



**MACON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
FEBRUARY 10, 2026
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

Chairman Young called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and welcomed all in attendance. All Board members, County Manager Warren Cabe, Deputy Clerk Tammy Keezer, Finance Director Lindsay Leopard, and County Attorney Eric Ridenour were present, as were a number of county employees, media, and citizens.

Announcements

Commissioner Shearl provided an extensive announcement reflecting on numerous county improvements accomplished since December 2022. He highlighted infrastructure repairs, facility upgrades, budget management, and services provided across all districts. Commissioner Shearl concluded by announcing his decision to run for reelection and outlined his vision for future county needs, including a new justice center, senior center improvements, and continued infrastructure development.

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)

Revising The Structure of The Macon County Board of County Commissioners

Chairman Young opened the public hearing at 6:13 p.m. Multiple citizens spoke against rushing the proposed changes, which would restructure from the current system to three districts with two at-large seats.

Dr. Joanne Rosner expressed disappointment that some commissioners hadn't responded to her emails and urged the board not to take hasty action. She questioned the artificial urgency and requested transparency, asking that the interests of citizens be placed ahead of potential candidates. **Amy Patterson** advocated for taking time to explore all options under North Carolina law, noting the county's diverse geography with 46% federal land. She suggested examining demographic data from the 2024 housing assessment and expressed personal preference for district-only voting, where residents vote only for their district representative. **Tom Young** suggested a separate meeting for an additional opportunity for more dialogue and discussion on the topic. **Mary Williams** recommended taking more time to review and receive input. **Linda Tyler** said she felt all Macon County residents needed the opportunity to vote on the issue in November. **Jim Tate** requested that the

board take their time in making this decision and shared his opposition to the proposed changes. **Jeff Weller** suggested the board take more time to make a decision and seek additional input on other options. **John Muir** advised the board to take time to make a decision. Scott Baste spoke in opposition to at-large members but suggested a 5th district. **Lisa Walker** shared her opposition to the proposed redistricting. **Freda Bennett** said this is not the proper way to go about redistricting and should be looked at during the census of 2030. **Mayor Patrick Taylor** requested that board members take their time and study possibilities before making a decision. **Caleb Brown** voiced his thoughts in opposition to the proposed redistricting and recommended that the issue be brought to a referendum.

After public comment, Commissioner Young closed the hearing at 6:39 p.m.

County Attorney Eric Ridenour explained the legal framework. He clarified that the proposed system with three districts plus two at-large seats cannot be put to a referendum under state statutes, requiring instead a local act through the General Assembly. Four referendum options exist under state law, but none accommodate the proposed structure.

Commissioner Shearl defended the proposal as addressing fairness issues, explaining that the current system is unconstitutional according to a 2002 North Carolina Supreme Court ruling regarding mixed single-member and multi-member districts. He emphasized that Macon County is the only county in the state with this electoral structure, calling it inherently unfair to Districts 1 and 3 residents who have limited opportunities compared to District 2.

Commissioner Antoine initially supported the proposal due to concerns about equal opportunity for all districts to have candidates run every two years, but after hearing public input, expressed willingness to slow the process and gather more information.

Commissioner Breeden agreed the current system needs addressing, but wanted more comprehensive information and options before proceeding. He supported taking additional time to build cases for various alternatives.

Chairman Young acknowledged the need for recalibration, noting voter population disparities, and emphasized wanting a comprehensive study involving regional counties, state consultants, and community input before making decisions.

Commissioner Shearl secured agreement from fellow commissioners that the current system is unfair and needs addressing, though they agreed to take time for proper study and community input.

Revising The Structure of The Macon County Planning Board

Chairman Young opened the public hearing at 7:14 p.m.

Mayor Patrick Taylor spoke for both Franklin and Highlands, requesting that municipalities continue to have voting representation on the county planning board, emphasizing their stake in land use decisions affecting economic development and population centers.

