



MACON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
JUNE 10, 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 a number of county employees, media, and citizens.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- (A) Mr. Cabe announced that this meeting is also serving as the Annual Opioid Meeting with Municipalities and that the boards from both the Town of Franklin and the Town of Highlands were invited to attend.
- (B) Mr. Cabe shared that the Elder Abuse Awareness Walk would be held on June 16, 2025, at 5:30 p.m. at the Gazebo on the square.
- (C) Commissioner Shearl announced that Fireworks in the Park will return to the recreation park this year and that he, Commissioner Breeden, Commissioner Young, and Mr. Cabe have been working on planning the events.

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):

RECOMMENDED FISCAL YEAR 2025-26 BUDGET – Chairman Young opened the public hearing at 6:04 p.m. **Betsy Baste** requested the board fund things the county needs in their budget, and stated, "It is our money, so spend it". **Don Willis** spoke in favor of a tax increase for the Cullasaja Gorge Fire Department. **David Dabney** spoke in favor of a tax increase for the Cullasaja Gorge Fire Department and stated that the trucks are older, and they cannot get parts for them. He said a one-cent tax increase will help the department with insurance rates and get new trucks. **John Courtney** spoke in support of a one-cent tax increase to purchase trucks for the Cullasaja Gorge Fire Department, mentioning response efficiency, safety for firefighters and the community, long-term cost savings, community protection, and insurance rates for residents. **Chad Stone** said he has been a volunteer since 1997 at the Cullasaja Gorge Fire Department and that the same trucks are there today, with a couple of newer ones. He spoke in support of a tax increase for the department. **Glenda Cook** indicated she supports a one-cent tax increase to purchase a new tanker and an engine for the Cullasaja Gorge Fire Department. She mentioned repair and maintenance of thirty-year-old trucks, operational downtime, required testing, outdated technology, resale or trade value, and response capability. **Dean Cook** spoke as the Chief of Cullasaja Gorge Fire Department, and a member of the department

for thirty-four years, and said he supports the one-cent tax increase. **Betsy Carson** said she spoke to all her neighbors, and they all support a one-cent tax increase for the Cullasaja Gorge Fire Department. **Jack Baird** spoke about a petition for the proposed tax increase for the Cullasaja Gorge Fire Department and shared his results.

At 6:28 p.m., with no one else signed up to speak, Chairman Young closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Shearl asked some questions about the Cullasaja Gorge Fire Department and recommended an audit of the department's books, possibly a forensic audit, and a report back to the County Manager. He said he cannot support an increase. Commissioner Breeden said it is a difficult decision for the Cullasaja Gorge Fire Department to make, as they cannot buy a fire truck without the money, especially when they knew they did not have the money. He said he agrees that maybe an audit is needed. Commissioner Young said he was proud to have supported the increase in 2022, but feels it is going to set a precedent that the board will bail them out if he supports the increase now. Commissioner Antoine said he understands the need, but has the same concerns; however, he could support the increase with an audit. Commissioner Shields stated he is supportive of a one-cent increase after hearing the community comments. Commissioner Shearl made a motion to approve the Fiscal Year 2026 budget and budget ordinance with no change to the Cullasaja tax rate, then retracted the motion, and made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Breeden, for no change in the tax rate for the Cullasaja Gorge Fire Department. The vote was 3-2 with Commissioner Shearl, Commissioner Breeden, and Commissioner Young voting in favor of the motion, and Commissioner Shields and Commissioner Antoine opposed. Manager Cabe explained the changes to the proposed FY'26 budget as requested by the board. He indicated the changes include the addition of four EMS positions, the deletion of a new ambulance which was replaced with a remounted ambulance, the addition of one transport deputy position with the deletion of some transport contracted money and some overtime funds, then moving the entire contingency of \$200,246 into the Macon County Schools current expense, and finally, moving \$106,365 from fund balance to balance the budget, with a new proposed budget of \$64,817,964. Commissioner Breeden mentioned Southwestern Community College (SCC) capital funding and said that up until 2024, we had not funded any capital, and then we started funding capital. He said he would like to see those funds go to Macon County Schools instead, and if any issues arise with the SCC facilities that we own, we are going to fix them anyway. Mr. Cabe clarified that this does not change the overall budget ordinance as it is a line-item change. He said if the entire \$125,000 allocated for SCC is transferred to Macon County Schools, then \$725,846 would be the total increase for Macon County Schools. Commissioner Shearl recommended keeping the \$125,000 and then paying for the items when invoiced. Mr. Cabe indicated funds could be moved from the fund balance if the board so chose when needed for repairs. Commissioner Young asked for Planning, Permitting, and Development Director Joe Allen and Project Coordinator Jack Morgan to inspect the SCC facilities and see if the work is needed. Mr. Cabe stated that if the board leaves the funds where they are, then the board can move the funds later. Ms. Carpenter clarified that the budget is being left the same with the changes Mr. Cabe presented and referred to Budget Ordinance A. Commissioner Motion by Shearl made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Breeden, to approve Budget Ordinance A, no change in the tax rate for Cullasaja Gorge Fire Department, as presented. The vote was unanimous.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD - **Richard Litchford** spoke about the Macon County and Fontana Regional Library Board appointments and provided two handouts with his thoughts to board members. **Diann Catlin** shared her

