

**Windsor, North Carolina
December 15, 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
County Attorney, Lloyd Smith, Jr.
Clerk to the Board, Tonya Davis
Information Technology Director, Joe Wilkes
Network Administrator, Dashawn Clark

CALL TO ORDER

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

INVOCATION & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Commissioner Ronald Roberson gave the Invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Pursuant to NCGS 153A-39, County Manager Vaughan opened the floor for nominations for the Bertie County Commissioners Chair. Commissioner Roberson nominated to re-elect Chair Corey Balance, Sr. to continue serving as the Chairman for Bertie County Board of Commissioners. Commissioner Roberson made a motion to close the nomination as stated. County Manager Vaughan called a roll call to approve Commissioner Ballance as the Chairman. The **ROLL CALL PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Pursuant to NCGS 153A-39, County Manager Vaughan opened the floor for nominations for the Bertie County Commissioners Vice-Chair. Commissioner Roberson nominated to re-elect Vice-Chair Lewis Hoggard, III to continue serving as the Vice-Chairman for Bertie County Board of Commissioners. Commissioner Roberson made a motion to close the nomination as stated. County Manager Vaughan called a roll call to approve Vice-Chair Hoggard as the Vice-Chairman. The **ROLL CALL PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

5-MINUTE RECESS

A 5-minute recess was not needed.

COMMENTS FROM THE COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Roberson extended his congratulations to Chair Ballance and Vice-Chair Hoggard on their respective appointments, expressing confidence in their leadership and wishing them continued success in their new roles. He noted his appreciation for their willingness to serve and lead the Board.

Chair Ballance thanked the Board for his nomination and appointment as Chair. He expressed his gratitude for the trust placed in him by his fellow Commissioners and stated that he would do his best to serve the Board with integrity and dedication, while also working in the best interest of the citizens of the county.

Vice-Chair Hoggard also thanked the Board for his nomination and reappointment as Vice-Chair. He conveyed his appreciation for the opportunity to serve and stated that he looks forward to supporting the Chair and working collaboratively with the Board to address county matters.

Commissioner White and Commissioner Saunders also offered their congratulations to Chair Ballance and Vice-Chair Hoggard, commending them on their reappointments and expressing their support as they assume their leadership responsibilities.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comments.

APPOINTMENTS AND REPORTS

1. Presentation of TDA Quarterly Report and the Launching of Eastern NC Film Commission by Laura Orsini

The Tourism Development Authority (TDA) quarterly report was presented by Laura Orsini, who provided an overview of the Authority's activities and financial performance for the first quarter. Ms. Orsini reported that a total of \$7,429.35 in occupancy tax revenue was collected during the quarter. She discussed ongoing efforts to strengthen the organizational structure of the TDA, including plans to establish several committees. Among these is a Finance Committee, which will be responsible for developing a formal budget and guiding the strategic use of funds, particularly for advertising and promoting tourism within the county.

Ms. Orsini also reported that the TDA is in the process of launching two new websites to enhance the county's online tourism presence and improve accessibility to visitor information. In addition, she addressed challenges related to Airbnb reporting, noting that the TDA is working to resolve discrepancies in reporting in order to improve the accuracy and reliability of financial and occupancy data.

Further discussion included the development of “Destination Bertie” as the official tourism website for Bertie County. Plans for this initiative include the future establishment of a visitor center and continued research into potential involvement and support from the North Carolina Department of Commerce and the state tourism department. Ms. Orsini emphasized the importance of collaboration at the state level to strengthen marketing efforts and attract visitors to the county.

Ms. Orsini also announced an upcoming film commission meeting scheduled for March 11th at the River Center in Windsor. She highlighted the continued importance of the film industry to North Carolina’s economy and noted that promoting Bertie County as a filming destination remains a key opportunity for tourism development and economic growth.

2. Presentation and Adoption of the Mid-East Region Digital Inclusion Plan by Jamie Heath

Jamie Heath presented the Mideast Region Digital Inclusion Plan and provided a detailed overview of the planning process, as well as the goals and objectives designed to improve digital access and digital literacy throughout the Mideast region. The presentation emphasized the importance of expanding broadband infrastructure and ensuring equitable access to technology for all residents, particularly in underserved and rural areas.

The meeting included an in-depth discussion of the digital divide affecting the Mideast region. Key challenges were identified, including inadequate and unreliable cellular service, the high cost of internet access, limited availability of devices, and gaps in digital skills among residents. These barriers were noted as significant factors impacting education, workforce development, healthcare access, and overall quality of life in the region.