Lee Walters, current vice chair of the planning board, provided a detailed background on legal requirements and the board's history. He noted that during the creation of the 2019 comprehensive plan, the board had 19 members who accomplished significant work. He questioned whether reducing to just three public members plus two municipal liaisons would provide adequate representation and expertise. Mr. Walters suggested solutions for attendance issues, including virtual meetings and alternate members rather than a drastic reduction.

Commissioner Young closed the public hearing at 7:21 p.m.

Following public comment, Commissioner Shearl explained his position as the Planning Board liaison, noting he had attended no meetings due to a lack of

quorum. He argued that eleven (11) members were too many for effective decision-making and advocated reducing to five (5) members. He also expressed philosophical opposition to voting for municipal representatives on a county board, stating that people choose to live outside towns to avoid government regulations.

Chairman Young agreed with the five-member structure and supported municipal representatives serving as non-voting liaisons rather than voting members, comparing this to how county representatives serve on municipal boards.

Motion: Commissioner Shearl moved to restructure the Macon County Planning Board from eleven (11) members to five (5) members, with the Towns of Franklin and Highlands serving as non-voting liaisons, and directed Attorney Ridenour to amend the bylaws accordingly.

Commissioner Breeden seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

Additions To Agenda

County Manager Cabe requested adding an appointment to the Highlands TDC under item 13D.

Commissioner Shearl requested discussion of undesignated fund balance, capital improvement planning, and county budget percentage for Macon County Schools during the upcoming budget process.

Public Comment Period

Multiple citizens addressed various concerns during the public comment period. **Linda Tyler** spoke about the Fontana Regional Library Board appointment process, expressing concern about the short timeline and lack of public advertising. She emphasized the importance of having Hudson Library board representation and advocated for appointing Jennifer Cambrook. **Narelle Kirkland** requested traffic signal timing adjustments at Palmer, Porter, and Depot Street intersections to provide equal time for north-south traffic, and completion of greenway paving between the middle section and the town bridge. **Selma Sparks** addressed problems with transit services, including a lack of notification when trips are cancelled due to weather and confusing instructions about being ready 15 minutes before pickup time. Commissioners assured her the complaints would be addressed. **Sheryl Hartley** advocated strongly for the Macon County Sheriff's Department, specifically supporting Sheriff Holbrooks' request for detention officer pay increases. She criticized the previous month's pushback and challenged commissioners to support public safety funding, directly criticizing Commissioner Shearl's position. **Matt Jackson** spoke about property taxes and the quarter-cent sales tax, noting Macon County's consistently low property tax rates among North Carolina's 100 counties. He advocated for the sales tax as a way to support necessary services without increasing the property tax burden, calling it fiscally responsible spending. **Heather Dombroskie** addressed concerns about transparency in board appointments and criticized the campaign speech at the meeting's opening. She questioned the FRL board appointment process and expressed concerns about the library system's direction.

Adjustments To and Approval of the Agenda

Commissioners discussed whether to proceed with the FRL board appointment given the short advertising period. After a discussion about timing and standard procedures, they decided to proceed with the appointment as scheduled.

Motion: Commissioner Shearl moved to approve the agenda as adjusted. Commissioner Breeden seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

Reports/Presentations

Mid-Year Budget Review – County Manager Warren Cabe and Finance Director Lindsay Leopard

County Manager Cabe presented the mid-year budget review with key highlights, including strong sales tax revenue performance, showing a \$657,000 increase over the previous year's first five months. Tax collections are tracking appropriately at 57% compared to 54% last year.

General fund expenditures are at 41% compared to 37% last year, which is a healthy positioning at the halfway point. The presentation showed debt service projections through 2045, with significant decreases expected by 2029.

General fund balance increased modestly by \$450,000 this year, with the unassigned fund balance actually decreasing due to major expenditures, including \$10 million for Highlands School renovation and \$500,000 for library renovations.

Mr. Cabe outlined upcoming capital projects totaling approximately \$5.6 million, including National Guard Armory renovation, SCC driving track, Macon Early College repairs, Veterans Memorial Park improvements, and various facility upgrades.

The budget calendar was presented with department meetings beginning immediately, outside agency budgets due April 15th, and the proposed budget presentation scheduled for May 12th, with a public hearing in June.

