

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE ALAMANCE COUNTY BOARD
OF COMMISSIONERS FOR ALAMANCE COUNTY**

**May 19, 2025, 6:30 PM
Commissioners' Meeting Room
124 West Elm Street
Graham, NC 27253**

Board Members Absent: Chairman John Paisley Jr
Vice-Chair Steve Carter
Commissioner Pamela Thompson
Commissioner Ed Priola
Commissioner Kelly Allen

CALL TO ORDER - CHAIRMAN PAISLEY

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE - CHAIRMAN PAISLEY

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Moved by: Commissioner Allen
Seconded by: Vice-Chair Carter

APPROVED UNANIMOUS

PROCLAMATIONS

Emergency Medical Services Week 2025

Commissioner Allen read and presented a proclamation to EMS Director Ray Vipperman and EMS staff in recognition of "Emergency Medical Services Week, May 18-24, 2025."

Moved by: Commissioner Allen
Seconded by: Chairman Paisley

APPROVED UNANIMOUS

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Scott Ward, a county resident, opposed the proposed library plan. He said shifting funding to the cities could restrict library access to county citizens. He continued that he wanted to know how

the money was being spent. Mr. Ward suggested a "citizen dashboard" to see how money was being spent.

Robert Alvis, a Graham resident, spoke that he was the President of the Alamance Burlington Association of Educators. He continued that ABSS should be fully funded and proposed classified pay supplements to bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and other classified employees. He indicated that many classified staff members had multiple jobs to make ends meet. Mr. Alvis offered to meet the Board individually to discuss school funding.

Windy Lampson, a Burlington resident, said she was an ABSS parent and a teacher for 18 years. She announced that she was selected as ABSS Teacher of the Year. She asked the Board to fully fund the ABSS budget request. She said that cuts to positions such as testing coordinators, school instructional specialists, nurses, and many others shifted those duties to teachers. She said the county's property tax rate was lower than that of surrounding counties. She continued that fully funding schools was not just an investment in students, but also in the future workforce. Ms. Lampson urged the Board to fully fund the ABSS budget request.

Shawn Francis, a county resident, stated that he saw inappropriate signs; he shared some examples on the walls at the library. He said that he wrote a public information request to the library director and was ignored. He continued that it was a violation of the law and the government had to respond to public information requests. He spoke about the elimination of DEI and cutting staff. Mr. Francis said that he had not received an answer for two years ago.

Ruth Schallert said she worked at ABSS as an occupational therapist for 9 years. She stated that the county should provide free and appropriate public education. She continued that the main reason there were so many vacancies in special education was that many special education teachers left ABSS for surrounding counties for more compensation. She stated that there was a special education staffing crisis and urged the Board to fully fund the ABSS budget. Ms. Schallert commented that the county could not afford to lose more staff that served special needs students.

Barbara Roberts, a Burlington resident, stated that she served on the Board of Friends of Alamance County Public Libraries for 38 years. She said that she did not want to be part of the silence of the good people and that people deserved a strong library system. She continued that in one month the public libraries had participated in 182 programs, festivals and fairs that were attended by over 5,000 people. In 2016, Friends of the Public Libraries reached the one million mark in fund raising, which supported public libraries. She stated that Alamance County should be proud of having a unified library system. She continued that 2025 marked 100 years of public libraries in Alamance County. Ms. Roberts said public libraries should be a funding priority.

Cassie Dodson, a Burlington resident, said that when a child showed up to school emotionally bleeding, they were told to sit down and be quiet. Those were students whose behaviors were dangerous; students that could not function in the classroom. She mentioned that she was a

teacher for 14 years. She continued that her brother had mental health problems and had died of suicide. As teachers, she indicated that they saw these signs every day. Kids deserved mental health specialists; teachers were not therapists. Ms. Dodson urged the Board to look into that for the budget.

Donna Vanhook, a Burlington resident, asked the Board to appoint Commissioner Thompson as a Restoration Advisory Board clean-up member. She also asked for support for library funding, which included essential services like the mobile internet cafe that helped the rural part of the county. Ms. Vanhook continued that library funding should not be disrupted.

