department. Ms. Stone asked why Commissioner Shearl did not bring the issues to the Board of Health meetings. Commissioner Shearl replied that he was trying to deal with the people individually and that he talks to his manager about these issues. He asked if she were to hear complaints what would she do to which she responded that she would discuss them with the Health Director. Board of Health Pharmacist Courtney Patrick said what the Commissioners is suggesting is very operational, but when it comes to health issues she hopes they would still have the ability to share their expertise with the Commissioners and that they have to have a way for employees to anonymously let Board of Health members know about issues without fear of retaliation. Dr. Vargas said he is still trying to understand what is going on. He said he does not understand what the Commissioners want. He said the Board of Health has a director and indicated that she has integrity, he has known her for 20 years, and her performance is impeccable. Dr. Vargas asked if the Commissioners had spoken to her staff, and stated that people should be paid more, and more people should be hired, that the Board of Health supports the director, and it sounds like the Commissioners are wanting to overwrite her authority. Commissioner Breeden asked Attorney Ridenour to explain what having the Board of Health in an advisory role would look like. Attorney Ridenour reviewed North Carolina General Statute 153A regarding the options for a structural change and stated that a change would require passing a resolution to consider the change followed by a public hearing. Commissioner Breeden said he fears if we do not go ahead and take action we will lose some employees and asked about whether a closed session was needed to share details of the concerns and complaints, Attorney Ridenour advised that the Commissioners could not call a closed session because the health director is not their employee. He said, however, the Board of Health can have a closed session. Commissioner Antoine stated that the Commissioners are just trying to get to a common goal but because of the way the health department is set up the Commissioners cannot even go in to closed session to discuss the issues. Commissioner Breeden said nothing at all has changed and made a motion to adopt a resolution to consider the Board of Commissioners becoming the Board of Health and the Board of Health to become an advisory committee with a public hearing at the September 9, 2025, meeting. Commissioner Shields says he does not know the job description of

the health director and that the Board of Health has to take ownership of whether the health director is or is not doing her job. He said it is the Board of Health's responsibility to make sure their leader is doing her job, to make sure they know what her job description is, and hold her to that. Mr. Hermanson stated that the Board of Health knows what her job description is and she knows what her job description is and that she is evaluated every year. Commissioner Young asked who evaluates her to which Mr. Hermanson responded a subcommittee of the board. Commissioner Breeden asked HR Director Tammy Keezer to comment on the HR process at the health department and that of the county. Ms. Keezer provided an explanation of how the two systems are similar and where there are differences. Dr. Vargas stated that the Commissioners are investigating how to fire the health director, had made a motion to change the structure of the board, yet the Board of Health has not yet heard the complaint and been able to discuss this issues, nor shared the information with Ms. McGaha and heard from her. Dr. Corbin asked questions about closed sessions and if the two commissioner liaisons could be in the closed session. Attorney Ridenour advised that the Board of Health could hold a closed session with the liaisons present and anyone they feel is relevant to the purpose for which they are going in to closed session. He indicated that as long as there are no more than two commissioners present in the closed session then the Board of Health would be meeting the guidelines, but if there were three or more it would be considered a public session. Commissioner Young asked when next Board of Health meeting is and Mr. Hermanson indicated July 29th. Commissioner Young said he feels that part of the problem is that the Board of Health does not know what the problems are and therefore cannot fix them. He said he would like to have more input from the Board of Health and that input from the public is not a bad idea either. Commissioner Young said having the public hearing can set a tone, but does not mean it will go through. He said he would like to have a list of the Board of Health member phone numbers and talk to them individually and hear what they have to say. With no other discussion, Attorney Ridenour stated that the motion on the floor by Commissioner Breeden is to have a public hearing on September 9, 2025, for the purpose of considering whether the Board of Commissioners would adopt the county health department as a department within the county pursuant to NCGS 153A-77. Commissioner Shearl seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous. At 7:32 p.m. the Board of Health adjourned their meeting.