Commissioner Shearl requested comprehensive information about total county funding for Macon County Schools, currently around 22 percent, including all capital and operational support. Discussion included consideration of percentage-based funding policies and capital improvement fund establishment.

Old Business

Update on the Hiring And Selection Process For Department Of Social Services (DSS) Director – Social Services Board Member And Selection Committee Chair Julie Adams

Social Services Board member and Selection Committee Chair Julie Adams, provided a comprehensive update on the DSS director hiring process. Of the six applications received, only three candidates completed all required components, creating too small a qualified candidate pool for such a critical position.

Ms. Adams emphasized the significance of the role, supervising departments serving approximately 4,000 food and nutrition recipients, 10,000 Medicaid-eligible individuals, 865 active child support cases, and numerous other services. She highlighted the leadership transition challenges with several experienced supervisors retiring simultaneously.

The DSS board recommended using Developmental Associates, the same firm that successfully recruited the current director, which previously yielded 24 qualified applicants. The service costs \$26,000 with 40-50 percent reimbursement from the state.

Commissioner Shearl initially expressed concern, but after better understanding the specialized nature and complexity of DSS hiring requirements, he corrected his previous position and offered support.

Motion: Commissioner Antoine moved to support DSS in their decision to use Developmental Associates for the director recruitment process. Commissioner Shearl seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

Update From the One-Quarter Cent Sales Tax Committee – Commissioner Shields

Commissioner Shields and committee member Betsy Baste presented the quarter-cent sales tax committee's progress. The diverse 10-member committee has met five times since December, developing a three-phase education plan for voters.

Ms. Baste explained that Macon County is the only county among seven in Region A without this tax, and that the ballot language required by state law provides no meaningful information to voters. The committee's role is education, not advocacy, helping voters understand what the tax means.

Key points included that the tax doesn't apply to automobiles, gas, groceries, prescription drugs, or medical supplies. The estimated \$2.3 million annual revenue from the quarter-cent tax would be equivalent to about two cents on the property tax rate. Approximately 40 percent would come from visitors and tourists.

The committee outlined their marketing timeline, with public education beginning in August and running through the November election. Commissioner Shearl challenged the approach, suggesting a property tax reduction to truly target outsiders and expressing concern about people on fixed incomes.

Discussion included Commissioner Shearl's alternative proposal of voluntary contributions to a capital improvement fund, offering to personally contribute \$500 if 20,000 residents followed suit.

Motion: Commissioner Shields moved to adopt the resolution supporting the quarter-cent sales tax referendum. Commissioner Young seconded. The motion passed 4-1, with Commissioner Shearl voting against.

Continued Discussion and Follow-Up Concerning Detention Officer Salaries – Mr. Cabe

County Manager Cabe presented the financial analysis for detention officer pay increases, showing a two-grade increase would cost approximately \$45,000 for the remainder of the fiscal year and \$125,000 annually. Current staffing shows four vacancies out of 16 positions.

Sheriff Holbrooks emphasized focusing on "low-hanging fruit" where the greatest need exists, noting detention officers face difficult conditions, including assaults and confined 12-hour shifts. He clarified this was not a request for additional funding but rather a reallocation within existing budget capacity.

Commissioner Shearl strongly opposed the timing, arguing it was unfair to other county employees and set a bad precedent during the budget year. He expressed concern about political pressure during election season and advocated for addressing compensation through the regular budget process.

Other commissioners supported the immediate need, with Commissioner Breeden noting the specialized certification requirements and challenging working conditions.

Motion: Chairman Young moved to approve the detention officer pay raise, effective February 23rd. Commissioner Breeden seconded. The motion passed 4-1, with Commissioner Shearl voting against.

New Business

Approval Of Resolution Exempting Professional Services For Design And Construction Of The New Carson Convenience Center – Mr. Cabe

County Manager Cabe requested approval to exempt engineering services under \$50,000 and approve a \$19,700 proposal from CE Tech Engineering for design and construction of the Carson Convenience Center. The project will utilize the solid waste fund balance and include improved recycling options and compactor-type containers.

