

MINUTES
WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
January 6, 2026

The Wilkes County Board of Commissioners met on Tuesday, January 6, 2026 at 5:00 P.M. with the following members present: Chairman Hardin Kennedy, Vice Chairman Evan Handy, Commissioner Casey Joe Johnson, Commissioner Bill Sexton and Commissioner Shirley Randleman.

Also present for the meeting were Tony Triplett, County Attorney; John Yates, County Manager; and Sarah Call, Clerk to the Board.

Chairman Hardin Kennedy welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at this time.

INVOCATION – Chairman Kennedy led the Invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – Commissioner Randleman led the Pledge of Allegiance.

BUDGET AMENDMENTS/TRANSFERS – Commissioner Bill Sexton made a motion to approve Budget Amendment No. 22 (EMS – \$1,660.00 Insurance reimbursement check to repair a garage door at EMS base 3 located within Millers Creek Fire Dept.); and Budget Amendment No. 23 (Airport & Landfill – \$24,000.00 This request is to increase revenues to cover legal fees for airport and landfill projects. **NOTE:** The County will begin billing Wilkes TDA, Wilkes Transportation Authority, Wilkes Soil and Water, and any outside agencies and non-profits that use the County Attorney for legal services. The Wilkes County legal fees will be billed at \$250.00 per hour.) The motion was seconded by Commissioner Shirley Randleman and unanimously approved.

WILKES COUNTY AIRPORT:

1. WORK AUTHORIZATION NO. 5 – WESTSIDE CORPORATE HANGAR SITE DEVELOPMENT (DESIGN) – Chairman Kennedy welcomed Greg Kershaw, PE Project Manager Ardurra Group. Mr. Kershaw said they have before them the Work Authorization #5 for the Wilkes County Airport, called the Westside Corporate Hangar Site Development. This is for two 100 x 100 ft. hangar spots that require some site work that needs to be accomplished, to make those pad ready sites so someone can build a 100 x 100 ft. hangar. That would include extending utilities, extending auto access on the back side of the hangars, and extending aircraft access on the front side, tying it in to the existing apron. The work authorization amount is for \$151,918.00. What's generating this right now is, there is a potential tenant that is engaged in developing their plans, they're interested in building the first of those two sites. They've got one person ready and they've had a few people reaching out for possibly the second spot as well. One thing they will do with these design plans, Mr. Kershaw said, is build it into two schedules of work. If there's only one hangar spot that's ready to go at the start, they could easily move forward with just doing the one, rather than site prepping for both of them at the same time. This design effort will take

between four and six months, so this will help them stay ahead on getting design plans for this hangar building.

Vice Chairman Handy asked how many aircraft a tenant can fit in a 100 x 100 ft. building. Airport Director Dustin Caudill replied it would depend on the size of the aircraft, if it's small aircraft, at least 5 or 6, if it's bigger, such as jets, two maximum. Mr. Yates added he thinks the tenant they're talking with now has five aircrafts. Vice Chairman Handy asked how many months out of the year do they have to be hangared here to get the tax revenue. Mr. Kershaw replied at least 6 months out of the year. Chairman Kennedy asked if the gentleman the County is talking to currently is looking at leaving another location to come here. Mr. Caudill replied yes. Chairman Kennedy asked does the funding for the \$151,918.00 work. Mr. Kershaw replied the plan now is for the design effort is to be funded from the Airport general fund. Mr. Yates stated the Finance Director will do a Budget Amendment for the next meeting for them to approve. Chairman Kennedy said that will amend the Airport budget, so it's coming out of the Airport fund, no tax dollars. Chris Huffman stated the Airport will pay for it.

Commissioner Bill Sexton made a motion to approve Work Authorization No. 5 for the Westside Corporate Hangar Site Development as presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Evan Handy and unanimously approved.