Participants reviewed the comprehensive Digital Inclusion Plan, which outlines specific goals, measurable objectives, and implementation strategies to address these challenges. The plan includes actions to increase access to affordable devices, improve broadband connectivity and coverage, and expand opportunities for digital skills training across the region. Priority projects were highlighted, along with detailed appendices that include survey results, scoring data, and other supporting information used to guide the development of the plan.

It was noted that the Digital Inclusion Plan is available for public review on the Mideast Commission website. The presentation concluded with an invitation for community organizations, local governments, and other stakeholders to participate in the implementation committee, which meets on a monthly basis to oversee progress and coordination efforts.

Vice-Chair Hoggard made the **MOTION** to approve the Adoption of the Mid-East Region Digital Inclusion Plan. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Roberson. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

Chair Balance read the Resolution of the Bertie County Board of Commissioners Adopting the Mid-East Region Digital Inclusion Plan.



**RESOLUTION OF THE BERTIE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
ADOPTING THE MID-EAST REGION DIGITAL INCLUSION PLAN**

WHEREAS, from Summer 2024 through Spring 2025, Mid-East Commission staff members in partnership with the Mid-East Region Digital Inclusion Steering Committee, which included members from Bertie County, drafted the Mid-East Region Digital Inclusion Plan; and

WHEREAS, the plan identifies priority projects to improve digital inclusion and close the digital divide in the region, including availability/infrastructure, access to devices, affordability, and digital skills training priorities; and

WHEREAS, on May 21, 2025, the Steering Committee recommended approval of the adoption of the draft Resilience Strategy; and

WHEREAS, at the Regular Meeting on September 18, 2025, the Mid-East Commission Board of Directors adopted the Mid-East Region Digital Inclusion Plan; and

WHEREAS, at the Regular Meeting on December 15, 2025, the Bertie County Board of Commissioners found the content and priority projects in the draft plan to be consistent with the desired vision for the future of the region and unanimously approved to adopt the Mid-East Region Digital Inclusion Plan.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Bertie County Board of Commissioners has adopted the Mid-East Region Digital Inclusion Plan.

Adopted the 15th day of December 2025.

3. Financial Summary and Budget Amendments by Finance Director, Willie Mack Carawan

Finance Director Willie Mack Carawan presented the October and November financial reports to the Board and provided an overview of the county's current financial status. He reported that revenues were showing improvement, largely because of property tax revenues and other tax-related income being received as anticipated. Despite this positive trend, Director Carawan noted that the county was still operating at an overall deficit of approximately \$1.7 million and emphasized the need for continued monitoring of expenditures and revenues.

Director Carawan reviewed the proposed budget amendments with the Board and explained the purpose of each adjustment. The amendments included a reduction in the Veterans Service Officer's grant carryover to more accurately reflect available funding, as well as an additional appropriation for the Department of Social Services to address operational needs. He answered questions from the Board and requested approval of the budget amendments to ensure the county's financial records accurately reflect current funding levels and to support the continued operation of county departments.

Vice-Chair Hoggard made the **MOTION** to approve the budget amendments, including a reduction in the Veterans Service Officer's grant carryover and an additional appropriation for the Department of Social Services. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner White. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

1. Jury Commission (1 appointment)

Commissioner Saunders made the **MOTION** to appoint Vasti James to the Jury Commission. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Roberson. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approve the September 8, 2025 and October 6, 2025 Open and Closed Session Meeting Minutes

Commissioner White made the **MOTION** to approve the September 8, 2025 and October 6, 2025 Open and Closed Session Meeting Minutes. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Vice-Chair Hoggard. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

2. Approve the September 29, 2025 Work Session Open and Closed Meeting Minutes

Commissioner White had questions concerning the closed session minutes and asked for discussion in closed session.

3. Approve the October 9, 2025 and October 13, 2025 Open Session Special Meeting Minutes and the October 9, 2025 Special Meeting Closed Session Minutes

Vice-Chair Hoggard made the **MOTION** to approve the October 9, 2025 and October 13, 2025 Open Session Special Meeting Minutes and the October 9, 2025 Special Meeting Closed Session Minutes. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner White. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

4. Approve the October and November 2025 Tax Release Journals

Commissioner Roberson made the **MOTION** to approve the October and November 2025 Tax Release Journals. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Vice-Chair Hoggard. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

5. Approve the October 2025 Register of Deeds Fees Report

Commissioner Saunders made the **MOTION** to approve the October 2025 Register of Deeds Fees Report. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Roberson. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

6. Approve Bonds for Bertie County Officials

Vice-Chair Hoggard made the **MOTION** to approve the Bonds for Bertie County Officials. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner White. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

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

1. Franchise Application for Non-Emergency Service – John Rawls

John Rawls, Emergency Services Director, presented and discussed a franchise application submitted by Medex Medical Transport for the provision of non-emergency medical transport services within the county. Director Rawls provided an overview of the application and outlined the scope of services proposed by Medex Medical Transport, as well as the relevant considerations associated with the request.

