

**Windsor, North Carolina
February 16, 2026
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
Attorney, Cliff Smith
Clerk to the Board, Tonya Davis
Information Technology Director, Joe Wilkes
Network Administrator, Dashawn Clark
Systems Administrator, Terrance Brown

CALL TO ORDER

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

INVOCATION & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Rachel Bellis with PETA provided the Board with information regarding several dogs that were found severely injured in Bertie County. She stated that the adoption of a tethering ordinance is necessary to help prevent similar situations and to protect the welfare of animals within the county.

Michelle Disney, who joined the meeting via Zoom, read information addressing the practice of chaining dogs and explained how it can lead to increased aggression and create dangerous conditions for both animals and the public. Mrs. Disney stated that a tethering ban needs to be adopted for Bertie County.

Jean Kozachuk asked the Board whether any bids have been received for the Fire Department in Midway. She also inquired about the status of progress on installing signs or buoys for the drop-off area at Bertie Beach.

Beth Northcott shared concerns regarding the treatment of animals in Bertie County. Mrs. Northcott suggested implementing an educational program for animal owners to help them learn the proper care and humane treatment of animals.

Bobby Harris, President of the Camden County Houndsmen Association, stated that he does not support the adoption of a tethering ordinance. He expressed that the County's existing Animal Control Ordinance simply needs to be enforced.

Wayne Twiford with the Currituck County Houndsmen Association stated that he does not support the adoption of a tethering ordinance

Eddie Bell with the Camden County Houndsmen Association stated that he does not support the adoption of a tethering ordinance.

Deborah Tayloe stated that the county should consider sterilization of animals to prevent the unwanted population. Mrs. Tayloe mentioned that Tier 1 counties in North Carolina can get reimbursed for animal sterilization costs through the NCDA&CS Spay/Neuter Program. Fifty percent of the state's total Spay/Neuter Account funds are specifically reserved for eligible applicants in Tier 1 areas to cover direct costs for low-income residents, with reimbursements distributed quarterly based on procedures performed.

Victoria Nussbaumer, a former Bertie County Animal Control Officer and worker with the Humane Society, shared that her experiences with animals have often been deeply distressing. She described encountering cases of severe neglect and abuse, where animals suffered from malnutrition, injuries, or unsanitary living conditions. Many of these situations were heartbreaking and required urgent intervention to prevent further suffering. She also highlighted the challenges that shelters face due to limited resources and space. According to Nussbaumer, there were times when, despite their best efforts to care for and rehabilitate the animals, the shelter simply did not have the capacity to house all of them. In some cases, this meant that animals had to be euthanized, a decision she emphasized was never taken lightly. She stressed that euthanasia was often a last resort, used only when no other options were available, and was deeply influenced by both the physical limitations of the shelter and the well-being of the animals involved.

Jonathan Stalls stated that he does not support the adoption of a tethering ordinance and that some sort of education needs to be provided to help people learn how to take care of animals.

John Davis emphasized that the Board must reach a clear decision regarding the proposed ordinance. He suggested that a constructive way forward would be for the Board to engage directly with the Houndsmen Association. According to Davis, such a meeting would allow both parties to discuss concerns and negotiate a potential solution that could address the Houndsmen's interests. Specifically, he proposed exploring an agreement whereby members of the Houndsmen Association would not be subject to the tethering ordinance if it is ultimately adopted, while still ensuring that the broader goals of the ordinance—such as animal welfare and public safety—are maintained. Davis framed this approach as a collaborative effort to balance regulatory compliance with the practical needs and traditions of the Houndsmen community.

Kelly O'ltara asked the Board to consider approving a tethering ordinance.

David Perry stated that he does not agree with a tethering ordinance for Bertie County.

APPOINTMENTS AND REPORTS

1. 2026 Primary Election Updates by Elections Director LaToya Peele

In the absence of Director Peele, Tonya Davis provided details about the 2026 primary election, including the early voting dates, voter requirements, and acceptable forms of identification.