2. FEE AND RENT SCHEDULE – Chairman Kennedy recognized Dustin Caudill, Airport Manager. Mr. Caudill said before them is an amendment to the T-hangar rates. They did complete constructing two sets of T-hangars on the east side of the Airport, he said, and with the services they offer on the east side consisting of electricity, water, and sewer, he would recommend charging \$400.00 per unit instead of \$300.00 to \$350.00 which is what's being charged on the west side, because the west side only has electricity. Mr. Caudill said he called around to several airports throughout North Carolina to compare rates and the rates he's presenting are compatible with other airports. Mr. Triplett added the Airport Board has discussed this too and they are in agreement with the new rate of \$400.00 a month for the new T-hangars on the east side of the runway.

Chairman Kennedy said his understanding is these two new hangars were grant funded, but they're full, they've already got tenants ready to go in these as well. Mr. Caudill replied yes, they've got thirteen full right now, and still waiting on a couple more that are supposed to take a look at them next week. Chairman Kennedy asked if this goes into effect tonight, the \$400.00, that will affect them too. Mr. Caudill replied yes.

Commissioner Shirley Randleman made a motion to approve the Fee and Rent Schedule as presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Casey Johnson and was unanimously approved.

WILKES COUNTY ANIMAL SERVICES – ANIMAL RESCUE OF THE YEAR AWARD
Chairman Kennedy recognized Bruce Johnson, Director and Mark Bowers, Shelter Manager. Mr. Johnson said they have an award for The Humane Society of Wilkes, for being the top rescue group of the year. They wanted to show them that they appreciate them and all their hard work.

Mr. Bowers stated they rescued 701 animals from the shelter this year, that's more than some shelters even bring in, they do extraordinary work. Vice Chairman Handy asked if this is going to be an ongoing annual recognition, an animal rescue award of the year. Mr. Johnson replied yes, that's their plan.

Chairman Kennedy stated for anyone that doesn't know, they have a Facebook page, and he encouraged people to like and follow that page and said they will be amazed at how much goes in and out of that center. He also noted how much hard work the Animal Shelter staff themselves put in.



Members of the Humane Society of Wilkes present to accept the award were: Katie Parsons, Mary Parsons, Ed Parsons, Blair Hancock, and Jennifer Mathies, along with Bruce Johnson and Mark Bowers from Wilkes Animal Services, and the Board of Commissioners Chairman Hardin Kennedy, Vice Chairman Evan Handy, Commissioner Casey Johnson, Commissioner Bill Sexton, and Commissioner Shirley Randleman.

FIRE DEPARTMENT RESCUE CONTRACTS:

1. AUSTIN VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT, INC. – Chairman Kennedy recognized Tony Triplett, County Attorney. Mr. Triplett said they have copies before them of a Rescue Addendum for eight of their fire departments. In November, the Board approved a template, a standard form contract, for the fire departments for rescue services, and he said this is that template now put into individual formatted form for each of the eight fire departments. He said each fire department has signed it. He wants to remind the Board that this is a temporary contract and just runs through June 30, 2026. This was to get them through the rest of the fiscal year and get an arrangement in place for continued rescue services by these fire departments who have been previously qualified by the County, so they can continue to provide rescue services and the County can pay them for those services at the rate of \$1,000 per call for each out of district call. He said that is what this contract calls for.

Vice Chairman Handy said to restate, this is just to get them through budget year 2025 through June of this year, 2026. Mr. Triplett replied yes, that's as far as it goes. They will need to talk again with the fire departments in the coming months, to discuss how they're going to go forward

in the following years, with a more permanent type arrangement. This is to get them through the rest of this fiscal year. Commissioner Randleman said when this was discussed, there was a beginning date when these departments will be paid that additional fee for outside service. Mr. Triplett replied yes, the beginning date was May 6, 2025.

Commissioner Sexton said for the people here that may not understand what they're talking about, when they lost the Rescue Squad last year, they contracted with fire departments that already had rescue services to provide that service, and this is what this is for, the contracts for those fire departments to provide that service, and they've been providing that service since last year, and they've been doing a great job. He, Chairman Kennedy, and Jason Reavis met with them on several occasions and worked out these contracts with them and a lot of hard work went into it. He's proud of these fire departments that they're signing contracts with, to step up and provide rescue service with the County. Chairman Kennedy said thank you to Jason, David Holbrook, and Robbie Bolin and all the hard work that they've put in, they've been face to face with that and he truly appreciates that. Out-of-district calls are at 66 as of now, and he prays they have zero calls, be it in or out of district, for the year 2026. Thank you all for coming together at a difficult time, he said, as it shows how strong Wilkes County is and how deeply rooted their fire departments are, to grab that baton and charge forward and say their citizens are number one.

