

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA)
)
COUNTY OF STOKES)
)

OFFICE OF THE
COMMISSIONERS
STOKES COUNTY
GOVERNMENT
DANBURY, NORTH
CAROLINA
MONDAY JULY 14, 2025

**Regular Meeting of the Board of County Commissioners.
These meetings are located in the Commissioners
Chambers in the Ronald Reagan Administration Building
in Danbury.**

The Board of Commissioners of the County of Stokes, State of North Carolina, met for a Regular Meeting in the Stokes County Administration Building in the Commissioners Chambers located in Danbury, North Carolina on Monday, July 14, 2025 at 6:00 pm with the following members present:

Board of Commissioners Present: Chairman Keith Wood, Vice-Chairman Wayne Barneycastle, Commissioner Brad Chandler, Commissioner Sonya Cox, and Commissioner Rick Morris.

County Administration Present: County Manager Jeff Sanborn, Assistant County Manager Amber Brown, Clerk to the Board Olivia Jessup, Assistant Director of Finance Tracy Aaron, and Assistant County Attorney Jennifer Michaud.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Wood called the meeting to order.

INVOCATION

Chairman Wood invited those in attendance to join the Board in the Invocation, if desired.

Commissioner Morris delivered the Invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chairman Wood invited those in attendance to join the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairman Wood entertained a motion to amend or approve tonight's agenda.

The agenda was amended to add the following items:

- Consent Agenda: Budget Amendment #2 - Finance Dept. - Fines and Forfeitures
- Discussion Agenda: Conditional Approval of Lein Subordination

Vice-Chairman Barneycastle moved to approve the agenda as amended.

Commissioner Cox seconded the motion. The motion Passed.

Public Comments

Chairman Wood opened the floor for public comments at 6:04 pm.

The following individuals signed up to speak in public comments:

Ryan Clark
5250 NC 772 Hwy., Madison, NC 27025
RE: Fire Contract

Ryan Mitchell
1072 Payne Road, Rural Hall, NC 27045
RE: Public Safety

Jeff Whitaker
1914 Hall Road, Westfield, NC 27053
RE: Non-Response

Chairman Wood closed the floor for public comments at 6:18 pm.

COMMENTS - Managers/Commissioners

Chairman Wood opened the floor for comments from the manager and commissioners.

Commissioner Cox commented:

- I'd just like to thank you all for being here and for expressing your opinions about the contract. As you know, we just kind of started combing through it, and I think there's a lot of work to be done on it. We hopefully can have a product at the end that the fire commissioners and the chiefs and the departments and the board can all look favorably upon, that would be my goal. So, thank you again for coming out and for the rest of you in the audience tonight, we appreciate y'all being here, and that's all I have.

Vice-Chairman Barneycastle commented:

- It's great to see everybody tonight. Hope everybody's had a blessed day. Jeff, I commend you for coming forth that information. I did hear about it, and as we all know that that will affect our ISO rating down the road. So, I appreciate that. I appreciate all the firemen showing up tonight. Someone's got it that we're going to vote on that contract next month. No. I want everybody to understand that contract will not be voted on next month. I can assure you that. Do I like the contract? No, I have had multiple people to read it that's in that line of work that reads contracts like that. Can't make heads or tails of over half of it. So, if they can't, then I know I can't, because they do that for a living. But again, I appreciate your concerns and hard work, and we'll deal with this down the road, and hopefully we can all come to agreement on this.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- I like to thank for the thank the firemen for coming in comments tonight too. This whole thing is really kind of confused me a little bit. First of all, all the emphasis on how many pages it is that's all relative. I don't think of 41 pages when I'm talking about complicated contracts as being a big number, just because we just happen to have one. It's three or four pages. Now to me, that seems irrelevant. What's really important is what's the content of the contract.
- The way the process works here and it works everywhere that I've ever been is that the manager doesn't give us a contract and ask us to give him a perfect product so he can staff it with you. That ain't the way it works. We asked the manager to go do contracts, leases, all kinds of documents, and he and his staff go and staff it with the appropriate experts or whoever. And then it comes back with those comments, and we get a recommendation on what we should do. And it sounds like some of the fire folks think we should be doing it the opposite of that, which is, you know, just kind of confusing to me, because I've never seen it done that way anywhere else before.
- We need the expertise of fire commissioners, firemen, boards of directors. I've already offered with one board person, Joe James, I'd come and sit down go through the whole thing with him, paragraph by paragraph, if he wanted me to. And actually, we kind of tentatively plan to do that. You know, the number of pages, the ones Ryan was showing. I mean, this one will probably end up about that size too when it's finished, but it's in a staffing process to figure out what needs to be in it and what needs to not be in it. And we're asking for your help. I mean, I would kind of appreciate a comprehensive document if I was in your shoes that gave me that looked at everything and then there's nothing says we can't eliminate everything down to five pages when we're done, if that's what it takes. If that's what it takes to appropriately have the accountability and correct the other issues that we're that we're working on. We're trying, everybody's working to try to make the system more fair and more accountable and there is no lack of support from any of us up here to the emergency services in this county. I take issue with that. That is total BS.
- So, you know, I don't know. I don't know what to say, really. I mean, I'm kind of like, I sound kind of surprised that everybody is a draft document. D-R-A-F-T, draft to be fixed. It wasn't designed to be the perfect product when it landed in your hands. And I

would hope you would work with us and our county staff so that we end up with appropriate document, whatever the length of it happens to be, that's all I have.

Commissioner Chandler commented:

- I want to welcome everybody. It's always good to hear from people in the audience. Good to see the firefighters here giving their opinions. I don't want to repeat too much what Commissioner Morris says, but I think I even heard chief Clark saying, in his statement, he called it a draft. So apparently, he knows it's a draft. A draft is nowhere near a final product. You know, that's not a shock. I guess we're going into political season. I thought it'd be a little bit later going into political season. I've met with several people. I've received a lot of phone calls from other people that are volunteer firefighters, and they got some concerns too. In fact, I've got a lot of notes already, and there are a lot of errors on it. That's not a shock. That was no nowhere near a final product.
- I've talked with a lot of different fire chiefs. They understand that this, this thing, is not going to happen in six weeks. There's no way to do that. I think Commissioner Barneycastle will even talk about the last meeting, the need to meet with the board of directors, and I'm good with that. I think that's important. I really do, but if I could just step back about two steps and remind everybody the reason that we're looking at redoing the fire service contracts is that - and again, I know best practices sometimes is not a is not a good word to use - but you have a lot of issues, and I should say we taxpayers. That's who ultimately funds the volunteer fire departments, it's the taxpayers. It's the Board of Commissioners throughout North Carolina and some very, very close to here, they've had to go to contracts in order to get the required response and get the required feedback. That's that that they need to show that the tax dollars are being spent efficiently.
- And I've said this in many meetings, a contract is a contract, even though it's with a volunteer fire department, if you agree to meet certain conditions, then the county gives tax dollars, money for you to fulfill those needs. The county has an obligation to provide fire service. So, if those needs aren't filled, that's a violation of the contract. Now, are we looking to the we want to cancel a whole bunch of contracts? No, no, we don't. We want to help the fire departments. You know, Chief Whitaker, comes here from Danbury. We're not out to embarrass people. We're not out to trying to close down the volunteer fire departments. We're not trying to do this. But let me also explain that I get tired of getting phone calls for residents who have called for the fire department and their fire department doesn't show up and their house is burning, or car is flipped over.
- In terms of what you know, Chief Clark was saying about the three volunteer fire departments that are in violation of the contract. That part's true, and the only reason that I haven't said it publicly is because we started a process with the fire commission, and it got to a point where it was so critical that I was asked if I would go along with because it has to be done publicly. It's public record, it's transparency. And then when I try to get it on the agenda, then I'm told that a letter comes from the fire commission saying, pull it. I think that there's probably nobody sitting in this room out here that

doesn't know the fire department said that are having severe issues. I mean, if it would make you all feel better, I could certainly name those names, but I don't know what good it would do.

