

Windsor, North Carolina
November 3, 2025
REGULAR SESSION

The Bertie County Commissioners met in Regular Session at 6:00 PM inside the Commissioners' room, 106 Dundee Street, Windsor, NC. This meeting was hosted partially in person and partially via Zoom (conference call). The following members were present or absent:

Present: Chair, Corey Ballance, Sr., District III
Vice-Chair, Lewis Hoggard, III, District I
Ronald "Ron" Roberson, District V
Vivian Saunders, District IV
Michael White, District II

Staff Present: County Manager, Juan Vaughan, II
Assistant County Attorney, Jonathan Huddleston
Clerk to the Board, Tonya Davis
Information Technology Director, Joe Wilkes

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Corey Ballance, Sr. called the meeting to order.

INVOCATION & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Vice-Chair Hoggard gave the Invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comments.

APPOINTMENTS AND REPORTS

1. Presentation to Carolina Rebuilding Ministry

Chair Ballance presented a plaque to Carolina Rebuilding Ministry in recognition of the organization's dedicated and compassionate work in the community. The plaque honored their ongoing efforts to provide hope, stability, and improved living conditions for individuals and families in need. Through the commitment of volunteers and supporters, Carolina Rebuilding Ministry has played a vital role in repairing homes, restoring dignity, and strengthening neighborhoods across the region. Chair Ballance expressed appreciation for the ministry's selfless service, highlighting the positive impact their volunteer-driven projects have had on countless residents and commending their continued dedication to making a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

2. Presentation by Mona Epps, CEO of Faithful House

Mona Epps, CEO of Faithful House, provided an overview of how the organization is utilizing opioid settlement funds to expand and strengthen housing and recovery services in Bertie County. She explained that the funding is being directed toward initiatives that support individuals and families affected by substance use disorder, with a strong focus on stable housing, access to recovery resources, and long-term support services. Ms. Epps emphasized the importance of addressing both recovery and housing needs together, noting that safe and stable living environments are critical to successful recovery outcomes. She also highlighted the positive impact these funds are having within the community and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to invest in programs that promote healing, stability, and overall well-being for Bertie County residents.

3. Request to form Animal Welfare Advisory Committee by Bertie County Humane Society

Rachel Bellis requested that the Board of Commissioners form an Animal Advisory Committee to help strengthen and improve animal welfare standards throughout Bertie County. The proposed committee would serve in an advisory capacity, providing guidance, recommendations, and community input on matters related to animal care, shelter operations, ordinances, and best practices for humane treatment. Mrs. Bellis emphasized that the committee could play an important role in identifying areas for improvement, supporting policy development, and fostering collaboration between county officials, animal welfare organizations, veterinarians, and residents. Mrs. Bellis noted that establishing this committee would promote transparency, enhance accountability, and ensure that animal welfare initiatives are informed by expertise and community engagement, ultimately leading to better outcomes for animals and the county as a whole.

The Board did not make a decision at that time.

4. Updates from the Bertie County NC Forestry Service

The Bertie County Forest Service provided comprehensive updates on a range of ongoing and planned initiatives focused on responsible forest management, wildfire prevention and control, and the protection of local water quality. Representatives discussed current forest management practices aimed at maintaining healthy ecosystems, reducing hazardous fuel loads, and supporting sustainable land use. They also outlined wildfire control efforts, including preparedness measures, interagency coordination, training, and public education designed to minimize risks and ensure rapid response during fire events. In addition, the Forest Service highlighted water quality initiatives intended to protect streams, wetlands, and surrounding natural resources, emphasizing best management practices that reduce erosion and runoff while promoting long-term environmental stewardship. Overall, the updates underscored the Forest Service's continued commitment to safeguarding Bertie County's natural resources and ensuring the safety and well-being of the community.

5. Presentation and Update of the 2025 Pecan Pickling Film Festival by Patricia Ferguson

Patricia Ferguson presented a detailed overview of the 2025 Pecan Pickling Film Festival, highlighting the festival's continued growth, increased visibility, and expanding impact within the film community. She shared that the festival has gained international recognition and has been nominated for a prestigious international award, marking a significant milestone for the event and for the county. Ms. Ferguson also announced plans to introduce a new faith-based film category in 2026, which will broaden the festival's scope and create additional opportunities for filmmakers to share diverse and meaningful stories.