Mr. Triplett said the Board would need to approve the rescue services addendum for each of the eight fire departments by separate motions, beginning with Austin Volunteer Fire Department.

Commissioner Shirley Randleman made a motion to approve the Contract for Fire Protection – First Revised Addendum for Provision of Rescue Services for Austin Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. as presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Casey Johnson and was unanimously approved.

2. BROADWAY FIRE DEPARTMENT, INC. –

Vice Chairman Evan Handy made a motion to approve the Contract for Fire Protection – First Revised Addendum for Provision of Rescue Services for Broadway Fire Department, Inc. as presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Casey Johnson and was unanimously approved.

3. CHAMPION VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT, INC. –

Commissioner Shirley Randleman made a motion to approve the Contract for Fire Protection – First Revised Addendum for Provision of Rescue Services for Champion Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. as presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Casey Johnson and was unanimously approved.

4. MCGRADY VOLUNTEER FIRE AND RESCUE, INC. –

Commissioner Shirley Randleman made a motion to approve the Contract for Fire Protection – First Revised Addendum for Provision of Rescue Services for McGrady Volunteer Fire and

Rescue, Inc. as presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Casey Johnson and was unanimously approved.

5. MILLERS CREEK VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT, INC. –

Vice Chairman Evan Handy made a motion to approve the Contract for Fire Protection – First Revised Addendum for Provision of Rescue Services for Millers Creek Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. as presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Randleman and was unanimously approved.

6. MULBERRY-FAIRPLAINS FIRE & RESCUE DEPARTMENT, INC. –

Vice Chairman Evan Handy made a motion to approve the Contract for Fire Protection – First Revised Addendum for Provision of Rescue Services for Mulberry-Fairplains Fire & Rescue Department, Inc. as presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Casey Johnson and was unanimously approved.

7. PLEASANT HILL VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT, INC. –

Commissioner Shirley Randleman made a motion to approve the Contract for Fire Protection – First Revised Addendum for Provision of Rescue Services for Pleasant Hill Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. as presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Bill Sexton and was unanimously approved.

8. RONDA COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT, INC. –

Commissioner Shirley Randleman made a motion to approve the Contract for Fire Protection – First Revised Addendum for Provision of Rescue Services for Ronda Community Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. as presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Bill Sexton and was unanimously approved.

WILKES COUNTY DISTRICT W TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY – FINANCIAL UPDATE – Chairman Kennedy welcomed and recognized Trevor Whitson, TDA Chairman and Becky Martinez, TDA Accountant. Mr. Whitson went over the financial report sent to the Board at this time.

Mr. Whitson stated looking at page 4 of the financial report, line item for funds from District K FY2026, as most of them know, years ago there was a Town TDA and a District K, which was everything outside of municipalities that was separate from the Town TDA. Once both of those TDA's were abolished and combined into one District W, they had carry forward funds from District K. One of the things they have done with that, is a program that they refer to as find your fund campaign, so they dedicated \$130,000 towards promoting those businesses, those tourism activities outside of these municipalities.

Commissioner Randleman said she appreciates that going forward, in compliance with the law that was adopted to create District W, they will be receiving this same kind of report on a quarterly basis and at the end of the fiscal year. Mr. Whitson replied yes. Commissioner Randleman said she thinks back to District K because initially she was involved in K, when the Town of Wilkesboro operated independently of K, and K was the County, then the Town of Wilkesboro only collected 3%. Moving forward, when W went into effect, they started collecting 6%. Taking that into consideration, it appears to her that some of the increase in revenue would be from going from 3% to 6%. If they were still at the 3%, they would be bringing in about half of what they're bringing in. Mr. Whitson replied he would agree with that statement. Commissioner Randleman said there is one item on the expense sheet, line item 301, fees for professional services, that is the line item that includes the Director's salary and all the contract staff, because they're all contract. She asked if this was correct, and Mr. Whitson replied yes. Commissioner Randleman stated line item 301, on expenses, that is all the professional contract services, and she asked if this was correct as well. Mr. Whitson replied yes.