thoughts about always saying thank you and not saying bad things about anyone. **Betsy Baste** said she took pictures of a truck still doing clean up on the river after June 1st. She said they have destroyed our riverbanks and need to repair them. Ms. Baste indicated that she sent emails to board members about the Macon County Library Board members and encouraged the board to appoint someone from Nantahala to the vacant Macon County Library Board. Lastly, Ms. Baste stated that she is the secretary of the Otto Community Development Club and has never seen the lease document on the agenda tonight, and they are named in the document. **Kim Leister** said she spoke to the board a couple of months ago with concerns about an email that was sent regarding Fontana Regional Library (FRL). She requested that the board address the concerns about the people who are going against the wishes of this board for staying with the FRL. **Jim Gaston** spoke about failed ideology.

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

- To move Item 13D under Consent, Approval of the hiring of relatives to Sheriff Brent Holbrooks, to New Business for discussion, per Commissioner Shearl
- To move Item 13E under Consent, Destruction of Solid Waste Records, to New Business for discussion, per Commissioner Shearl
- To remove Item 13G under Consent, Approval of Lease for Space at Otto Volunteer Fire and Rescue, per Commissioner Shearl
- To move Item 13K under Consent, Capital Project Ordinance Amendment – Macon Middle School Renovation, to Old Business for discussion, per Commissioner Shearl
- To move Item 13L under Consent, Capital Project Ordinance Amendment – Franklin High School Project, to Old Business for discussion, per Commissioner Shearl
- To move Item 13M under Consent, Capital Project Ordinance Amendment – Highlands School Project, to Old Business for discussion, per Commissioner Shearl
- To move Item 13N under Consent, Capital Project Ordinance Amendment – Highlands Middle School Renovations, to Old Business for discussion, per Commissioner Shearl
- To move Item 13O under Consent, Grant Project Ordinance Amendment - Housing Administration, to Old Business for discussion, per Commissioner Shearl
- To remove Item 14C under Appointments, Town of Franklin Planning Board, per Mr. Cabe.
- To correct Item 13I under Consent, Capital Project Ordinance Amendment – Recreation Parks Capital Projects, to remove the word “Amendment” as this is the initial ordinance, per Ms. Carpenter

REPORTS/PRESENTATIONS:

ANNUAL OPIOID MEETING WITH THE TOWN OF FRANKLIN AND THE TOWN OF HIGHLANDS – Southwestern Commission Executive Director Russ Harris used a PowerPoint Presentation to explain funding, planning, and goals. He said \$5,635,859 has been allocated for Macon County, and no funds will be spent without a vote from the board. Ms. Carpenter indicated that funds are received randomly throughout the year, and the current balance of funds received is \$1,789,541.51. Mr. Cabe indicated that if we choose to apply for additional funding through Dogwood Health Trust, we could receive about \$300,000 over two years, and if we receive the grant, they will assist us with how to spend the funds.