#### **UPDATE ON PROGRESS FROM BURNINGTOWN-IOTLA FIRE AND RESCUE –**

Burningtown Iotla Volunteer Fire Department Chief Ken McKaskill spoke about the upcoming open house and community meeting and shared that board members should have received an invitation. He reported that the department had an inspection yesterday and that everything they set out to do has been accomplished, that they currently have 28 members on their roster, 16 of those will count toward the required members with specified training hours and by the end of July they should have 19 members with training. Commissioner asked how many of the members are Junior Firefighters to which Mr. McCaskill replied four (4) so the regular membership is 24. Commissioner Shearl asked if Cowee Volunteer Fire Department will no longer have to run their calls when they reach the 19 trained members, and Mr. McKaskill said yes that is correct. Mr. Cabe asked if it was the will of the board to remove them from probationary status if they meet their membership by the end of July. Commissioner Young said he thinks we need an update next month. No action.

**CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL OF ADDITIONAL REPAIRS AT MACON COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY –** Planning, Permitting, and Development Director Joe Allen gave an update, indicating that the interior should be finished by July 11<sup>th</sup> and the exterior work should be completely done by mid-August. Mr.

Allen reviewed each line item in an estimate for additional repairs. Commissioner Shields made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Antoine to move \$52,281 from fund balance and amend the contract with Windriver construction to complete the project. The vote was unanimous.

**UPDATE ON ENGINEERING AND DESIGN FOR PHASE 1A AND 1B**

**RECREATION PARK MASTER PLAN** – Mr. Cabe explained the details of the updated design and requested board approval. Commissioner Shearl made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Shields to approve the amount not to exceed \$19,910 from fund balance, accompanying budget amendment, and contract amendment as applicable. The vote was unanimous.

**CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL OF LEASE AGREEMENT WITH OTTO**

**FIRE AND RESCUE** – Mr. Cabe explained the details of the lease agreement and indicated that both the Otto Community Development Organization and the Otto Volunteer Fire and Rescue have approved the lease in the amount of \$2,000 per month which is budgeted. Commissioner Shields made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Antoine to approve the lease as requested. The vote was unanimous.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

**DISCUSSION AND UPDATE OF HIGHLANDS PLAYGROUND** - Brian Stiehler provided an update on funding including a \$350,000 contribution from Macon County, \$250,000 from the Town of Highlands, and \$747,711 in donations from the local community for a total of \$1,347,711. Mr. Stiehler said they applied for two grants and have not been awarded either of the grants. He said they are \$150,000 short and is going to ask the Town of Highlands for \$50,000 and is requesting another \$50,000 from Macon County. Mr. Stiehler said they hope to start construction as soon as the funds have been received and then have the playground open next spring. Commissioner Shearl made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Shields to commit another \$50,000 out of fund balance to the playground project. The vote was unanimous.

**DISCUSSION ON EXPANDED ACCESS TO ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES**

**THROUGH REGULATED ON- AND OFF-PREMISES SALES** – Commissioner Breeden said he thinks this is an issue that would help businesses up and down the Georgia Road as well as Economic Development Commission projects. Commissioner Shearl said let it go to referendum in the 2026 election and let the people decide. Commissioner Antoine said whether for or against, this is something that hurts Macon County because people go out of town because we do not have things here. He said he thinks this should go on the ballot and let the people decide. Commissioner Breeden asked Attorney Ridenour to bring a couple of versions of the resolution to the next meeting. No action.

**DISCUSSION REGARDING USE AND OCCUPANCY OF MULTI-USE ROOM AT NANTAHALA COMMUNITY BUILDING / LIBRARY**

- Steve Bigos with Nantahala Community Development Club (NCDC) provided information about the NCDC and used a PowerPoint slide to show use of the facility, cleaning, etc. He said charging for private events and funds are used for cleaning and upkeep of the facility and requested to continue as they have been with a formal lease. Mr. Cabe handed out copies of the lease and explained the terms of the lease. Commissioner Breeden said he does not feel we need to enter in to a lease saying it is a county-owned facility and any fees need to go back to the county just like any other county facility. He said the fire panel and other things are on the NCDC side of the building and have to be accessed. Commissioner Young made some comments about the fee amounts. Commissioner Breeden indicated that the way it is being run now is working and he does not see the

reason or purpose for a lease for a community room in such as small community. Mr. Bigos spoke about the need for a lease so the NCDC could hold Bingo legally. Commissionr Young said he could support this if they cut their fees in half and the lease was on a year-to-year basis. He said this was a gift to the community from the taxpayers. Commissioner Breeden stated the lease needs to be revised to include some language about access by the library and other county entities. After discussion there was consensus among board members to bring a revised lease to the August meeting to include a fee structure. Commissioner Shearl said any activity that supports the community should supercede any private event and indicated that if we can work out something for Bingo whether an MOU or something else then lets do that instead of the lease.

**CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL OF DOGWOOD HEALTH TRUST SAVING LIVES FROM SUBSTANCE ABUSE GRANT APPLICATION** - Mr. Cabe reported the desire to apply for an invitation only grant in the amount of \$300,000 to help develop the strategic plan and provide educational and training money to assist us as we go through the process to figure out how to manage the opioid money that we have been receiving. He said to facilitate the expenditure of those funds we have to have a strategic plan, develop priorities with public, and meet the reporting requirements. Mr. Shields made motion, seconded by Commissioner Breeden, for Mr. Cabe to move forward with submission of the grant application. The vote was unanimous.

**CONSENT AGENDA:** Upon a motion by Commissioner Breeden, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted unanimously to approve the consent agenda as presented, which includes: (A) Minutes of the June 10, 2025 regular meeting, (B) Budget Amendments #1-5, (C) Grant Project Ordinance WAP FY 2026, (D) Grant Project Ordinance NC Helene Recovery WX Fund, (E) Grant Project Ordinance NC Helene Recovery WX Fund, (F) Grant Project Ordinance Amendment Duke Energy 2017 HHF, (G) Grant Project Ordinance Amendment Duke Energy Weatherization Direct Reimbursement, (H) FY 2025-2026 Juvenile Crime Prevention Council Certification and County Plan, (I) Revised and Updated Travel Policy, (J) Tax releases for the month of June 2024 in the amount of \$2,436.92, (K) Monthly ad valorem tax collection report for which no action is necessary.

**APPOINTMENTS:**

**TOWN OF FRANKLIN PLANNING BOARD (2 SEATS)** - Attorney Ridenour distributed paper ballots and read the results into the record. The applicants were Richard Brady, Janet Greene, and Debbie Tallent, and the voting results were Richard Brady and Debbie Tallent. Commissioner Antoine made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Breeden, to appoint Mr. Brady and Ms. Tallent. The vote was unanimous.

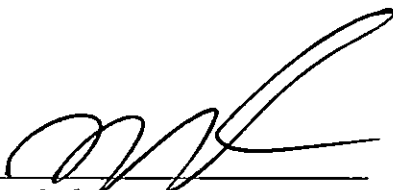
**COMMUNITY FUNDING POOL (7 SEATS)** - Shearl mentioned that no funding for this fiscal year was approved, although the \$75,000 from last fiscal year was rolled over to FY2025-26, and asked why we need a committee to approve funds for one year and why we continue to fund non-government organizations (NGO's). After some discussion, Commissioner Shields made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Young, to continue setting up a committee of seven people to distribute the \$75,000. Motion was 3 to 2 with Commissioners Antoine, Breeden, and Shearl opposed, and Commissioners Shields and Young in favor of the motion. Discussion regarding having a subcommittee of the Board of Commissioners to make recommendations for the distribution of funds. Commissioner Shearl made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Breeden, to form a subcommittee to take applications from the non-profits for the award of

\$75,000 funding and report back to this board for approval of distribution, and moved for Commissioner Breeden and Commissioner Antoine to serve as the subcommittee. The vote was 3 to 2, with Commissioners Shearl, Breeden, and Young voting in favor, and Commissioners Antoine and Shields opposing.

**AIRPORT AUTHORITY (2 SEATS)** - Attorney Ridenour distributed paper ballots and read the results into the record. The applicants were Natalie Alison, Janet Shuler, and Harold (Pete) Haithcock, and the voting results were Pete Haithcock and Janet Shuler. Commissioner Shearl made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Breeden, to appoint Ms. Shuler and Mr. Haithcock. The vote was unanimous.

**CLOSED SESSION:** At 9:22 p.m., upon a motion by Commissioner Breeden, seconded by Commissioner Shearl, the board voted unanimously to go into closed session as allowed under NCGS 143-318.11(a)(3) to consult with an attorney. At 9:32 p.m., upon a motion by Commissioner Breeden, seconded by Commissioner Shearl, the board voted unanimously to come out of closed session and return to open session.

**ADJOURN:** With no other business, at 9:32 p.m., upon a motion from Commissioner Breeden, seconded by Commissioner Antoine, the board voted unanimously to adjourn.

  
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Warren Cabe  
Ex Officio Clerk to the Board

  
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Josh Young  
Board Chair