Vice Chairman Handy asked in looking at line item 650, reimbursable expense from District K, is that \$130,000 what was left over from K and they spent \$87,000 and \$33,000 is what they have left? Mr. Whitson replied yes, that money was spent specifically in District K, which was how the legislation was written, the money needed to be spent directly in District K.

Commissioner Sexton asked Mr. Whitson if he would explain the difference between District K and District W. Mr. Whitson replied originally District K was for everything outside of Wilkesboro, North Wilkesboro and Ronda, the three municipalities inside the County. When District K was formed, there was already a Town TDA for Wilkesboro at 3% occupancy tax, and basically other than a handful of Airbnb's, that money came from the people that stayed in a hotel. Now, with Airbnb's and VRBO becoming so much more popular, and people getting into the short term rental business, they formed District K, which is outside of those municipalities, and their occupancy tax was at 6%. They were in existence from January until October of 2023, and then both of those organizations were abolished, and they created a new District, which is District W, which is all of Wilkes County except for the portion of West End Elkin that's inside the Elkin town limits. The occupancy tax that is collected now is from Wilkesboro, North Wilkesboro, Ronda, Ferguson, Triplett, everywhere inside of Wilkes County. That's the difference between the two, and now it's all been combined into one, District W.

Commissioner Randleman stated she has the language, as far as K, because the bill that abolished K says that any revenue collected by the Town of Wilkesboro or Wilkes County's District K, prior to the repeal of the respective occupancy tax authorizations under this act, must only be used for the direct benefit of those respective areas. She thinks the legislation is very clear, what everybody was supposed to be doing. Mr. Whitson said he appreciates that she has helped them with some clarity as well. Vice Chairman Handy asked if Wilkesboro has spent whatever is left from their original TDA. Mr. Whitson replied to his understanding, he was not a part of that Board, that money was dedicated to some capital improvement projects. He believes a lot of that money was dedicated to the bathrooms that were going to be built, but have not been constructed yet, near the stage in the Commons area. Vice Chairman Handy said he would be curious, as they migrate towards W, having all that washed away, he just wanted to know how much they had left.

Chairman Kennedy recognized Thomas Salley, TDA Director, in the audience and thanked him for being there, and also Ken Noland, the Wilkesboro Town Manager. He asked who is overseeing the Wilkesboro TDA Funds. Mr. Noland replied he is. He said what happened was those monies that were remaining at the abolishment of that TDA were transferred directly to a non-profit that the Town controls, The Friends of Wilkesboro, and that non-profit has that money. It was dedicated, as the Chairman of the TDA said, to bathroom projects in the downtown, they have that project out to bid right now, waiting on results and hoping it will come in at a price they can afford.

Chairman Kennedy asked going back to the fees for professional services, he sees they have a budgetary number of \$152,600.00, how many different individuals is that for? Ms. Becky Martinez replied that regularly on a recurring basis they have people that are doing copywriting for them for different publications, they have two people doing that, a social media manager herself doing the accounting and a CPA that does the annual audit, and the director's cost through the Town of Wilkesboro. Chairman Kennedy said it is six people that are recurring. Ms. Martinez replied yes. Mr. Whitson said the percentage of the budget on that is 14%, through some research they've done with other TDA's throughout the State, the average is around 25%, so they feel like they're getting a really good bang for their buck. Chairman Kennedy stated he appreciates the financial responsibility of not spending more than they bring in, that's hard these days, but from what he's seeing they're not outspending what's coming in. He said they have a nest egg sitting there and to please keep that moving forward so they don't spend more than they take in. Ms. Martinez added they are contracting local people, too, so it's providing jobs for local contractors.