In addition to these announcements, Ms. Ferguson provided updates on several new flagship programs designed to strengthen the festival's long-term sustainability and community engagement. She highlighted a unique donation of a 3D-printed camera from Hollywood animators, noting how this innovative contribution will support hands-on learning and creative production. She also emphasized the festival's successful outreach to local students, particularly through animation training initiatives that expose young people to film and digital arts, develop valuable skills, and inspire future careers in the creative industry. Overall, the presentation underscored the festival's evolving role as a cultural, educational, and economic asset to the community.

6. Presentation of Highway 17 and I-87 Corridors by Marc Finlayson

Mark Finlayson provided a comprehensive overview of North Carolina's transportation system, offering detailed insight into both statewide priorities and local impacts. He highlighted ongoing and planned improvements along the Highway 17 corridor, emphasizing its importance for regional connectivity, economic development, and safety. Mr. Finlayson also discussed current and upcoming transportation projects in Bertie County, outlining their scope, timelines, and anticipated benefits for residents and businesses.

In addition, he explained how transportation projects are funded across the state, noting that primary revenue sources include gas taxes and transfers from the general sales tax. Mr. Finlayson addressed the challenges associated with these funding mechanisms, particularly for rural areas such as Bertie County. He explained that the project scoring criteria used to allocate funds often favor population centers, making it more difficult for rural projects to compete for limited resources. His presentation underscored the ongoing need to advocate for equitable funding strategies that recognize the unique transportation needs of rural communities while maintaining a balanced and efficient statewide transportation system.

7. Municipal Election Updates and Candidate Filings by Director LaToya Peele

LaToya Peele, Director of the Board of Elections, presented a detailed report on recent and upcoming election activities within the county. She reviewed the municipal election results, noting a significant increase in early voting participation, with 230 early voters compared to 81 during the 2023 municipal election. Ms. Peele also confirmed that Election Day is scheduled for November 4th, with polling places open from 6:30 AM to 7:30 PM to ensure voters have ample opportunity to cast their ballots.

Ms. Peele outlined the candidate filing requirements and associated filing fees for the 2026 partisan primary election. She stated the offices that will be on the ballot, including county commissioner districts, sheriff, clerk of court, and state legislative positions for the North Carolina House and Senate. Her overview included important timelines, eligibility requirements, and financial obligations for prospective candidates. Ms. Peele emphasized the importance of understanding and meeting these requirements to ensure compliance with election laws and to support an orderly and transparent election process.

8. Project Updates by Consultant Robin Payne

Robin Payne presented updates on the Bertie Beach Tall Glass of Water Project, providing an overview of recent activities and ongoing progress. She highlighted a planned winter event titled “Explore the Outdoors,” which is designed to encourage community engagement, promote outdoor recreation, and increase awareness of the natural resources available at Bertie Beach. The event is intended to offer residents and visitors an opportunity to experience the area during the winter season while fostering appreciation for the local environment.

Mrs. Payne also reported on infrastructure improvements associated with the project, including continued progress on the 440-foot pathway leading to the beach. She noted that the project is being supported by an \$80,000 Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA) grant, which has been instrumental in moving the work forward. The pathway is expected to enhance accessibility, safety, and overall visitor experience at Bertie Beach. Overall, the updates reflected steady advancement of the project and a continued commitment to expanding recreational opportunities and improving public access to the waterfront.

9. Financial Summary & Budget Amendments by Finance Director, Willie Mack Carawan

Willie Mack Carawan, Finance Director, presented the Board with the September 2025 financial reports providing an overview of the county’s current financial position. He reported that cash on hand had decreased by \$2.1 million, bringing the balance to \$12.046 million. Mr. Carawan explained that this decrease was anticipated and is expected because of grant advances as well as lagging revenues from property tax collections.

In addition to the financial summary, Mr. Carawan requested the Board’s approval of the 2025 budget amendments necessary to close out Fund 40 and authorize the formal closure of that fund. He also asked the Board to approve the current 2026 budget amendments, noting that these adjustments are needed to ensure accurate accounting and alignment with projected revenues and expenditures. His presentation emphasized the importance of maintaining sound fiscal management and keeping the Board informed of financial trends and required actions.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

1. Fire Commission Committee (8 appointments – 3 Firefighters, 3 citizens, Fire Marshall, and President of the Fire Association)

Commissioner Roberson made the **MOTION** to appoint Daniel Mizelle, Randall Walston, Kenneth Perry, Michael Conwell, Joseph Pittman, III, Catherine Outlaw, John Rawls (Fire

Marshall), and Jody Sary (President of the Fire Association) to the Bertie County Fire Commission Committee. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner White. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

John Rawls asked the Board to appoint Commissioner Vivian Saunders to the Fire Commission Committee as the Commissioners Representative.

