



Macon County Board of Commissioners Regular Meeting Minutes July 14, 2026

Call to Order and Welcome by Chairman Young

Chairman Young called the July 14th, 2026 Macon County Board of Commissioners meeting to order at 6:00 p.m., thanking everyone in attendance and noting the packed agenda ahead. 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

Mr. Cabe let folks know that construction had kicked off on the pickleball courts at the Recreation Park, and also mentioned that boardwalk construction along the Arthur Drake Road greenway area was expected to start within a week or two, with parking remaining accessible off Iotla Street near the Depot Street intersection.

Commissioner Shearl gave folks a heads-up that redistricting was on the agenda but made clear he wasn't looking for any action and wanted to spend the coming months getting out in the community and talking to folks who hadn't made it to the Planning Board meetings.

Attorney Ridenour flagged the High-Impact Ordinance revisions related to data centers, noting that proposed language — marked in red in the agenda packet — was ready for the board's consideration and stated, "If you support the restrictions, you're probably already being heard; if you're in favor of bringing in data centers, now's your chance to speak up".

Pledge of Allegiance

Commissioner Shields led the Pledge of Allegiance, preceded by a moment of silence.

Public Hearing(s)

No public hearings were scheduled.

Additions to Agenda

No additions were made to the agenda.

Public Comment Period

Joanne Rosner challenged the board to put redistricting on the ballot and let the people decide. Kim Leister raised her concern about whether the proposed redistricting change serves the community or individual candidates. Lisa Walker urged the board to put redistricting on the ballot. Constance Neely noted that nobody at her community association meeting had even heard of the redistricting process — a sign, she said, that more community outreach is needed before any decision gets made. Margaret Pickett spoke in favor of the five-district pure voting option for the proposed redistricting. Lorraine Ross proposed several questions regarding redistricting. Ricky Siegel warned that the three-two plan could result in one district having three of the five commissioners, which didn't strike him as fair representation for areas like Highlands or Nantahala. Amy Patterson urged the board to honor the history by letting the people vote on redistricting. Heather Johnson thanked the board for taking more time and encouraged thorough data collection and community input before moving forward with redistricting. Matt Jackson said he appreciated the board's apparent opposition to data centers and expressed some caution about simply labeling data centers the same as crypto mining, worrying that broad language might leave loopholes. Betsy Baste addressed specific language in the High-Impact Ordinance. Chuck Watson had general concerns about whether data centers are a fit here. He also raised concerns about flock cameras, questioning where the surveillance ends. Rob James gave a detailed breakdown of the scale of large-scale data centers and questioned the long-term financial viability of AI companies. Michael Scarborough agreed with most of the concerns but focused on the need for better transparency in how zoning ordinance changes are publicized, arguing that a lot of community anger comes from miscommunication and hard-to-find public notices. Judy Hartley asked about the moratorium

on data centers discussed at a prior Town of Franklin meeting and emphasized the county's limited flat land as a concern. Sarah Johnson pointed out the importance of dark sky tourism to Macon County's economy, noting that light pollution from data centers could damage the county's appeal to overnight visitors and harm the local salamander population — reminding the board that Macon County is "the salamander capital of the world." Leland Shockley flagged a concern about a Bitcoin facility in Andrews being converted to a data center as a loophole. Nathan Pennell spoke about data centers. Pam Haley shared research on noise levels near data centers and urged the board to vote against data centers outright, not just restrict them. Linda Tyler made a pitch to reconsider withdrawing from the Fontana Regional Library system, suggesting the county think creatively about bringing in a partner county and ensuring that board appointments go to people who actually support the library. Dan Kowal spoke on the library, expressing concern about the legitimacy of the withdrawal vote at the prior meeting and suggesting that the county explore partnerships with Cherokee or Boundary communities. Patricia Trick gave a detailed breakdown of how Flock's AI builds "vehicle fingerprints" tracking not just plates but bumper stickers and dents, connecting to broader surveillance capabilities. Scott Baste echoed concerns about the three-two redistricting and the Flock cameras, noting that 22 cameras were already operating in the county before most commissioners even knew about them. Bill Trick called the data storage arrangement — held by a private company — something that "sounds like China" and distributed a list of communities compiled by deflock.org that had ended their contracts. Dylan Castle raised concerns about the oath to defend the Constitution and defend the freedoms. Jimmy Goodman spoke about Flock cameras and unlawful search. He asked board members to no longer fund. Donald Herring spoke about Flock cameras and the fourth amendment, reasonable expectation of privacy, and securing the data. Jamie Miller spoke about Flock cameras, comparing them to a phone-tracking app and doesn't want the government watching the same way. Jeff Miller spoke about Flock cameras. Rob Tolp spoke in opposition of Flock cameras. Bodie Catlin spoke in opposition to Flock cameras. Michael Lyons commented about redistricting, data centers, and Flock cameras. Heather Dombrowski commented with a pointed remark that a convicted sex offender had spoken during the session about being targeted by surveillance, and asked the sheriff's department to focus tracking on such individuals rather than the general public. Representative Carl Gillespie took a moment to publicly thank the board and county staff for their partnership and responsiveness to his office. Michael Livers commented that he doesn't believe AI or Flock cameras offer real benefits and that pursuing them isn't worth setting "the world on fire."