2. Non-Emergency Transport by Tim Bazemore, Jr.

Tim Bazemore, owner of Coastal Medical Transport, emphasized the need for the Board to carefully consider expanding the non-emergency transport services due to potential competition and regulatory issues. Netta Lipscomb and Willie Davis from Bertie Ambulance Service agreed with this sentiment and highlighted the importance of adhering to strict guidelines for ambulance transport.

3. Report of 2025 Unpaid Real and Personal Property Taxes, Order to Advertise 2025 Tax Liens & 2028 Reappraisal Update by Jodie Rhea

Jodie Rhea stated that the total of unpaid 2025 Unpaid Real and Personal Property Taxes is \$1,339,234.08, which includes \$1,189,762.05 for Real Property and \$149,427.03 for Personal Property. Mr. Rhea asked the board to approve the Order to Advertise the 2025 Tax Liens.

Mr. Rhea mentioned the upcoming 2028 reappraisal process and the need for careful communication with property owners during field visits.

Commissioner Saunders made the **MOTION** to approve the 2025 Unpaid Real and Personal Property Taxes and Order to Advertise the 2025 Tax Liens. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commission White. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

4. Bertie County ABC Board Update by Tim Bazemore, Jr.

Tim Bazemore addressed the Board regarding both the financial and operational challenges facing Bertie County's ABC system. He explained that the system is currently underfunded, which has led to employees being paid below competitive levels, creating staffing and retention concerns. To address these issues and enhance overall revenue, Mr. Bazemore proposed expanding the system's operations into the western part of the county, highlighting the potential for increased sales and community access.

Additionally, Mr. Bazemore requested that the Board consider allowing the ABC Board to retain its generated funds instead of distributing them to the county. He argued that keeping these funds within the ABC system would enable reinvestment in infrastructure, employee compensation, and operational improvements, ultimately strengthening the system's long-term sustainability. His presentation underscored the need for strategic planning and investment to ensure that the ABC system can continue to serve the community effectively while addressing financial and staffing challenges.

Chair Ballance asked to have this item added to the March 16, 2026 Work Session agenda for further discussion.

5. Project Updates by Robin Payne

Robin Payne presented a redesign for Bertie Beach, which would reduce costs on Phase II of the pavilion and stage. She asked the Board for approval to move forward with the bidding process.

Mrs. Payne also informed the Board that the shoreline stabilization work at Bertie Beach will start the third week of February 2026.

Vice-Chair Hoggard made the **MOTION** to allow Mrs. Payne to move forward with the bidding process for Phase II of Bertie Beach. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Saunders. The **MOTION PASSED** with a 5-0 vote.

6. Employee of the Quarter/Year Process by Human Resources Director Nicole Boone

Nicole Boone provided the Board with information regarding the process of electing an Employee of the Quarter/Year award(s). The purpose of the award is to formally recognize and reward employees who demonstrate outstanding performance, dedication, and commitment to Bertie County and its citizens. The County will highlight individuals who go above and beyond in their roles, inspiring their peers and contributing to a positive and productive work environment. By celebrating these employees, we reinforce our commitment to excellence and show appreciation for the valuable contributions that drive Bertie County's success.

All full-time and part-time permanent employees are eligible to participate in the Employee of the Quarter Program. Employees must not be on a probationary status or on a performance improvement plan. An employee may be designated as Employee-of-the-Quarter only once during a calendar year.

The Employee of the Quarter Selection Committee will meet to review the nominations and to select the Employee of the Quarter. An Employee may be nominated in one of the following categories Job Performance, Customer Focus, Safety, Integrity, and Leadership. The elected employee will receive \$100.00 monetary award, a certificate, recognition at the Commissioners meeting, and the Employee of the Year will be selected from among the four Employees of the Quarter recipients by the Employee of the Quarter Selection Committee.

7. Budget Amendments by Finance Officer Willie Mack Carawan

Willie Mack Carawan provided the Board with Budget Amendments with additional revenues for the Register of Deeds and adjustments were made for the concealed weapon permit fees from where the state's portion of the concealed weapon fees were being disbursed from the revenue code rather than an offsetting expense code.