Commissioner Johnson asked how often does the TDA meet. Mr. Whitson replied monthly. Commissioner Johnson asked if they get much participation from those who pay the occupancy tax as far as the homeowners. Mr. Whitson replied not as much as they would like, they have had some people that started attending their meetings because they were opposed to the occupancy tax, and they have completely flipped. Now they're in support of it because of the things the TDA is doing. He would welcome more people to attend their meetings so they can know what they are trying to accomplish with this occupancy tax. But he said the honest answer to Commissioner Johnson's question was no, they have not had as many people attend as he would wish. Ms. Martinez added they are hosting an event where they're inviting their partners, trying to encourage them to participate more, and give them feedback and information. Vice Chairman Handy asked if they could put that on the County Facebook page to promote and try and help them get attendance. Ms. Sarah Call replied yes, if they will send the information. Chairman Kennedy said he talked to the EDC and said some of the work that they do here in economic development definitely attracts tourism, and he asked if there are ways they can partner to save money and still promote it. Mr. Whitson replied they had a marketing committee meeting today and Francisco Martinez with the EDC was there, and he is 100% correct, there's good opportunities there to work together.

They presented a short TV ad at this time showing some areas in the County that bring overnight visitors.

WILKES COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY – BOARD APPOINTMENT – Chairman Kennedy recognized Suzanne Manners, Librarian. Mrs. Manners said on behalf of the Wilkes County

Library Board, she would like to request the appointment of Heather Tedder to serve on the Library Board. Chairman Kennedy asked if she had been appointed before. Ms. Manners replied no, when she began her job at the County, Ms. Tedder was working with the County library system to do surveys and studies about the importance of being part of the region.

Commissioner Shirley Randleman made a motion to approve the appointment of Heather Tedder to serve on the Wilkes County Library Board as requested at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Johnson and was unanimously approved.

WILKES COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE – ACCEPTANCE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTED DIVERSION (LEAD) GRANT – Chairman Kennedy recognized Major Logan Kerr. Mr. Kerr stated he brought Mr. Fred Brason along with him tonight because this project deeply involves Project Lazarus and Fred is a foremost expert on this LEAD program and this grant opportunity. Major Kerr said LEAD is a Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion program, it's a pre-booking diversion that offers an alternative to arrest and prosecution for low-level crimes, especially those related to drug use, mental health, or poverty. It involves police officers referring individuals to community-based support services instead of booking them into jail. LEAD programs are designed to improve public safety and public health, by addressing the underlying problem that is causing the criminal action. He said it focuses on the unmet need of the person, such as substance abuse disorders and mental health. This has already been implemented throughout the State of North Carolina, in multiple cities and counties including Fayetteville, Wilmington, and New Hanover County, all of whom already have a LEAP program in their communities. Duke University did an evaluation on the LEAD program, he said, and they found it reduced recidivism, improved overall public safety, and enhanced public health. He stated that all of the local law enforcement, the two Towns, and the Sheriff's office came together on this program, they are all in support it.

Fred Brason said this is a grant opportunity from the North Carolina Department Health and Human Services that they applied for, because they have never had a LEAD program here, which means most individuals in those circumstances were unfortunately having to go into the jail. They have learned over time that arresting somebody with a substance issue or mental health issue is not going to solve that problem. This is an avenue to solve that problem, he said, rather than put the illness on the County and the expenses of putting someone in the jail, who doesn't necessarily belong there. That was one of their goals, because in all the years they've been dealing with substance use in Wilkes County there was a gap for those individuals who had no place to go and no safety net. Mr. Brason said this provides a safety net. Through the grant process, they're allocating money to the Sheriff's office and the different Towns, in order to have a specific liaison individual from those departments and offices to work directly with them and the community to refer the individuals for all the support they need. Every individual that has a substance or mental health issue has a circle, he said, and that circle is family for the most part. They now have a family oriented recovery coach to work directly with the family, so that everybody is supported. This is a referral mechanism for all the resources they have in the community, to support those individuals so they don't fall through the cracks and don't have the recidivism and end up back in jail, or end up back in substance use, or a possible overdose. It will also address the social calls that all of the police officers are ending up doing. The LEAD program is a two year grant which

was supposed to start July 1st, he said, but the funds were just released a few weeks ago, so it's already into a carryover stage with the state and they have funds for two years to carry this through and roll it over beyond that.