- In regards to Mr. Mitchell on about my comment, I'm the one that made the comment about the new driving policy, it did allow for volunteer fire departments to drive an ambulance in terms of, you know, an emergency. I've been in public safety for 35 years, never fought a fire other than using a fire extinguisher out of the back of a patrol car every once in a while. But as my career spanned, I did work a lot with firefighters, and they're a great bunch of people. I support them 100% just like they support the police 100% because we're kind of in the same game out there, serving the public. But maybe I'm a little different. Maybe it's wrong, but I also look at liability, and I'm not afraid to ask a question. My position was, is our risk management from the state are they okay with that? Would that affect our insurance if that volunteer firefighter driving an ambulance, going through traffic and has a wreck? That was my concern.
- When I asked that question, I call around with other counties. Maybe I'm way off whack. I mean, who cares? Who drives the ambulance, because it is an emergency. And then I find out, very first call I made a county that neighbors us, they don't allow that. And then even, and then even in terms of their defensive driving, their courses and stuff, it pertains to the difference between an ambulance and fire truck. So then, as we're going forward, I find out that, the risk manager is good with it. And then I also received some information from four people that were that were heavily involved in the in the EMS, and I voted to approve it, but for me asking a question over liability and possibly somebody getting hurt in another wreck, I don't think I'm not supporting public safety. For two and a half years, I've done nothing but support public safety.
- I don't even know what to say with the employees, if you're just talking about the take home vehicles. I'm not saying I disagree with you. If there's other things that you're trying to say regarding the Manager, I don't know any. I don't know anything about it, but I do know this: the Manager, in my experience with him here is that he does look at both sides, and he does look at statistics. And if you can show the need for whatever that issue would be, whether it be training or be take home cars. They have that opportunity to show that. And there's certainly no ill will of us trying to drive out public safeties, but especially volunteer firefighters. The whole thing comes down to it started to at least in the majority of the counties in North Carolina, and Stokes is one of them, Monday through Friday. During the day, we have a hard time getting volunteers to respond to calls, and that's the primary thing that started the contracts, and there's no hidden agenda. There's no us against them. I've got to answer to the taxpayers for the money, and I've also got to answer to the fire departments to make sure that we can get you all the help. What can we do to get you all the help? But Statistics does also help too, and that's all I got.

County Manager Jeff Sanborn had no comments.

Assistant County Manager Amber Brown commented:

- Welcome everybody. Thank you all for being here. That's all I got.

Clerk to the Board Olivia Jessup had no comments.

Chairman Wood commented:

I like to welcome everybody. I'm glad to see everybody. Chief Whitaker, thank you for being honest, because that don't exist in this world. It's rare. To the firemen, we need your input. We need y'all and this is just a start, but we got a rough road to hoe in the future. All you got to do. I look at the journal, I'm sad to say on the computer, because you can't get a paper no more, and the firemen are in it every day. They're being shut down, they're being laid off. And I don't understand all that. So, we don't think that we're the enemy. We're here to work this out, and I appreciate y'all's input. And that's all I got.

Conflicts Of Interest

No conflicts of interest were stated by the Board.

CONSENT AGENDA

All attachments presented on the Agenda are available in the attachments of the Agenda on the County Website and are available upon request from the Clerk, with the exception of the minutes approved which are located on the County Website under the minutes tab.

Resolution of Donation to Stokes County Historical Society

Budget Amendments

Minutes

Chairman Wood entertained a motion to approve the Consent Agenda, which included the below:

- Resolution of Donation to Stokes County Historical Society
- Budget Amendments
- Minutes

Commissioner Cox moved to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

Commissioner Chandler seconded the motion. The motion Passed.

DISCUSSION AGENDA

All attachments presented on the Agenda are available in the attachments of the Agenda on the County Website and are available upon request from the Clerk, with the exception of the minutes approved which are located on the County Website under the minutes tab.