Commissioner Roberson made the **MOTION** to approve the Budget Amendments. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commission White. The **MOTION PASSED** with a 5-0 vote.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

No appointments

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approve the January 5, 2026 Open and Closed Session Meeting Minutes

Commissioner White made the **MOTION** to approve the January 5, 2026 Open and Closed Meeting Minutes. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Vice-Chair Hoggard. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

2. Approve the September 29, 2025 Revised Closed Session Meeting Minutes

Vice-Chair Hoggard made the **MOTION** to approve the September 29, 2025 Revised Closed Session Meeting Minutes. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Chair Ballance. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **3-2** vote. Commissioner White and Commissioner Saunders voting nay.

3. Approve the December 2025 and January 2026 Register of deeds Reports

Commissioner White made the **MOTION** to approve the December 2025 and January 2026 Register of Deeds Reports. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commission Roberson. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

4. Approve the December 2025 Tax Release Journal

Commissioner White made the **MOTION** to approve the December 2025 Tax Release Journal. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Roberson. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

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

1. 1008 N King Street Property Bid Update

County Manager Vaughan reminded the Board that a bid of \$65,000.00 had been submitted to purchase the county-owned property located at 1008 N. King Street, Windsor, NC. He noted that no other bids had been received and asked the Board if they wished to proceed with accepting the offered bid.

Commissioner White made the **MOTION** to accept the \$65,000.00 bid to purchase the property located at 1008 N. King Street, Windsor, NC. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Roberson. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

2. Consideration of Offer to Purchase 306 W Main Street Aulander

County Manager Vaughan informed the Board that an offer of \$12,349.99 had been received to purchase county owned property located at 306 W. Main Street, Aulander, NC. County Manager asked the Board how would they like to proceed. The Board held a brief discussion.

Commissioner White made the **MOTION** to accept the \$12,349.99 offer to purchase the property located at 306 W. Main Street, Aulander, NC. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Vice-Chair Hoggard. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

3. Consideration of Highest Responsible Bids for Camper Trailers

County Manager Vaughan informed the Board that sealed bids were received for the two camper trailers through the attorney's office. There were two bids for Camper Trailer #1 and three bids for Camper Trailer #2.

Camper Trailer #1 highest bid was \$2,500.00.

Commissioner White made the **MOTION** to accept the \$2,500.00 bid to purchase Camper Trailer #1. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Roberson. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

Camper Trailer #2 received tied bids at \$2,000.00. County Manager Vaughan stated that there are options on how the Board may proceed concerning the tie bids. County Manager stated that one options is to put it back out for bids or they could have Attorney Huddleston negotiate between the two highest bidders with a deadline with their highest bids.

The Board stated that they would like Attorney Huddleston to negotiate between the two highest bidders for Camper Trailer #2.

Vice-Chair Hoggard made the **MOTION** to allow Attorney Huddleston to negotiate between the two highest bidders for Camper Trailer #2. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Roberson. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **4-0** vote. Commissioner Saunders recused herself from voting since her organization was one of the bidders.

4. Consideration of Standards of Care & Animal Tethering Ordinance

Chair Ballance stated that since there has been a lot of thought, discussion, and from hearing all the concerns from the citizens, we as the Board have considered putting this on the ballot to let the citizens decide how they want the tethering ordinance carried out. Chair Ballance asked for a motion to put the tethering ordinance on the ballot to let the citizens of Bertie County decide how the tethering ordinance to be carried out.

Commissioner Roberson made the **MOTION** to put the tethering ordinance on the ballot to let the citizens of Bertie County decide how the tethering ordinance will be carried out. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Vice-Chair Hoggard. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **450** vote. Commissioner White and Commissioner Saunders did not vote Yay or Nay.

Chair Ballance asked that the Animal Control Advisory Board consideration be added to the March 16, 2026 Work Session agenda.

5. Animal Shelter Update

County Manager Vaughan provided an update on the new animal shelter project stated that the drawings have been approved and sent back. County Manager noted that the concrete slab will be placed once the necessary permit is obtained. He also stated that the project remains on track for completion in May.