Commissioner Randleman asked if a person goes into this program and then has a relapse, what is the mechanism that will allow them to apprehend that person? Mr. Brason replied if someone is referred into the LEAD program and they go back to a relapse and use, unless there is an individual crime that comes from that, they don't push them out of the program, they continue to support them. Commissioner Randleman asked if it would take further criminal activity for the Sheriff's office to go out and apprehend them. Mr. Brason replied yes. Other individuals, like a social call, is one and done and they just deal with those individuals, he said. Mr. Kerr added that's what they have the liaison office for.

Vice Chairman Handy asked if this is the same program the Judge Crumpton came and presented before. Mr. Kerr replied no. Vice Chairman Handy asked since this is a two year grant program, are they going to be able to reapply in two years? Mr. Brason replied very possibly, they're all supported by the State, they're well-funded, the State and Federal Government supports them. Vice Chairman Handy said he was curious if they need to work that in after two years to their budget process or if they would be able to reapply. Mr. Brason replied that's a possibility, it can also move in to the different departments in the office to remain ongoing. He said that's why they wanted to build the liaison process, so it's sustainable within the different departments and the Sheriff's Office.

Chairman Kennedy said it sounds like a great program with the grant funding, but as they know, if it starts with a grant, when the grant cycle ends, then it becomes the question how do they fund it later. Dealing with mental health himself, there's a large gap that they've had for many years, not just this County, but the whole United States. With this, some could be referred back to Daymark and the IVC. They don't want mental health folks in a jail, they want them where they can get some help, but they have to make sure the people around them are safe prior to that.

Commissioner Shirley Randleman made a motion to approve the Acceptance of Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) Grant for two years as presented and requested at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Evan Handy and was unanimously approved.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES – UPDATE – Chairman Kennedy welcomed Kevin Brown, DSS Director. Mr. Brown said the Low Energy Assistance program started December 10th. It is a federal funded program that provides a one-time benefit payment to help eligible households with their heating expenses. Wilkes was allocated \$502,000 as of today they have \$211,000 remaining, 279 applications processed.

Mr. Brown said they wanted to say thank you to the community for their generous support of the Foster Children at Christmas. They are very appreciative; they went above and beyond to support the families and kids to get the gifts they wanted at Christmas.

Mr. Brown went over the November monthly caseload report, Foster Care financial report, Adoption Services financial report, Child Development and Subsidized Child Care financial report. Next, he went through the CPS Foster Care monthly reports for November.

Chairman Kennedy asked how is someone referred or how does someone apply for the low energy assistance program. Mr. Brown replied they can apply online through EPass, they can apply by phone, mail, and in person at their College Street Office; the quickest is by phone. Chairman Kennedy said he was on site when the kids come in and it was great to see the gifts the community provided, some very large items were provided to the kids and it was wonderful to see.

TAX DEPARTMENT – SETTLEMENT – Chairman Kennedy recognized Will Lankford. Mr. Lankford said anytime the term ends for a Tax Collector, whether it is voluntary or not, there is a tax settlement that is to be passed. It states what has been collected up to that point and then it is turned over to the new Tax Administrator or Collector. He is here to present the settlement from the Tax Collector’s report which is from the beginning of this fiscal year until the last day of his appointment which was December 31, 2025. The report is 31 pages and he will read the Real Estate total and Personal Property total:

As of December 31, 2025 total billed real estate property tax	\$43,143,691.25
total collected at this time	\$35,215,861.92
uncollected balance at this time	\$ 7,927,829.33
collection percentage	81.62%

As of December 31, 2025 total billed personal property tax	\$ 4,390,622.29
total collected at this time	\$ 3,572,449.27
uncollected balance at this time	\$ 818,173.02
collection percentage	81.37%

Chairman Kennedy thanked Mr. Lankford for the job he did and asked if the 81% collection rate is normal. Mr. Lankford replied it is a little higher than normal, but close. He added what helps is Wilkes County offers a discount for the month of August, anything paid prior to September 1, individuals and companies especially the ones they have a fiduciary responsibility such as mortgage lenders that hold escrow and this helps to get a lot of tax payments in early. Chairman Kennedy thanked him again and stated this is being handed over to County Manager, John Yates. Mr. Yates replied this is big shoes to fill. Mr. Triplett said the Board will need to vote to accept the settlement. Vice Chairman Handy thanked Mr. Lankford.