Bob Byrd, a Burlington resident, stated that he was there to support county staff who had attended racial equity training, especially those in managerial, supervisory, or leadership positions. He mentioned that he was an Alamance County Commissioner from 2014 to 2018 and was a commissioner representative on the Board of Health. During his time on the Board of Health, an Elon student gave a workshop on racial disparities in the maternal-child section. He described his experience as transformational in how he viewed race and racism. He stated that the training was relevant to county staff as it gave them a foundational knowledge base. Mr. Byrd said that racial equity training should be encouraged and supported.

Walter Allison, a county resident, stated that the county should fund training for county employees as employees came into contact with the public. He encouraged the Board to take equity training as it made them better people. He stated that the library and the school system should be fully funded. Mr. Allison concluded his comments with a scripture.

Tasha Miles, an Elon resident, stated that she was an ABSS employee for 18 years. She urged the Board to consider fully funding ABSS. She continued that the county planned to spend money on upgrades to the courthouse, but wanted to complain about funding the school system. She challenged the Board to ride a bus with a bus driver and sit in a classroom with special needs students to see their challenges. Ms. Miles continued that pay was ridiculous for the size of the county; cutting funding would not only hurt staff, but also students.

Medora Burke-Scoll, a county resident, stated that she was the Vice President of the Alamance Association of Educators and was a teacher at Eastern Alamance High for 15 years. She said that ABSS was in a budget crisis and teachers across ABSS had taken a reduction in supplements. She mentioned that one librarian filled the role of two librarians. She said frustration came from being asked to tighten the belt, hold on to your seat, and make do for a year. She continued that a full-time testing coordinator and an extra assistant principal were cut. She stated that staff had to figure out testing accountability metrics that made students wait for testing. Ms. Burke-Scoll said that cuts hurt kids.

Sandra Cook, a Haw River resident, said she was an ABSS parent. She stated that a recent report from the NC Department of Public Instruction showed high teacher turnover. She said the report showed that of the 1,400 ABSS teachers who worked last year, 139 of them left the job. A 9.7

percent rate was one of the highest attrition rates in the Triad. She mentioned that her 3rd grader last year was overloaded with 40 students in one classroom until a permanent teacher was hired in mid-October. She also mentioned that her kindergartener's classroom was overloaded last year until a teacher was hired in mid-October. This year, her 1st grader lacked a permanent teacher for a few weeks, and her 4th grader had 35 students in the classroom. She stated that high teacher turnover was not only a burden, but also fiscally wasteful. She said a \$5.72 million increase was justified, as much of the funding increased teaching supplements and benefits that improved retention. Ms. Cook urged the Board to fully fund ABSS.

Theresa Draughn, a county resident, said she was a parent and a substitute teacher. She asked the Board to fully fund the school board's budget request, including pay supplements for teachers and classified staff. She stated that supplements were not a luxury, but a necessity. She stated that some of the people taking care of kids made poverty-level wages. She continued that public schools were a foundation for communities where children spent most of their days. She said the county had committed millions to a courthouse expansion, which showed what was possible when something was considered a priority. Ms. Draughn urged the board to fully fund the school board's budget request.

Aletha McKenzie said that she was a nurse for 52 years. She said that children should be prioritized, and this was all about the children. She continued by saying that children competed in a global market. She stated that half of the children could not read, half could not speak, and half could not present themselves to get a job. She mentioned that children were not being prepared to make good decisions for all of us. Ms. McKenzie said that the ancestors died to secure freedom and democracy; the children needed it.

LaSonya Moffett, a county resident, said she was a social worker at Williams for a year. She stated that she started as a social worker in November of 2023 and, in January of 2024, was told that she would be out of a job in March 2024. She said social workers left due to stress and fear of not having a job. She continued that most social workers had more than one school to assist. She said it was difficult to support students when they had to jump around to different schools; kids needed consistency. Ms. Moffett said students and families had been affected by the drastic cuts.

Regenia Richardson, a mathematics teacher at Williams High asked the Board to fund the proposed ABSS budget. She said that she taught in Illinois for 17 years and took a \$29,000 pay cut to do the same job, which she said was more strenuous. She said kids arrived from the bus, 45 minutes late every day. She mentioned that kids were being discouraged, and she had to provide extra sessions for students. She said more bus drivers were needed; it was important for kids to get to school on time. Ms. Richardson urged the Board to fund ABSS.