Following discussion, the Board determined that additional information was necessary and tabled the application for further consideration. The Board requested an opportunity to meet directly with representatives from Medex Medical Transport to review their presentation and discuss their proposal in greater detail. It was agreed that this meeting would take place during the Board's January 5, 2025 meeting, at which time the Board will further evaluate the application and determine next steps.

2. Consideration of ABC Board's Request

Michael Freeman, Chair of the Bertie County ABC Board, requested that the Board of Commissioners approve the distribution of ABC funds to the County on an annual basis rather than the currently required quarterly distribution. Mr. Freeman explained the request and referenced the ABC Board's past practice of making annual distributions, noting that this approach had not resulted in any known legal or compliance issues to date.

The Board discussed the statutory requirements governing the distribution of ABC revenues and the expectation that ABC stores distribute proceeds on a quarterly basis. During the discussion, Mr. Freeman confirmed that the ABC Board is capable of making quarterly distributions if required, while reiterating that the existing annual distribution practice had been followed without prior issue. Board members requested additional clarification regarding the applicable North Carolina General Statutes before taking formal action on the request.

Attorney Smith advised the Board that North Carolina General Statute 18B-805(c) specifically requires distribution payments from ABC boards to the County to be made on a quarterly basis. Based on this statutory guidance, Chair Ballance informed Mr. Freeman that the Board of Commissioners is obligated to comply with state law. As a result, the request to approve annual distributions in lieu of quarterly payments was denied, and quarterly distributions will continue in accordance with North Carolina General Statutes.

3. Consideration of Lobbyists' Contracts

County Manager Vaughan informed the Board that the lobbyists' contracts cover the period from January 2025 through December 2026. He noted that, during the recent budget work sessions, the Board had approved a reduction of \$18,000.00 in funding for these contracts as part of the adopted budget adjustments.

Commissioner White expressed opposition to continuing the contracts under the reduced funding and questioned how the remaining costs would be covered. In response, County Manager Vaughan explained that any shortfall would need to be addressed using unexpected or additional revenue received by the County. The discussion highlighted the Board's concerns regarding budget priorities and the funding source for the lobbyist contracts.

Commissioner Roberson made the **MOTION** to approve the continuation of the Lobbyists' contracts through December 2026. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Saunders. The **MOTION PASSED** with a 3-2 vote. Vice-Chair Hoggard and Commissioner White voting nay.

COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS

Commissioner Roberson

Commissioner Roberson stated that he had received a letter requesting that the Board review the current property tax rates and associated costs. He suggested that the Board consider examining the property tax structure to determine if adjustments or evaluations were warranted based on the concerns raised in the letter.

Vice-Chair Hoggard

Vice-Chair Hoggard stated that he attended Governor Stein's holiday reception, where he had the opportunity to meet and engage with several state leaders. He noted that the event provided a valuable chance to discuss state and local issues, strengthen relationships, and gain insight into upcoming initiatives.

Commissioner White

Commissioner White asked County Manager Vaughan if the report that he had requested was ready.

Commissioner Saunders

Commissioner Saunders provided updates to the Board from the boards, committees, and commissions that she is on. Commissioner Saunders stated that she has been questioned about the formation of the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee.

Chair Ballance

Chair Ballance thanked everyone who attended the Commissioners meeting. Chair Ballance mentioned that he needed more information on the tethering law and would like to meet with the Humane Society representative to find out exactly what they are asking the Board to approve.

COUNTY MANAGER REPORT

County Manager Vaughan stated that the Employee Appreciation Luncheon that was held on December 4, 2025 was a success and would like to publicly thank all of the county employees for all that they do for the county and citizens.

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 Commissioner Saunders. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

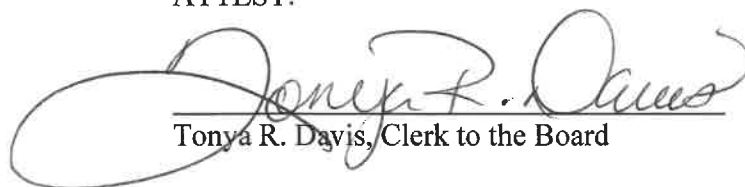
Commissioner White made the **MOTION** to re-enter into open session. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Saunders. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

ADJOURN

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


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

ATTEST:


Tonya R. Davis, Clerk to the Board