Vice Chairman Evan Handy made a motion to accept the Tax Settlement from July 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025 as presented at tonight’s meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Casey Johnson and was unanimously approved.

Mr. Lankford thanked the Board.

WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS SCHEDULED MEETING – CHANGE OF LOCATION FEBRUARY 17, 2026 MEETING – Chairman Kennedy stated they need to change the location of this meeting due to early voting using this room. The February 17th meeting will be at the Wilkes County Agricultural Center Meeting Room.

Commissioner Bill Sexton made a motion to move the location of the Wilkes County Board of Commissioners Regular Meeting scheduled for Tuesday, February 17, 2026 at 5:00 P.M. to the Meeting Room at the Wilkes County Agricultural Center located at 416 Executive Drive, Wilkesboro, N.C. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Shirley Randleman and was unanimously approved.

NEW BUSINESS – Chairman Kennedy stated they may continue to have an item on the Agenda for Fire Department Rescue Contracts as more of these come in.

BOARD AND COMMISSIONS UPDATE – Commissioner Sexton said none of his Boards has met since their last meeting and he does not have an update. Commissioner Johnson stated the Courthouse Safety Committee met yesterday, but he was unable to attend because the Community College's classes started back yesterday. He said he does not have an update from that. He is looking forward to the America 250 and hearing from Thomas Salley and what this year will bring. Commissioner Randleman stated she has nothing to report as none of her committees have met, but she is ready to gear up for 2026. Vice Chairman Handy agreed and added with the Holidays, none have met and he is ready for 2026. Chairman Kennedy stated he has received training on some new committees and said the Library Board will meet next week; he had training at the EDC this week. They had a great Mayors' meeting, he said; they have those with the Mayors of the Towns and the Chairman and they will have another week after next. They try to work together as a team and support each other. He said he thanks everyone for coming out tonight.

CLOSED SESSION – Motion was made by Commissioner Bill Sexton to go into closed session to discuss qualifications, competence, performance, or conditions of employment for a county officer or employee or prospective county officer or employee pursuant to the personnel exception under G.S. § 143-318.11(a)(6), and also under G.S. § 143-318.11(a)(3) of the North Carolina General Statutes to consult with the Board's attorney to preserve the attorney-client privilege. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Shirley Randleman and was unanimously approved.

Motion was made by Commissioner Bill Sexton seconded by Vice Chairman Evan Handy and by unanimous vote adopted to adjourn back into regular session. No action was taken in Closed Session.

BOARD CLOSING COMMENTS – Commissioner Sexton said he appreciates everyone being here and their participation in the county business and thanks them for taking the time to do this. Commissioner Johnson thanked everyone for a great meeting tonight. He appreciates the Board, the County employees and all they do; he hopes everyone had a great Christmas and New Year. Vice Chairman Handy thanked everyone for being here and welcomed them back from the Christmas holiday and wishes them a Happy New Year. He is ready to get started with 2026 and believes they can get things moving in the right direction. Commissioner Randleman wished

everyone a Happy and blessed New Year; they want everyone to be safe. Chairman Kennedy thanked everyone for their participation and coming out, those watching online they appreciate as well. He wishes everyone a Happy New Year, thanks to the staff for the job they do, thank you county employees they are the lifeline for the county services. Thanks to the good Lord for the blessings, he bestows upon them.

ADJOURN – Motion was made by Commissioner Bill Sexton, seconded by Commissioner Casey Johnson and by unanimous vote adopted to adjourn the meeting of the Wilkes County Board of Commissioners at 6:48 P.M.

Sarah D. Call, Clerk

Hardin C. Kennedy, III Chairman

WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Approved: January 20, 2026