Sam Moser, a county resident, commended the school teachers present at the meeting. He said that he wanted the Board to fund the school system adequately and for the school system to use the money appropriately. He said that several teachers had told him that money was not the issue,

but that it was students who lacked discipline. He continued that he wanted to be sure that tax money was being used properly. Mr. Moser urged the Board not to increase property taxes again this year.

Hillary Messer, a teacher, said she moved from Florida and faced a major pay cut. She stated that with a teacher assistant, she taught small groups. She mentioned that she met a teacher assistant who drove the bus before school, taught at an EC classroom, and drove the bus for a high school in the afternoon with three kids of her own. She stated that she was probably the only teacher who did not work two jobs, so she did Instacart on the side to ensure she had rent money. Ms. Messer said that she did not mind paying more in taxes.

Southey Blanton, a Burlington resident, said he had 4 children. He said that the sticker policy was created because people were uncomfortable that gay and transgender people existed. He mentioned that the stickers were meant for parents to police material. He continued that LGBTQ youth were 4 times more likely to commit suicide due to stigmatization. Mr. Blanton described the sticker policy as an attack on a small minority; all because a few people found it "icky."

Christopher Bullard, a Burlington resident, talked about Dadfest, an event that would take place on June 14 at the Cadillac Ranch. Mr. Bullard invited everyone to attend.

CONSENT AGENDA

Moved by: Vice-Chair Carter

Seconded by: Commissioner Allen

APPROVED UNANIMOUS

APPOINTMENTS/ REAPPOINTMENTS

Alamance Community College Board of Trustees – Steve Carter

Veteran Service Committee-Robin Jackson & Brian Pierce

Budget Amendment 11

Juvenile Crime Prevention Council FY 2025-2026 Funding Plan

Tax Refunds, Releases, and Exemptions- Extensions April 2025

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Regular Minutes of May 5, 2025

PRESENTATIONS/OTHER BUSINESS

Vaya Health Update - Donald Reuss, Vaya Health

Donald Reuss from Vaya Health and Sara Huffman from RHA Health Services gave an updated Alamance Behavioral Health Center overview. He mentioned the services being offered: walk-in services, a dedicated entrance for children, adolescents, and families, a peer living room, a pharmacy, a behavioral urgent care 24/7/365, and a facility-based crisis center. The walk-in services were operated Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. He mentioned that more people accessed the walk-in services, and expected numbers continued to climb. Ms. Huffman added that the walk-in services were the first part to get into therapy with a therapist or doctor. Mr. Reuss described the peer living room as people with lived experiences helping other people with lived experiences. He said that people talked to their peers Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.; he considered it preventative care. Ms. Huffman said the pharmacy provided full services, such as flu shots and medical medications. Mr. Reuss continued with urgent care that opened 24/7/365, adding that it operated like an emergency room but could not deal with acute medical conditions. He indicated that numbers were climbing. He mentioned that it diverted people from jails and the emergency department (ED). He stated that 101 people who would have been in the ED or jail were diverted away in March. Commissioner Thompson asked whether regulars who had been to the ED were sent to the diversion center or kept at the hospital. Ms. Huffman answered that they were working with Cone Health and had a good process when transitioning those individuals. Mr. Reuss said that security was good and that there was 24/7/365 security at the center. He said they tracked drop-offs; neighbors, friends, family members, and law enforcement could drop off people. He continued by saying they tracked which law enforcement agency used the service. Mr. Reuss said that a 16-bed facility-based crisis center opened on May 5th. He stated that diversions from the ED rose due to the opening of the facility-based crisis center. The facility kept people from 3 - 7 days, sometimes a little longer. He continued that the next step for the facility-based crisis center was to get it certified as an involuntary commitment site. He said that state statute allowed facility-based crisis centers and emergency rooms to be the only facilities that could be certified as involuntary drop-off sites. He mentioned that the facility had to be operational for 6 months before the state processed the application for involuntary commitment certification. Mr. Reuss stated that an operational campaign would publicize the facility and services to the community in June. Ms. Huffman mentioned that billboards will be seen around the community. Commissioner Thompson asked about the children's areas and what those areas looked like. Mr. Reuss said that urgent care was for kids and adults. He mentioned that the facility-based crisis was only for adults. He thought there were four facility-based crisis centers for children in the state. He added that children could be moved across the state for facility-based crisis services.