OLD BUSINESS:

SCHEDULE JOINT MEETING WITH THE MACON COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH –

Mr. Cabe said he spoke with Health Director Kathy McGaha, who spoke with Board of Health Chair Jerry Hermanson about having a joint meeting on July 8th. He said they are both in support of the meeting and shared that we may want to adjust the schedule so that the meeting is at the beginning of the agenda instead of at the end. Board members consented to hold the joint meeting as indicated.

UPDATE ON COMMUNITY FUNDING POOL - Mr. Cabe said he is trying to get thirteen members under the bylaws. He said we have received thirteen applications currently, two of which are county employees, but that if he brings the exact number of applications as required, then there will not be enough to have selection options. He indicated that the board can change the bylaws to a lower number to give board members an adequate number of applications to choose from. Commissioner Shearl said he does not feel it is appropriate for this board to give funds to non-government organizations. Mr. Cabe said funds are in this year's budget. Commissioner Shields commented about grant writing and the need for funding for organizations. Commissioner Young said funds are already allocated this year and that he wants to make a motion to change the membership to five members and have a deeper discussion in the next fiscal year. Commissioner Breeden said he does not think we need a committee to decide who this board funds, and that we need at least a board liaison on the committee. Commissioner Antoine made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Shields, to change the membership to seven members. The vote was unanimous.

CAPITAL PROJECT ORDINANCE AMENDMENT – MACON MIDDLE SCHOOL

RENOVATION – Commissioner Shearl removed this item from the consent agenda and asked for clarification about why this was needed. Ms. Carpenter explained this was due to the change order for the track price.

CAPITAL PROJECT ORDINANCE AMENDMENT – FRANKLIN HIGH SCHOOL

PROJECT - Commissioner Shearl removed this item from the consent agenda and asked for clarification about the GMP. Ms. Carpenter explained the GMP and other changes that have occurred with the project, with the only new addition of \$11,750 for the Porter Street change.

CAPITAL PROJECT ORDINANCE AMENDMENT – HIGHLANDS SCHOOL PROJECT

- Commissioner Shearl removed this item from the consent agenda and asked for clarification and discussion. Ms. Carpenter said this amendment incorporates all the previous boards' and current boards' appropriations and said this is the project that started out as the Highlands Pre-K.

CAPITAL PROJECT ORDINANCE AMENDMENT – HIGHLANDS MIDDLE SCHOOL

RENOVATIONS - Commissioner Shearl removed this item from the consent agenda and asked for clarification and discussion. Ms. Carpenter said this amendment captures changes and appropriates funds.

GRANT PROJECT ORDINANCE AMENDMENT - HOUSING ADMINISTRATION -

Commissioner Shearl removed this item from the consent agenda and asked for clarification and discussion. Ms. Carpenter explained and said we have to appropriate the Housing Director and one administrative person who are not funded by the grant funds they receive.

Commissioner Shearl made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Breeden, to approve each of the ordinance amendments above. The vote was unanimous.

NEW BUSINESS:

DISCUSSION AND UPDATE ON CLEAN-UP OF PRIVATE PROPERTY LOCATED AT 7017 GEORGIA ROAD, FRANKLIN, NC - Planning, Permitting, and Development Director Joe Allen presented a summary report of code violations and mitigation efforts that have been implemented. He said violations have been issued by both the Macon County Code Enforcement and Environmental Health offices, but there is still raw sewage flowing on the ground and imminent hazards on the property. Mr. Allen and Attorney Ridenour requested that the board have further discussion in closed session.

APPROVAL OF THE HIRING OF RELATIVES TO SHERIFF BRENT HOLBROOKS - Commissioner Shearl removed this item from the consent agenda and asked for clarification and discussion. He said approval of relatives was new to him and asked if the positions held by relatives were advertised, how people are being vetted, and what makes family members more qualified or better than other applicants. Sheriff Holbrooks said the positions were advertised, and multiple applications were received. He said both employees are related by marriage, and that people are not willing to come to work for \$17.00 per hour when they can go to Cookout and get paid more. Sheriff Holbrooks indicated that he is not on the interview panel, that there are five people on the panel, including a member of the Town of Franklin Police Department. Commissioner Shearl said he wanted it cleared up that these hires were handled fairly. Commissioner Breeden made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Antoine, to approve the hiring of Detention Officer Kaylee Jenkins and part-time School Resource Officer Tracy Chastain. The vote was unanimous.