Commissioner Roberson made the **MOTION** to appoint Commissioner Vivian Saunders to the Bertie County Fire Commission Committee as the Commissioners Representative. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner White. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

2. Albemarle Regional Health Services (Commissioner Representative)

Chair Ballance stated that he is not able to attend the Albemarle Regional Health Services meetings and asked if Vice-Chair Hoggard would accept the appointment of the Commissioners Representative for Albemarle Regional Health Services. Vice-Chair Hoggard accepted.

Commissioner White made the **MOTION** to appoint Vice-Chair Hoggard to Albemarle Regional Health Services as the Commissioner Representative. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Saunders. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

Commissioner Roberson stepped out of the meeting for a moment.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approve the 2026 Commissioners Meeting Schedule and the 2026 Holiday Schedule

Commissioner White made the **MOTION** to approve the 2026 Commissioners Meeting Schedule and the 2026 Holiday Schedule. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Vice-Chair Hoggard. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **4-0** vote.

Commissioner Roberson returned to the meeting.

2. Approve Frazier Architects Contract

Commissioner White made the **MOTION** to approve the Frazier Architects Contract. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Saunders. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

3. Approve Vincent Valuations LLC Contract for the 2028 Reappraisal

Commissioner Roberson made the **MOTION** to approve the Vincent Valuations LLC Contract for the 2028 Reappraisal. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Saunders. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

*****OTHER ITEMS*****
DISCUSSION AGENDA (D)

1. Public Hearing Pursuant to NCGS 153A-77 – November 19, 2025

Chair Ballance reminded the Board of the scheduled Public Hearing Pursuant to NCGS 153A-77 to be held on November 19, 2025.

2. Next Regular Meeting – December 8, 2025

Chair Ballance reminded the Board of the next Commissioners Meeting that is scheduled for December 8, 2025.

3. Employee Appreciation Luncheon and Town of Windsor Christmas Parade – December 4, 2025

Chair Ballance reminded the Board of the Employee Appreciation Luncheon that will be held at Blue Jay Recreation Center on Thursday, December 4, 2025 at 12:00PM and the Windsor Christmas Parade will start at 3:30PM.

COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS

Commissioner Roberson

Commissioner Roberson invited everyone in the county to join the Explore the Outdoors at Bertie Beach.

Vice-Chair Hoggard

Vice-Chair Hoggard stated that he and the County Manager had spoken to Assistant Secretary of State Reginald Speight and have some dates set up where Assistant Secretary Speight can come to Bertie to talk with them.

Commissioner White

No report

Commissioner Saunders

Commissioner Saunders highlighted various county initiatives, including welcome centers, the Tokens for Timmy project for the Humane Society, and mental health services.

Chair Ballance

Chair Ballance congratulated the Town of Lewiston for receiving their new fire truck and reminded everyone that the new Dental office in Aulander is open and accepting clients.

COUNTY MANAGER REPORT

County Manager Vaughan stated that he had met with Representative Willingham and had spoken to Lobbyist Steinberg concerning the \$1.7 million 911 communications facility match. County Manger also mentioned that an upcoming meeting with state officials regarding the Bertie-Martin Regional Jail expansion to include Chowan and Washington Counties. The annual Opioid Settlement Funds meeting will be set for December 15, 2025.

ATTORNEY REPORT

No report

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comments.

CLOSED SESSION

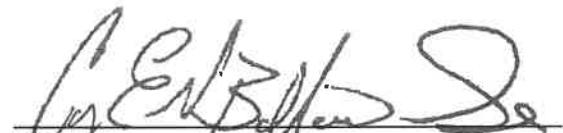
Commissioner White made the **MOTION** to enter into Closed Session pursuant to N.C.G.S. § 143-318.11(a)(3)(4)(6). The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Vice-Chair Hoggard. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

Commissioner Saunders made the **MOTION** to re-enter into open session. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner White. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

Commissioner Roberson made the **MOTION** to accept the revised DOT easement offer of \$20,000 per acre. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner White. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

ADJOURN

Commissioner White made the **MOTION** to adjourn the meeting. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Saunders. The **MOTION PASSED** with a 5-0 vote.



Chair, Corey Ballance, Sr.
Bertie County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:



Tonya R. Davis
Tonya R. Davis, Clerk to the Board