The design will also explore relocating the center to the front of the property to potentially use the back portion for recreational purposes, possibly including a soccer field.

Motion: Commissioner Breeden moved to approve the resolution exempting professional services for the Carson Convenience Center design and construction, awarding the contract to CTE Consulting and Engineering for \$19,700 from the solid waste fund balance, including an associated budget amendment. Commissioner Shearl seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

Approval Of Proposal from NCDOT For Improvements to the Intersection at Porter Street and Panther Drive – Mr. Cabe

County Manager Cabe explained that NCDOT requires intersection improvements due to the new school construction. After rejecting initial proposals requiring right-of-way acquisition, NCDOT proposed a roundabout at the Porter Street and Panther Drive intersection.

The design would accommodate two-lane traffic entering Panther Drive and solve circulation issues while meeting DOT requirements. The engineering proposal from Wade Trim through LS3P totals \$183,000, fully reimbursable by NCDOT.

Commissioner Shields expressed concerns about bus and parent traffic coordination at the intersection. Mr. Cabe confirmed the roundabout would handle bus traffic and that commissioners would review and approve the final design.

Motion: Commissioner Breeden moved to approve the NCDOT proposal for intersection improvements at Porter Street and Panther Drive for \$183,000 from the general fund balance with a corresponding budget amendment. Commissioner Antoine seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

Consent Agenda

Upon a motion by Commissioner Breeden, seconded by Commissioner Antoine, the board voted unanimously to approve the consent agenda as presented which includes: (A) Minutes of the January 12, 2026, regular meeting, (B) Budget Amendments #185-186, (C) Grant Project Ordinance Amendment - Duke Energy Weatherization Grant, (D) Appointment of CHSA Director Kimberly Dills to the VAYA Region One Board to Replace Patrick Betancourt (E) Tax releases for January 2026, in the amount of \$8,869.35, and (F) Monthly ad valorem tax collection report for which no action is necessary.

Appointments

Consolidated Human Services Agency (CHSA) Board (1 Seat)

Four candidates were considered for the general public seat: Chris Hedden, Lyndsey Henderson, Matt Jackson, and Carol Kite. Commissioner Shearl noted he had resigned from his CHSA board position.

Motion: Following a ballot vote, Commissioner Antoine moved to approve the appointment of Chris Hedden to the CHSA Board. Commissioner Breeden seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

Board of Equalization and Review (5 Seats)

Five recommended candidates were presented to fill all seats: Kristine Flaig, Donald Holland, Richard Lightner, William "Bill" Trick, and Dwight Vinson, all continuing their service from previous terms.

Motion: Commissioner Shearl moved to accept all five applicants to the Board of Equalization and Review. Commissioner Shields seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

Fontana Regional Library Board of Trustees (1 Seat)

Three candidates were considered for the unexpired term ending August 2027: Denise Boothby, Jennifer Cambrook, and James Carty.

Motion: Following a ballot vote, Commissioner Breeden moved to approve the appointment of Denise Boothby to the Fontana Regional Library Board. Commissioner Antoine seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

Highlands TDC (1 seat)

County Manager Cabe explained that the Town of Highlands requested the appointment of James Tate as their at-large representative on the Highlands TDC board per the organization's bylaws.


Motion: Commissioner Breeden moved to approve the appointment of James Tate to the Highlands TDC board. Commissioner Antoine seconded. The motion passed 4-1, with Commissioner Shearl opposed.

Closed Session As Allowed Under NCGS 143-318.11

Motion: At 9:24 p.m., Commissioner Breeden moved to enter closed session pursuant to NCGS 143-318.11(3) for attorney-client privilege, (5) for real property matters, and (6) for personnel matters. Commissioner Antoine seconded. The motion passed 5-0. The board returned to open session at 9:57 p.m.

Adjourn/Recess

Motion: At 9:58 p.m., Commissioner Breeden moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Shields seconded. The motion passed 5-0.



Warren Cabe
Ex Officio Clerk to the Board



Josh Young
Board Chair