Adjustments to and Approval of the Agenda

Commissioner Shearl requested that consent agenda item 11F — the FY 2026-2027 Juvenile Crime Prevention Council Certification and County Plan — be pulled for a future meeting so the board could receive more information on what the agency actually does.

Motion to approve the agenda as adjusted was made by Commissioner Shearl and seconded by Commissioner Shields. Motion passed 5-0.

Reports/Presentations — None

Old Business

Continued Discussion Regarding Macon County Public Library — County Manager Warren Cabe

Mr. Cabe updated the board on what had happened since the June vote to give notice of withdrawal from the Fontana Regional Library system. He confirmed the notice letter had been sent to the state library, the Fontana Regional Library (FRL), and the other member counties, and that he and Librarian Abby Hardison had met with state library representatives to understand the process for applying for state aid under the independent library model.

On the financial side, Mr. Cabe ran through some early numbers. Taking into account the current operating budget of about \$1.29 million, the same staffing levels, and the addition of at least one IT position, the estimate came out to roughly \$1.35 million annually — about a \$96,000 increase. He also noted that Macon County had received \$115,000 in state aid this past year, which would help offset the difference. He cautioned that the numbers are still preliminary and will be refined over the coming months.

Mr. Cabe also flagged that Swain County had filed an injunction freezing the distribution of FRL surplus funds — meaning the \$500,000+ that was expected to come back to Macon County is currently on hold. He also noted that the FRL had requested an additional \$326,000 from Macon County to balance its current operating budget, which is being run on an interim basis and currently preventing employees from receiving a 2.8 percent COLA increase and other pending raises.

FRL Board Chair Bill McGaha addressed the board directly and asked for the \$326,000 to be approved so the FRL could pass a final budget and get those raises to its roughly 38

employees. He explained that under an interim budget, those kinds of pay adjustments are frozen.

Commissioner Young and several commissioners expressed confusion about why the FRL couldn't just use its own fund balance — which sits somewhere between \$2.4 and \$2.5 million — to cover those expenses rather than coming to Macon County. County Attorney Ridenour said he had found nothing in state statutes that would prohibit the FRL from appropriating its fund balance for that purpose, suggesting it might be an internal policy of the FRL board rather than a legal requirement. Ms. Leopard confirmed that an interim budget wouldn't allow pay raises regardless of fund balance availability.

Commissioner Shearl initially moved to approve the \$326,000 transfer from Macon County's fund balance, but after the discussion clarified that the FRL may be able to use its own funds and that the injunction complicated matters, he withdrew the motion. The board directed the FRL to explore whether its own financial policies could be changed to allow use of its fund balance, and indicated that if a legal barrier is confirmed, the board would revisit the funding request at the August meeting.

Mr. Cabe also mentioned the possibility of transitioning library employees onto the county's payroll ahead of the July 1, 2027 departure date, which could ease the transition and resolve some of the compensation issues in the meantime.

Redistricting Recommendation from Macon County Planning Board — Planning, Permitting, and Development Director Joe Allen

Mr. Allen reported that the planning board held four months of public meetings, received 20 comments from 16 community members, and voted to recommend a three-two configuration: three resident districts with one commissioner each, plus two at-large seats.

Commissioner Shearl again commented that he is not seeking action — he wants to spend the next several months taking the conversation out to the broader community.

No action was taken.

Update on the 2027 Reappraisal for Macon County — Tax Administrator Abby Braswell

Ms. Braswell provided the board and the public with an overview of where the reappraisal stands, handing out paper copies of current township-level assessed value changes and qualified sales data. She noted the numbers will keep shifting daily until they're finalized in January.

She walked through the reappraisal timeline: schedule values and present use schedule values will be proposed at the August 11th board meeting, followed by required advertising in October and November, with board approval targeted for December. Notices will go out in February 2027, with informal reviews in February and March, formal appeals before the Board of Equalization and Review starting the second Monday in April through June, and tax bills going out in July 2027.

She also briefly noted that House Bill 474 passed and was signed, impacting four counties related to the reappraisal moratorium, with Harnett County and Scotland County excluded and allowed to use new values, and Buncombe County reverting to old values.

Ms. Braswell encouraged residents to contact her office with questions — cards with contact information were made available.

New Business

Discussion Concerning License Plate Reader Cameras — Sheriff Brent Holbrooks

Sheriff Brent Holbrooks opened by explaining that the Macon County Sheriff's Office implemented Flock license plate readers in spring of 2024 and currently operates 16 cameras throughout the county, with 4 placed at schools through a grant. He noted the cameras are used daily in investigations involving breaking and entering, larceny, abductions, narcotics offenses, and non-criminal matters like dementia patients and amber alerts.