Voluntary Agriculture District Board Appointments

Chairman Wood turned the floor over to Olivia Jessup, Clerk to the Board, to present Voluntary Agriculture District Board Appointments.

George Cutchins and Taylor George were nominated to the Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) Advisory Board at their last meeting. Cutchins and George will be replacing Josh Francis and Sloane McPeak as their terms are expiring. The new appointment terms for the individuals will be for three years.

The Board nominated George Cutchins and Taylor George and moved the item to the Action Agenda for next meeting.

Stokes Aging Planning Committee Appointments

Chairman Wood turned the floor over to Olivia Jessup, Clerk to the Board, to present Stokes Aging Planning Committee Appointments.

Vicky East requested the following members of the Aging Planning Committee to be reappointed for this fiscal year 2025/2026:

- Brad Lankford
- Tammie Bennett
- JoAnn Hall
- Judy Hennis
- Brandon Hooker
- Jack Sneed
- Mike Stewart
- Kathy Young
- Waynona Sands

Additionally, she requested Judy Hopkins, Darlene James, and Katie Tedder to be appointed to the Aging Planning Committee.

The Board nominated the list as presented and moved the item to the Action Agenda for the next meeting.

Conditional Approval for Lein Subordination

Chairman Wood turned the floor over to Tory Mabe, Economic Development Director to present Conditional Approval for Lein Subordination.

On June 10, 2025, Finance Director Tammy Keaton was contacted by an attorney representing Mitchell's Meat Processing Inc. about obtaining a payoff quote and needing County approval

for a Subordination Agreement related to a mortgage transition from Farm Credit to Atlantic Union Bank. The County holds a lien on the property through a Building Reuse Grant from NC Commerce. After review, the Commerce Department clarified they had not initiated this lien request.

By June 13, discussions confirmed that Mitchell's Meat was refinancing, and the County was becoming the primary lien holder. Atlantic Union Bank requested that the County subordinate its lien before June 20, but doing so without an updated appraisal or loan documentation posed a financial risk to the County in the event of default or foreclosure.

On July 3, the County requested updated appraisal and loan documents from the company, which were only received on July 14, the same day as the Commissioners' meeting. Of the \$200,000 Building Reuse Grant, \$151,057.91 has been paid out. The appraised property value is \$615,000, while the County's taxable value lists it at \$451,500.

Per the grant agreement, Mitchell's Meat must create and retain 9 new jobs for 6 months; failure to do so could require the County to repay the disbursed funds to the State.

Stokes County Economic Development and Mitchell's Meat seeks conditional approval from the Commissioners to proceed, contingent upon verifying equity and reviewing loan documents.

After some discussion, the Board moved the item to the Action Agenda for tonight's meeting.

ACTION AGENDA

All attachments presented on the Agenda are available in the attachments of the Agenda on the County Website and are available upon request from the Clerk, with the exception of the minutes approved which are located on the County Website under the minutes tab.

DSS Board Appointment

At the last meeting Kathy Young was nominated to serve on the DSS Board. No other applications were received.

Chairman Wood polled the Board.

All stated Kathy Young.

Kathy Young was appointed to the DSS Board.

Conditional Approval for Lein Subordination

Chairman Wood entertained a motion to approve the item as presented.

Commissioner Morris moved to approve Conditional Approval for Lein Subordination.

Commissioner Chandler seconded the motion. The motion Passed.

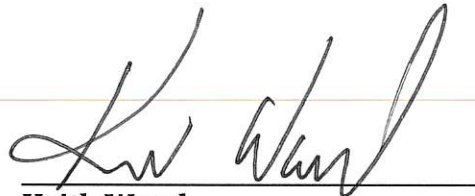
Adjournment

Chairman Wood entertained a motion to adjourn.

Vice-Chairman Barneycastle moved to adjourn at 6:58 pm.

Commissioner Chandler seconded. The motion Passed.


Olivia Jessup
Clerk to the Board


Keith Wood
Chair