6. Discussion of Assistant County Manager Position

The Board instructed the County Manager to move forward with the hiring process for the Assistant County Manager position.

7. NACo 2026 Legislative Conference in Washington, DC, February 21 – 24, 2026

Vice-Chair Hoggard stated that he will be attending the NACO 2026 Legislative Conference in Washington D.C. Chair Ballance stated for the record that he would not be attending the meeting.

COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS

Commissioner Roberson

Commissioner Roberson asked everyone to be careful with the use of AI.

Vice-Chair Hoggard

Vice-Chair Hoggard reminded everyone that February is black history month.

Commissioner White

No report.

Commissioner Saunders

Chair Saunders provided updates from the Boards, Committees, and Commissions for which she serves on.

Chair Ballance

Chair Ballance asked everyone to please get out and vote. Your vote matters.

COUNTY MANAGER REPORT

County Manager Vaughan stated that he received a letter of resignation from the Bertie County ABC Board, Michael Freeman, effective immediately.

The County Manager provided an update regarding correspondence received from Bertie County Public Schools requesting the transfer of \$836,000.00 from the School Capital Reserve Fund. The County Manager advised that he responded to Dr. Smallwood, Superintendent, explaining that the funds had already been expended on school debt in accordance with North Carolina General Statute.

A meeting was initially scheduled for December 9, 2025, with representatives from Bertie County, Bertie County Public Schools, and legal counsel; however, the meeting was canceled due to the threat of inclement weather.

On January 9, 2026, the County Manager, Finance Director Willie Carawan, Superintendent Dr. Smallwood, and Bertie County Public Schools Finance Officer Charlene Jones met to discuss the matter. During that meeting, Dr. Smallwood stated that the Board of Education's attorney confirmed that school capital reserve funds may be expended on school debt.

Following the meeting, the Board of Education requested that County Manager Vaughan attend an upcoming Board of Education meeting to present and explain how the funds were utilized. County Attorney Smith was unable to attend the January or February 2026 Board of Education meetings due to other obligations. The County Manager reported that the Board of Education agreed to accept a written explanation from the County detailing the use of the funds. Should the Board of Education have additional questions after reviewing the written submission, a meeting will be scheduled with the County Manager, Finance Director, and the Board of Education.

ATTORNEY REPORT

No report.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Jacques Turner with Med-X Medical Transport requested the Boards consideration for an exclusive contract to transport patients from ECU hospitals.

David Ray expressed concerns about the Boards consideration of an ABC store in Lewiston Woodville, citing concerns about alcohol's impact on the community.

Pamela Chamblee asked for more chairs to be place in the hallway for people to have somewhere to sit down during the meetings with an overflow of people.

Earl Hoggard stated that he does not agree with a tethering ordinance in Bertie County and that the people who are not taking care of their animals should be held responsible.

Admad Vaughan, Mayor of Kelford, stated that the western part of the county needs attention when there are inclement weather issues. There are no resources or shelter accommodations in that part of the county.

Brenda Parrish stated that the county could reach out to rescue centers for help to find space for the animals or to even save their lives.

Victoria Nussbaumer stated that there are changes that are needed in Bertie County. Deadlines need to be set at the animal shelter.

Denise Wilcox suggested that the Board reach out to other counties to get help if needed.

Mike Hoggard stated that he does not agree with a tethering ordinance for Bertie County.

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.

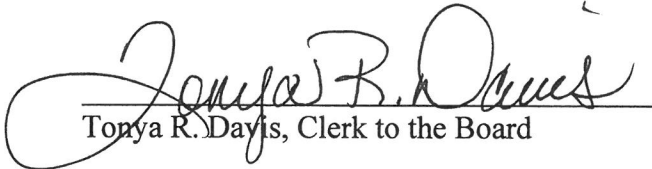
Commissioner Saunders made the **MOTION** to re-enter into open session. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Roberson. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **5-0** vote.

ADJOURN

Commissioner Saunders made the **MOTION** to adjourn the meeting. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner White. 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