

**MACON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
SEPTEMBER 9, 2025  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

Chairman Young called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. All Board Members, 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) The Macon County Board of Education has requested a joint meeting, but the proposed dates did not work for them. Additional dates will be proposed for consideration.

(B) Commissioner Breeden said he wanted to announce before the opening of the public hearing that a few months ago, when the public hearing was scheduled, the Board of Commissioners had indicated they were interested in taking over the Board of Health and maybe having an advisory role for the Board of Health. He said that has evolved into a couple of other options, so he would like to say that the Board of Commissioners taking over the Board of Health and moving them to an advisory role is not an option and is not on the table. Commissioner Breeden said the options that we have are to continue like we're doing, or a consolidation, which would be the health department and another human services department. He said that would allow the Board of Commissioners to appoint the current Board of Health, add a few members to that Board of Health, and make them the Consolidated Health and Human Services Board (CHHS), and they would be the governing board. Commissioner Breeden indicated that the CHHS would decide all the policies, review the budget, and handle all the medical matters that require attention, as well as make decisions that don't require our involvement. He said that gives us the personnel side of things, which would allow us to handle the day-to-day operations, and relieves those professionals on the Board of Health or CHHS who may not be able to leave the office to do those types of things.

(C) Commissioner Shields asked those present to remember the Holbrooks family in the passing of the Sheriff's dad, a former sheriff.

**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:**

### **CONSIDERATION OF ASSUMING POWERS AND DUTIES OF THE MACON COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH PURSUANT TO NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL STATUTE §153A-77.**

Chairman Young requested that Ms. Keezer begin by sharing a PowerPoint presentation as an overview of what the public hearing and consolidation of the health department are about. Following the presentation, Attorney Ridenour spoke about eliminating government silos where separate departments have no interaction with other departments within the same county system. He said when operating in silos, departments or their employees may be treated completely different within the same county system, such as the health department and DSS are today, with their grievances and appeals going to the Office of State Human Resources, but those of other county employees stay within the county system and policies. Attorney Ridenour stated that consolidation tries to keep this type of operating in isolation, where one board or one government department does not know what the other is doing from happening. He indicated that operating in silos can also be inefficient and result in delayed services and incomplete decision-making. Attorney Ridenour presented a draft resolution for board members to review as they decide what they want to do, explaining the content of the resolution, the consolidation process, and the next steps.

Chairman Young opened the public hearing at 6:30 p.m. for public comment. **Constance Neely** stated that she appreciated the new information and emphasized the need to put science and patient care above anything. **Margaret Pickett** indicated that with the new information, she would like more time to research the benefits of a consolidated health agency versus the and would like for the public to have the opportunity to comment before the board votes. **Lisa Walker** said she also firmly believes that we need medical professionals making medical policy decisions and not a board of elected officials. **Mary Williams** indicated that she is encouraged by the consolidated model and the opportunity to share knowledge on those basic things that are the same across the organization, but maintain the specialty part of the medical aspect of it. She requested that the board not make a quick decision and consider extending the timeline. **Kaleena Keener** stated that the Board of Commissioners has the authority, the responsibility to act, to end the culture of fear, favoritism, and cruelty; to protect the employees who serve this county with integrity; and to protect the children who deserve every opportunity to thrive. She said leadership is not measured by title, but by courage and by doing what is right, even when it's difficult, for the people of Macon County, our employees, our families, our children, and our county. **Jessica Jones** thanked board members for listening to the concerns voiced by the health department staff. **Jamie Waldroop** said he wants accountability for leaders at the health department and leadership with confidence that fair and appropriate solutions to problems can be obtained. **Mike McKee** made general comments about the board's actions and relationship with the health department. **Jacqueline Rhew** thanked the board for looking at the issues and for supporting the staff. **Richard Edfield** said he believes that public health should be under the leadership of those who are in the medical profession and have the training and expertise to make sound medical decisions based on science and research. He indicated that putting our health department under the control of any other governing body leads to the chance of medical decisions being based on politics and public opinion. **Richard Brady** stated that he thinks this is an opportunity for change and a good move that provides the employees of the Macon County Health Department have another layer of protection for the employees and another process. He said that is what we really should focus on because of the negative things that we have heard from them at recent meetings, and he would support the change. **Betsy Baste** said that what is critical in this

whole conversation is that employees need to be heard, need to be believed, and need to be treated with respect and professionalism. That was a simple fix, a simple solution, but now we have a huge, complex problem that we are trying to make really difficult. She asked board members to give plenty of time to make the right decision to really help the people of Macon County and the employees. Chairman Young closed the public hearing at 7:00 p.m.