Lieutenant Lee Tripp presented statistics showing a dramatic increase in law enforcement effectiveness following the cameras' implementation. In 2023 — before cameras — the office worked 376 cases with 115 felony charges and seized 1,241 grams of methamphetamine. In 2024, with cameras in place from March onward, felony charges jumped to 365 despite a similar case count. By 2025, with a full year of camera use, methamphetamine seizures reached nearly 14,000 grams — roughly 11 times the pre-camera amount. Lieutenant Tripp attributed the increase directly to the cameras' ability to allow investigators to monitor known drug traffickers' movements without dedicating five officers to physical surveillance, freeing them up to work other cases simultaneously.

Flock Safety Representative Alex Groove addressed several of the concerns raised during public comment. He stated that 40 court cases have affirmed that ALPR systems do not violate the Fourth Amendment, that data is purged at exactly 30 days and stored on Amazon AWS GovCloud servers accessible only to law enforcement, and that the data is owned by the agency — not Flock. He disputed claims about integration with Leonardo's Signal Trace system, calling those connections "completely false." He shared examples of Flock-assisted recoveries of abducted children and a crime spree resolution in Austin, Texas.

After several minutes of discussion, Commissioner Shearl moved to defund the license plate reader program.

Motion to defund the LPR (Flock camera) program in Macon County was made by Commissioner Shearl and seconded by Commissioner Antoine. Motion passed 3-2, with Commissioners Shields and Breeden voting against.

The board then discussed what to do with the cameras themselves. Sheriff Holbrooks noted that 12 cameras belong to the Sheriff's Office and 4 are school cameras obtained through a grant. He stated he would not be removing the school cameras, as they are not his property.

Commissioner Shearl moved that the 12 sheriff's office cameras be removed from Macon County as soon as feasibly possible, and further requested that the 4 school cameras be relocated to actual school grounds — not pointed at public highways — if the school system wishes to continue using them.

Motion to remove the 12 Sheriff's Office Flock cameras from Macon County immediately (as feasibly possible) and to request the school cameras be relocated to school grounds only was made by Commissioner Shearl and seconded by Commissioner Breeden. Motion passed 5-0.

Attorney Ridenour noted the board should review the contract for any early termination provisions before proceeding. The \$47,000 currently sitting in the investigations contracted services line was discussed, with Sheriff Holbrooks indicating he intended to redirect those funds to overtime.

Schedule Public Hearing on Proposed Revisions to the High Impact Ordinance and Request the Planning Board to Review

Attorney Ridenour walked the board through the proposed approach to addressing data centers through the High Impact Land Use Ordinance. Rather than an outright ban — which carries First Amendment risks — the strategy is to regulate data centers so strictly (noise levels, operational hours, water use, electricity use, setbacks) that they effectively cannot operate in Macon County under those conditions. The key proposed change involves adding data centers and server-based facilities to the existing definitions and restrictions, including in sections 157.04, 157.05, 157.20(o), and 157.21 of the Macon County Code of Ordinances. He noted the language is intentionally concise — "a little vagueness" allows for human judgment rather than creating loopholes through over-definition.

Commissioner Shearl noted that Senator Corbin had told him the state is no longer offering incentives for data centers in North Carolina, suggesting there may be action at the state level as well.

The Planning Board meeting is scheduled for August 6th at 5 PM at 1830 Lakeside Drive. A public hearing will be held immediately before the next county commission meeting, with a vote expected that same evening.

Motion to schedule a public hearing on the proposed revisions to the High Impact Ordinance prior to the next regularly scheduled board meeting, and to request the Planning Board review the proposed language, was made by Commissioner Antoine and seconded by Commissioner Breeden. Motion passed 5-0.

Consent Agenda

Item 11f (FY 2026-2027 Juvenile Crime Prevention Council Certification and County Plan) was removed from the consent agenda for a future meeting at the request of Commissioner Shearl.

Motion to approve the consent agenda as amended (items 11a, 11b, 11c, 11d, 11e, 11g, 11h, 11i, and 11j) was made by Commissioner Breeden and seconded by Commissioner Antoine. Motion passed 5-0.

Appointments

SCC Board of Trustees (1 Seat)

One applicant, Logan Gillespie, was submitted for the available seat on the Southwestern Community College Board of Trustees. It was confirmed that the appointment does not require a sitting commissioner.

Motion to approve Logan Gillespie to the SCC Board of Trustees was made by Commissioner Breeden and seconded by Commissioner Shields. Motion passed 5-0.

Closed Session as Allowed Under NCGS 143-318.11

At 9:54 p.m., a motion to enter closed session under NCGS 143-318.11(a)(3) to discuss pending litigation potentially involving Macon County was made by Commissioner Breeden and seconded by Commissioner Antoine. Motion passed.

Upon returning from closed session at 10:50 p.m., Attorney Ridenour read a public announcement on behalf of the board: the Macon County Board of Commissioners requests that the Fontana Regional Library Board immediately resolve the lawsuit filed against it by Swain County, noting that defending the lawsuit provides no benefit to Macon County taxpayers, is counterproductive, and should be resolved without further delay.

Adjourn/Recess

At 10:53 p.m. a motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Shearl, seconded by Commissioner Breeden. The vote was unanimous.



Warren Cabe
Ex Officio Clerk to the Board



Josh Young
Board Chair