DESTRUCTION OF SOLID WASTE RECORDS - Commissioner Shearl removed this item from the consent agenda and asked for clarification and discussion. Ms. Keezer indicated that these records had met the retention and disposition requirements by policy and state guidelines. She stated that these were landfill tickets and not any other records. Commissioner Shearl made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Shields, to approve the request as submitted. 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 May 13, 2025, regular meeting, the May 22, 2025, continued session, and the May 28, 2025, continued session, (B) Budget Amendment #338, (C) Approval of Macon County Public Health FY26 Billing guide and Fee Plan, (D) Approval of the hiring of relatives to Sheriff Brent Holbrooks – moved to New Business, (E) Approval of Destruction of Public Records for Macon County Solid Waste – moved to New Business, (F) Approval of Update to Longevity Pay Policy, (G) Approval of Lease for Space at Otto Volunteer Fire and Rescue – removed, (H) Ordinance Amending the Fiscal Year 2024-25 Budget, (I) Capital Project Ordinance – Recreation Parks Capital Projects, (J) Capital Project Ordinance Amendment – Greenway Improvements SCIF, (K) Capital Project Ordinance Amendment – Macon Middle School Renovation – moved to Old Business, (L) Capital Project Ordinance Amendment – Franklin High School Project – moved to Old Business, (M) Capital Project Ordinance Amendment – Highlands School Project – moved to Old Business, (N) Capital Project Ordinance Amendment – Highlands Middle School Renovations – moved to Old Business, (O) Grant Project Ordinance Amendment - Housing Administration – moved to Old Business, (P) Grant Project Ordinance Amendment - Duke Energy 2017 HHF, (Q) Tax releases for the month of May 2025 in the amount of \$2,109.69, (E) Monthly ad valorem tax collection report for which no action is necessary.

APPOINTMENTS:

SOUTHWESTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES (1 SEAT) – Attorney Ridenour distributed paper ballots and read the results into the record. The applicants were Jeffrey Cloer and Casper Moerck, and the voting results were unanimous to approve the reappointment of Jeffrey Cloer.

AGRICULTURE ADVISORY BOARD (5 SEATS) - Attorney Ridenour distributed paper ballots and read the results into the record. The applicants were Melinda James, Pam Bell, Mike Breedlove, Matt Reynolds, and Jos Ward, and the voting results were unanimous to approve the appointment of all five applicants.

TOWN OF FRANKLIN PLANNING BOARD (2 ETJ SEATS) – removed.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES BOARD (1 SEAT) - Attorney Ridenour distributed paper ballots and read the results into the record. The applicants were Hillary Shockley, Julie Adams, and Lisa Leather, and the voting results were 4 to 1 to approve the appointment of Julie Adams, with Commissioner Young, Commissioner Antoine, Commissioner Breeden, and Commissioner Shearl voting in favor, and Commissioner Shields opposed.

MACON COUNTY LIBRARY BOARD (1 SEAT) - Attorney Ridenour distributed paper ballots and read the results into the record. The applicants were Bonnie Bell, Melissa Schreiber, Natalie Grant, Robert Perkins, and William McGaha, and the voting results were 4 to 1, with Commissioner Young, Commissioner Antoine, Commissioner Breeden, and Commissioner Shearl voting in favor, and Commissioner Shields opposed.

FONTANA REGIONAL LIBRARY BOARD (1 SEAT) - Attorney Ridenour distributed paper ballots and read the results into the record. The applicants were Heather Dombroskie and Kathy Smith, and the voting results were unanimous to approve the appointment of Kathy Smith.

CLOSED SESSION: At 8:36 p.m., upon a motion by Commissioner Breeden, seconded by Commissioner Antoine, the board voted unanimously to go into closed session as allowed under NCGS 143-318.11(a)(3) to consult with the attorney. At 9:05 p.m., upon a motion by Commissioner Antoine, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted unanimously to come out of closed session and return to open session.

ADJOURN: With no other business, at 9:10 p.m., upon a motion from Commissioner Shearl, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted unanimously to adjourn.



Warren Cabe
Ex Officio Clerk to the Board



Josh Young
Board Chair