Macon County Board of Health Chairman Garrett Higdon thanked the Commissioners for allowing the Board of Health to speak and expressed gratitude, first the board highlighting the ongoing issues at the health department. He said as a result, there are two things that the previous iterations of the health board have not had contact information listed publicly, and the former complaint process did not include an option to contact the Board of Health members. He indicated that by bringing these issues forward, the Board of Health has been given the opportunity to fully understand the root causes and critical policy gaps that need to be addressed. Mr. Higdon said the Board of Health learned about these issues at the joint meeting in July, and the following week, had taken measures to address them with our commissioner liaison. He shared that in the two months since, the Board of Health has held emergency meetings and regularly scheduled sessions to work towards resolving these issues and shared some of the details of the Board of Health's approach. After the discussion, no action was taken.

**ADDITIONS, ADJUSTMENTS TO AND APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA:** Upon a motion by Commissioner Shearl, seconded by Commissioner Breeden, the board voted unanimously to approve the agenda, as adjusted, as follows:

- To add to Item 12E under Consent Agenda, the surplus of vehicle number 310, which is a 2012 International rollback with 365,000 miles that we will be replacing, per Mr. Cabe.
- To add Item 11C under Old Business, Consideration of a resolution of the Macon County Board of Commissioners to approve the creation of a consolidated health service agency, per Attorney Ridenour.
- To add Item 12I under Consent Agenda, Approval of a fireworks permit for a wedding event to be held on November 7, 2025, at Old Edwards' Inn, The Farm property, per Ms. Keezer.
- To remove Item 11A under New Business, Discussion and approval of funding increase for eDispatches electronic notification of emergency responders for smartphones and fire reporting software, per Mr. Cabe.

**PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD – Vickie Sanders** commented about the Burningtown-Iotla Fire Department. **Betsy Baste** has signed up to speak, but was not present when her name was called.

**REPORTS/PRESENTATIONS:** None.

**OLD BUSINESS:**

**UPDATE ON BURNINGTOWN-IOTLA FIRE DEPARTMENT-** Mr. Cabe provided an update on the intent tonight was to update you on their inspection process and said the North Carolina Office of the State Fire Marshall did an unannounced inspection on August 26<sup>th</sup>, and they passed their 9S inspection. Commissioner Breeden indicated that he and Commissioner Antoine went to Burningtown on Friday and had them do a fire scene set up, and

unfortunately, there was a serious lack of leadership with no one taking charge. Commissioner Antoine agreed with Commissioner Breeden and shared some additional observations. Burningtown-Iotla Chief Kenneth McCaskill provided an update on training and membership. After some discussion, Commissioner Breeden made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Antoine, to terminate the contract with Burningtown-Iotla Fire Department and enter into a contract with Cowee Volunteer Fire Department. The vote was unanimous.

**DISCUSSION ON SOLID WASTE** – Mr. Cabe shared that the board asked for an update on solid waste last month, and said that at that time, we were in the process of making some decisions going forward. He said we have talked about cell construction, hauling, and some other expenses, and the board is going to have some tough decisions to make over the next month to twelve months. Interim Solid Waste Director Jaimie Picou explained the details of the status of the landfill capacity, construction, service options, and potential costs and changes to the fee structure using a PowerPoint presentation. Following her presentation, Mr. Cabe reviewed the actions that the board must take, including accepting or rejecting the current bids for construction of Cell 2, or waiting until the October meeting to understand the true cost of shipping waste out of the county. After discussion, Commissioner Young made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Shields, to reject all the previous bids due to financial restraints and rebid the project, adopting the revised contractor pre-qualifications. The vote was unanimous.

**DISCUSSION AND CLARIFICATION OF THE TERMS OF THE PROPOSED LEASE FOR NANTAHAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CLUB** – Attorney Ridenour provided an overview of the previous discussions and proposed redline changes to the contract. After discussion regarding whether the library was going to have a key to the building, who was going to be in charge of the calendar, and janitorial issues, Commissioner Young made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Antoine, to enter into a contract with Nantahala Community Club, eliminating the proposed redline change. The vote was unanimous.

**UPDATE ON THE BOARDWALK ON THE GREENWAY AT SULI MARSH** - Mr. Cabe shared there has been some concern about the boardwalk, which is on the greenway at the Suli Marsh on Arthur Drake Road. He said some repairs had to be made, and there are some additional repairs needed due to some safety concerns. Mr. Cabe indicated that a bid document is being drafted for a complete repair and/or replacement of the boardwalk, and he hopes to have the dollar figures at the October meeting. He also shared that there is the possibility of putting a parking area there on the greenway near the intersection of Depot Street Extension and Iotla Street, and if we did that, we could eliminate the boardwalk.

