



**MACON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
FEBRUARY 11, 2025
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

Chairman Young called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. All Board Members, Interim 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 a joint meeting with the Highlands Board of Commissioners and Franklin Town Council on Thursday, February 13, 2025, at 7:00 p.m., at Old Edwards Inn in Highlands.
- (B) Mr. Cabe reported that an Animal Shelter Attendant position had been posted today on the Macon County website and Facebook page which is a contract position and will be funded by the health department.
- (C) Commissioner Shearl congratulated Commissioner Young for being selected as The Franklin Press Elected Official of the Year.
- (D) Commissioner Shearl announced that he would like to form a committee on efficiency and would like him and Commissioner Young to sit on the committee to fully understand the budget.
- (E) Commissioner Young announced that we are one of the only counties that allow five minutes per speaker during the public comment period. He said he would like to consider three minutes per speaker to allow the opportunity for more citizens to speak.

MOMENT OF SILENCE: Chairman Young requested all in attendance rise and a moment of silence was observed.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Led by Commissioner Breeden, the pledge to the flag was recited.

PUBLIC HEARING(S): None

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

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD:

Tamara Zwinak spoke about a gas leak that occurred on Siler Road near her residence. She requested the board consider a warning system for notifying residents in this kind of emergency. **Dr. Joann Roesner** spoke about Animal Services and referred to a letter she had previously sent to board members. She said the county needs a functional animal control department with adequate

staffing and an open door for public comment. **Constance Neely** spoke about Animal Services privatization versus continued control by Macon County. **David Germain** spoke about the Fontana Regional Library (FRL), changes to the FRL agreement, board appointments, and the suggestion that the Board of Commissioners and County Manager were coordinating behind the scenes to plan an exit from the FRL. He requested that if there is a consideration to exit the FRL it be done openly and honestly and asked the board to state that they had no intention to do so. **Elizabeth Short** spoke about Animal Control and said she has called for two months for assistance with a dangerous dog and has gotten no help. She said the shelter needs more help. **Ashley Higgs** introduced herself as the Manager of Appalachian Animal Rescue and said she cannot do her job without Animal Control. She said Appalachian Animal Rescue has seven staff members to take care of 105 animals and they do not deal with dog aggression, animal abuse, etc. because that is handled by Animal Control. **Betsy Baste** spoke about Animal Services and said she is a volunteer there. She said she would love to see the Macon County Sheriff's Office take over Animal Services so that people would listen to them. Ms. Baste indicated she would be okay with a non-profit running the shelter operation with full county support. She then spoke about "Sunshine Laws" stating that members of public bodies may not hold meetings, etc. to avoid conducting business in a public meeting. She disseminated a letter about FRL circulating in the community for the board to review. **Autumn Lucas** spoke about Animal Services saying "Macon County Cares" and should take pride in taking care of animals." She talked about staffing in the shelter and said that interacting with the animals is where the joy is and that gets lost because of the higher need to clean. **Robert Malenson** spoke about Animal Services and said he understands the misery and anxiety of the dogs in the cages. He indicated that it only takes 15 minutes per day to walk a dog and there are only three or four regular volunteers to walk them. Mr. Malenson asked the board to consider putting animals down earlier because the shelter just keeps on keeping them. **Heather Johnson** spoke about the FRL Board appointment selection process and requested a clear process for selection and appointment. She also spoke about Animal Services asking for the Animal Control Officers to have the authority to carry out their enforcement duties. **Heather Dombroskie** spoke about FRL and referred to the letter that Ms. Baste handed out earlier. Ms. Dombroskie read the letter aloud and asked why would the Board of Commissioners spend time and finances to fund a library when there are many other needs more worthy in the county such as East Franklin School, Animal Services, Senior Services, etc. **Andrew Garrison** provided some handouts about a kennel that is being built off Iotla Church Road and asked the board why this would be allowed in a residential neighborhood.

REPORTS/PRESENTATIONS:

(A) FISCAL YEAR 2025-26 BUDGET KICK-OFF – Mr. Cabe indicated that the budget kick-off would be divided into two meetings this year. He said Ms. Carpenter will give a mid-year update tonight and then Mitch Mrigulio with Davenport will provide an update on where we are with big projects at the March meeting. He asked the board for basic priorities they want him to focus on and general directions as he prepares the budget. Ms. Carpenter provided her report using a PowerPoint presentation.