Team SeQuEnCe 7890 Presentation

Noah De Leon from First Robotics Competition (FRC) Team Sequence 7890 said they had been a team since 2019. He described FRC as a global organization that strived to teach kids how to be good engineers and prepared kids to be the leaders of tomorrow. He stated that students coded and marketed the robot. He said robots weighed up to 140 pounds and reached up to 8 feet in the

air. Mr. De Leon mentioned that their team comprised 22 members from 14 different schools. He also mentioned that they had a space in Holy Hill Mall. Carly Gehringer, Spencer Critcher, James Penrod, and other team members were present.

ICE Contract Presentation - County Attorney Stevens & Susan Evans, Finance Officer

County Attorney Stevens provided information on the ICE contract that had been in place since 2007 and amended several times since. He mentioned that the amendments were primarily related to adding or removing beds and changes in the compensation rate. He said that ICE brought in up to 40 inmates. He stated that service rates were negotiated in 2020; negotiations were ongoing to provide a higher compensation rate. County Attorney Stevens said that Sheriff Johnson had negotiated getting paid for 40 beds regardless of whether the beds were being occupied. Commissioner Thompson inquired about what happened when there were over 40 inmates. Susan Evans, Finance Officer, said that at times, there could be more than 40. The ICE detainees were not mixed with the general inmate population. Commissioner Thompson inquired about what kind of money was being made. Ms. Evans stated that \$135 had been the per diem rate since 2019. She advised that they were asking ICE to renegotiate a per diem rate that covered the cost of detention officers, feeding detainees, medical evaluations, medications, and clothing. Commissioner Thompson inquired about how excess money from the ICE contract was used. Ms. Evans said profits were used to buy guns and tasers for the Sheriff's Office. She added that there were no restrictions on what those funds could be used for.

Presentation of the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Recommended Budget - County Manager York

County Manager York said that she recommended a fiscally responsible budget. She stated that the Board's goal had no tax increases. She continued that a flat budget with no tax increases required \$4.4 million in service cuts. She stated that cuts could come from closing library branches. Eliminating library branches at Graham, Mebane, and North Park would save the county \$1.3 million in recurring operational expenses. Closing the libraries reduced full-time positions by 17.6. She continued that they had looked into eliminating positions from all non-mandated services, which resulted in 30 additional layoffs. She said that eliminations impacted the county manager's office, the county clerk's office, the budget and management services, the Family Justice Center, information technology, parks, the register of deeds, and veteran services. She mentioned that they looked at reducing compensation for the county workforce, cost of living, merit pay, and freezing other pay for a reduction of \$2.4 million. County Manager York stated that she spent the last two years trying to build an organizational culture where employees felt supported, valued, and appreciated. She noted those strategies destroyed those efforts. She continued that the recommended budget contained a 1.59-cent property tax increase. She stated that a 1.59 cent tax increase equated to \$52.80 on a median assessed home of \$265,200; on a \$200,000 home, it equated to \$31.84. She mentioned that this rate was significantly lower than that of surrounding counties in the region. She added that a one-penny increase resulted in \$2.6 million in tax revenues next year. She said that personnel costs represented about 41% of the

total budget. County Manager York stated that if the full amount requested were funded, a 6.1-cent tax increase would be required. She continued that tough decisions had to be made, which included hiring freezes and position reductions. She mentioned that 13 new full-time positions were requested and were justified with data. The total recommended current expense for ABSS was \$46.7 million; the requested expense was \$59 million. ACC's total recommended current expense was \$5.4 million; the current expense requested was \$5.2 million.

Commissioner Thompson said the Board should cancel the courthouse project and put the 911 building on the market. She stated that they could not just build buildings; they had to build lives. She continued that they had to focus on what makes this world go: young children and the teachers who taught them.

Commissioner Allen asked if money had been given to the airport authority. County Manager York said that the county was, and she recommended a reduction of \$125,000.

Commissioner Allen stated that the airport authority received \$20 million from the state and funds from the City of Burlington last year. She mentioned that the airport should be self-supported and that the county should prioritize what is important.

Commissioner Priola said no one proposed closing the libraries. He stated that the library system was bloated with staff. He continued that, according to the Museum and Library Services Association, library visits had been reduced by fifty percent over the past ten years.

Vice-Chair Carter encouraged citizens to take the time to look at the budget numbers. He said that one of his top priorities when he ran for office was seeing an SRO in every school and having every school safe, which was done. He asked how the Board can fund adequately without raising taxes. He said it did not go both ways.