#### **NEW BUSINESS:**

**DISCUSSION AND APPROVAL OF FUNDING INCREASE FOR eDISPATCHES ELECTRONIC NOTIFICATION OF EMERGENCY RESPONERS FOR SMARTPHONES AND FIRE REPORTING SOFTWARE** – Removed.

**DISCUSSION REGARDING REVISION TO NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL STATUTE § 153A-94.2(b) REQUIRING COUNTIES AND CITIES TO CONDUCT SBI CRIMINAL HISTORY RECORD CHECKS FOR APPLICANTS BEGINNING OCTOBER 1, 2025** – Ms. Keezer gave an overview of the new requirements for county employees to have a criminal records history check including fingerprinting conducted by the NC State Bureau of Investigations (SBI) before an official offer of employment can be made if the applicant will be working in any capacity with children under the age of 18. Ms. Keezer said Human Resources staff are currently completing training, working on a

contract with the SBI, and determining what policy changes need to occur. She requested approval from the board for her to make the required changes to the policies once final guidance is received from the UNC School of Government and the SBI. Ms. Keezer indicated that this process is going to delay hiring, as the criminal history records check cannot be conducted until a contingent offer has been made and the employee is not allowed to begin work until the results are received. She said the SBI is about two weeks behind in processing requests. Commissioner Breeden made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Antoine, to make the policy changes as needed, as requested. The vote was unanimous.

**CONSIDERATION OF A RESOLUTION OF THE MACON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS TO APPROVE THE CREATION OF A CONSOLIDATED HEALTH SERVICE AGENCY**

– Commissioner Breeden said he would like to continue exploring consolidated health department options, but that following the earlier discussion following the public hearing, it does not look like that would pass tonight. He said he knows the Board of Health has done a lot of work in these past few months, and he is proud of what they have been able to accomplish. Commissioner Antoine said he wants to keep things as is for now and requested the Board of Health take care of the employees, take the opportunity to fix the things that have been discussed, and not take the other options off the table with the option to move forward at a later date. Commissioner Young and Commissioner Shearl thanked the Board of Health members for their time and commitment to what they have done.


**CONSENT AGENDA:** Upon a motion by Commissioner Breeden, seconded by Commissioner Shearl, the board voted unanimously to approve the consent agenda as presented which includes: (A) Minutes of the August 12, 2025 regular meeting, (B) Budget Amendments #52-70, (C) Grant project ordinance amendment WAP FY 2026, (D) Approval of Renewal of Lease for Gem and Mineral Society of Franklin, (E) Consideration and Approval of Bid for the purchase of a rollback truck for the Macon County Garage, (F) Tax releases for the month of August 2025 in the amount of \$25,994.28, (G) The Settlement Report for 2024 Taxes, (H) Monthly ad valorem tax collection report for which no action is necessary, and (I) Fireworks permit for an event on November 7, 2025 at the Old Edwards Inn Farm.

**APPOINTMENTS:**

**MACON COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH (2 SEATS)** – Attorney Ridenour distributed paper ballots and read the results into the records. The applicants for the general public seat were Ava Ammons, Richard Brady, Phillip Gibson, Mark Hehn, Lyndsey Henderson, Debra Prince, and Monica Severn. The applicant for the physician seat was Michael Toedt. The voting results for the general public seat were Ava Ammons – three votes, Marc Hehn – one vote, Lyndsey Henderson – one vote. The voting results for the physician seat were Mark Toedt - 5 votes. Commissioner Breeden made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Shearl, to approve the appointment of Ava Ammons for the general public seat and Mark Toedt for the physician seat. The vote was unanimous.

**CLOSED SESSION:** At 8:55 p.m., upon a motion by Commissioner Shearl, seconded by Commissioner Breeden, the board voted unanimously to go into closed session as allowed under NCGS 143-318.11(a)(3) to consult with an attorney and (4) to discuss matters relating to the location or expansion of industries or other businesses. At 9:38 p.m., upon a motion by Commissioner Breeden, seconded by Commissioner Shearl, the board voted unanimously to come out of closed session and return to open session.

**ADJOURN:** With no other business, at 9:38 p.m., upon a motion from Commissioner Breeden, seconded by Commissioner Antoine, the board voted unanimously to adjourn.

  
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Warren Cabe  
Ex Officio Clerk to the Board

  
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Josh Young  
Board Chair