OLD BUSINESS:

(A) UPDATE ON THE FRANKLIN HIGH SCHOOL PROJECT – Project Coordinator Jack Morgan made some general comments about the project and introduced Joey Cain with Carroll Daniel Construction who reported that they are in full demolition mode with the stadium portion of the project. He said everything is moving along as scheduled and there are currently no schedule or budget impacts. Mr. Cane said they will take care of the student parking lot this

summer with the plan to turn the football field, track, and stadium back over to the school in April or May 2026 and the target move-in date for the new campus is April or May 2027. He said after that demolition will begin that summer and that by April 2028 everything will be complete. Mr. Cabe made some comments about some off-campus items that are impacting the Franklin High School project such as the intersection of Phillips Street and Panther Drive, the intersection with Phillips Street and Wayah Street, etc.

(B) UPDATE ON THE MACON COUNTY LIBRARY PROJECT – Mr. Cabe said work has started and the bad part of the support posts has been removed. He said the structure has been stabilized and the rebuild of the foundations of the posts will begin soon and then they will move to the inside to finish up. Mr. Cabe said we are ready to open up the bidding process for the roof which is not part of this project but is in the budget.

(C) CONSIDERATION OF SURPLUS PROPERTY OFFER FOR PROPERTY LOCATED AT 651 EAST MAIN STREET – Attorney Ridenour said we were previously presented with an offer on this piece of property that the board did not feel was sufficient to start the upset bid process. He said since then we have received two offers with the highest offer of \$150,000 and explained the upset bid process that would need to follow should the board want to proceed. Commissioner Breeden said he felt it would be a disservice to jump into accepting an offer especially since we have departments such as Veterans Services, Board of Elections, etc. who are looking for space. Commissioner Shearl said he was not interested in entertaining an offer less than the tax value and agreed with Commissioner Breeden on seeing if there is a use for the building for the county. No action was taken.

NEW BUSINESS:

(A) APPROVAL OF MACON COUNTY'S TANF ELECTING COUNTY PLAN FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026-2028 – Department of Social Services Director Patrick Betancourt made some brief remarks and introduced Sheila Conley as the Medicaid, Work First, Energy Assistance Supervisor, and Amy Mason as a Medicaid Supervisor. Mr. Betancourt explained the plan and requested the board approve the document that has been provided to the State every two years. He said this plan will bring approximately \$183,000 per year back into the County to hold recipients accountable before they can receive public assistance. Commissioner Shields made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Antoine, to approve the plan as present. The vote was unanimous.

(B) SCHEDULE INTERVIEWS FOR PERMANENT COUNTY MANAGER POSITION – Human Resource Director Tammy Keezer provided an update on the application process. She recommended the board schedule a date to interview the three most qualified applicants with twelve total applications being received. Commissioner Young requested that Ms. Keezer provide copies of the applications to all board members for review. The board consented to schedule interviews on March 4, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. and requested Ms. Keezer schedule interviews with the three applicants that had been identified.

CONSENT AGENDA: Upon a motion by Commissioner Shearl, seconded by Commissioner Breeden, the board voted unanimously to approve the consent agenda as presented which includes: (A) Minutes of the January 14, 2025, regular meeting, and the January 23, 2025, continued session, (B) Budget Amendments #187-195, (C) Approval of the Cullasaja Gorge Volunteer Fire Department Request for Letter for Municipal Lease and Option Agreement for an Apparatus, (D) Approval of Surplus of Service Weapon for Scott Nelson, (E) Tax releases for the month of January 2025 in the amount of \$12,110.30, (F) Monthly ad valorem tax collection report for which no action is necessary.

APPOINTMENTS:

(A) Board of Health (6 seats)

Attorney Ridenour explained the process and requirements of N.C.G.S. 130A-35 for professional designation appointment for the Board of Health. He distributed ballots stating these would be kept for open vote records. Attorney Ridenour collected the completed ballots and read the individual ballot results. Commissioner Shearl made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Shields, to appoint Angie Stone as the Nurse representative, Dr. Roy Lenzo as the Veterinarian representative, Dr. Carlos Vargas as the Physician representative, and Jerry Hermanson, Steve Grisson, and Dr. Nathan Fiebleman as General Public representatives. The vote was unanimous.

CLOSED SESSION: None

ADJOURN: With no other business, at 7:54 p.m., upon a motion from Commissioner Antoine, seconded by Commissioner Breeden, the board voted unanimously to recess to February 13, 2025, at 7:00 p.m. for a joint meeting with the Franklin Town Council and the Town of Highlands Board of Commissioners to be held in Edwards Hall at Old Edwards Inn located at 19 Church Street in Highlands.



Warren Cabe
Ex Officio Clerk to the Board



Josh Young
Board Chair