Chairman Paisley said that a public hearing on June 2nd allowed voters and citizens to comment on the budget to the Board.

COUNTY ATTORNEY'S REPORT

County Attorney Stevens said that one of the public speakers, Mr. Francis, had indicated that he had not received a response to a public records request. He confirmed that the county responded on May 1, 2024, and sent the requested records to him.

Commissioner Priola added that the public speaker had included in his request an account of training related to public advocacy. He indicated that the public speaker did not receive that information. Commissioner Priola asked the county attorney if he could inquire about those trainings.

County Attorney Stevens said that he would look back through the sent records. He indicated they would have responded with that information if they had those records, but he would review again.

Commissioner Priola asked County Attorney Stevens for a follow-up on the 2003 Supreme Court case of the United States versus the American Library Association. Commissioner Priola opined that the case permitted some regulation of public libraries concerning minors.

County Attorney Stevens explained that the case involved funding for a program that would have limited access to obscene materials to all persons, including minors. He continued that the court dealt with that situation and the federal funding that applied to that, whether it was regulated or could be regulated. He mentioned the topic of the case was relevant to the same discussion and the same material that the county is dealing with here. However, it dealt mainly with obscene materials to the extent that they were in the county libraries, which could have regulated access. He commented that the discussion related to the labeling of books in the libraries is material that might be objectionable to some. It might fall short of whatever the legal definition of obscenity is. County Attorney Stevens opined that the case was instructive and was unsure whether it outlined and prescribed a clear regulation system that the county could implement.

COUNTY MANAGER'S REPORT

No report given.

COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

Commissioner Thompson remembered that a previous Board had paid for a salary study and did not follow through with funding those salaries. She said that if the Board was going to do the third year of the market study, they could not pull the rug out from under employees.

Commissioner Thompson said the county needed quality staff. She said she wanted strong people in county government, strong social workers, and strong law enforcement that had everything they needed to do their jobs. Commissioner Thompson mentioned that people tell them yearly that they want the schools and other stuff funded. She stated that school funding mattered because it built the foundation of the county. She continued that they could not cut funding to teachers, bus drivers, and cafeteria workers.

Commissioner Allen mentioned a phone call that she had received about an employee's salary. She said that when you have experienced employees with proven knowledge, they need to get paid. She said you get what you pay for. Commissioner Allen said the county had to pay to get and retain the best of the best.

Commissioner Priola said that every dollar spent came from people who earned that dollar. He stated that tax relief for people was not a policy preference but a matter of whether people kept or lost their homes. Commissioner Priola stated that the five of them were elected as Republicans for limited government, low tax rates, etc. He encouraged them to meet their responsibility. He continued that the Board needed to reject a tax increase and find money to pay for essential things.

Vice-Chair Carter said the county was working on a dashboard where citizens could see how money was being spent. He continued that Alamance County was the 15th largest county in the state, the 13th fastest growing, and the 18th lowest in tax rates. Vice-Chair Carter mentioned that only 17 other counties had a lower tax rate. He mentioned a 2009 study that showed for every dollar collected in property taxes, county residents used \$1.46 in services. He stated that the Board had committed to county employees by funding the market study and did not want them to lose their credibility.

Chairman Paisley spoke that the Board had already funded Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the market study and adjusted salaries. He advised that Phase 3 of the market study was not being phased out. He commented that County Manager York had included Phase 3 in her recommended budget. Chairman Paisley mentioned he had received complaints that homeless people were begging for money and lying in the aisles of the May Memorial Library. He suggested conversing with the Burlington City Council and Police Chief Balog. He noted that even though May Memorial was in the City of Burlington, the county was still responsible for ensuring the libraries were safe for children. Chairman Paisley explained that the Board had asked County Manager York to create a zero budget, and she did. He continued by saying that she had come up with her recommended budget with a potential increase in the tax rate by 1.59 cents per \$100. He said it was a budget nobody liked, but County Manager York did exactly what her job required her to do by creating a recommended budget. He said the county had top-notch people, and they had to support the county personnel.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Allen, seconded by Vice-Chair Carter moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried.

There being no further business to be brought before the Board, the meeting adjourned at 10:27 PM.

John Paisley, Jr., Chairman

Alamance County Board of Commissioners

Tory M. Frink, Clerk to the Board