

**Minutes**  
**Catawba County Board of Commissioners**  
**Budget Public Hearing and Wrap-Up**  
**Thursday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2025, 7:00 pm**

The Catawba County Board of Commissioners met on Thursday, May 22, 2025, at 7:00pm in the Board of Commissioners Meeting Room, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Catawba County Justice Center, 100 Government Drive, North Carolina. The purpose of this meeting was to conduct a public hearing to receive public comments on the County Budget for Fiscal Year 2025/26.

Present were Chair Randy Isenhower, Vice-Chair Austin Allran and Commissioners Robert C. Abernethy, Jr., Barbara Beatty and Cole Setzer.

Also present were County Manager Mary Furtado, Assistant County Manager Paul Murray, Assistant County Manager Justin Merritt, County Attorney Jodi Stewart and County Clerk Dale Stiles.

1. Chair Randy Isenhower called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm, noting a quorum was present.
2. Chair Isenhower led the Pledge of Allegiance.
3. Chair Isenhower offered the invocation.
4. County Manager Mary Furtado gave an overview of the FY26 Budget process, an overview of the proposed FY26 Budget being recommended for adoption, which is scheduled for Monday, June 2, 2025, and an overview of several outstanding decision points around which the Commissioners requested additional deliberation. Ms. Furtado noted that budget presentations with County departments and outside agencies took place on Wednesday, May 21, 2025, and stated the purpose of this meeting was to conduct a public hearing to receive citizen comments on the proposed budget.
5. Public Hearing  
Chair Randy Isenhower asked Commissioners if they had any questions. With no questions being raised, Chair Isenhower opened the public hearing for the proposed FY25/26 Budget. The following spoke:
  - Shawn Brown, Mayor of Claremont; spoke on behalf of Claremont Fire District.
  - Trent Cloninger, Deputy Fire Chief; spoke on behalf of the Catawba Fire District.
  - Senator Dean Proctor spoke about the critical near-term need to renovate Hickory High School, indicating his strong support for the Commissioners to raise taxes to support school facility needs.
  - Rick Davis, Chief of Sherrills Ford Fire Department, spoke on behalf of Sherrills Ford-Terrell Fire & Rescue District.

Chair Isenhower asked if there were any additional public comments, and as there were none, the public hearing was closed.

6. Chair Isenhower opened the floor, inviting discussion among the Commissioners about the proposed FY25/26 Budget:
  - Chair Isenhower raised concerns regarding the proposed Chromebook replacement funding for Catawba County Schools (\$1,080,000) and Hickory City Schools (\$582,750). Vice-Chair Austin Allran and Commissioners Robert Abernethy and Cole Setzer shared Chair Isenhower's concerns, which included the total dollar amount of the request, whether Chromebooks are needed at every grade level throughout the K-12 systems, and lack of consistency in approach between the three school systems.
    - Chair Isenhower made a motion to eliminate Chromebook Replacement funding for Catawba County Schools and Hickory City Schools from the recommended budget and to eliminate the transfer of \$1.1 million in additional revenue into the existing capital project established for that purpose. Chair Isenhower noted existing project funds would remain available in the capital

account in the event the Board desires to revisit this decision at a later date. The motion carried with a 4-1 vote, with Chair Isenhower, Vice-Chair Allran and Commissioners Abernethy and Setzer in favor. Commissioner Barbara G. Beatty opposed the motion.

- Commissioner Setzer began discussion of reducing the amount requested for the proposed Newton-Conover High School Phase II project from \$16 million to \$12 million, noting concerns regarding the seating capacity of the proposed auditorium, the magnitude of other competing County-wide school facility needs, and the precedent this proposed funding would set in terms of the amenities funded through the County's school construction program.
  - Chair Isenhower made a motion to reduce the amount for Newton-Conover High School Phase II Project to \$12,000,000.00, versus granting the recommended \$16,000,000.00. The motion carried unanimously.
- Chair Isenhower raised discussion of the proposed fire tax rate increases. Specifically, he raised concerns about the proposed tax rates for Newton Rural Fire District. Commissioners Abernethy and Setzer indicated they shared Chair Isenhower's concerns.
  - Vice-Chair Allran made a motion to reduce the recommended tax rate for Newton to .1160 versus granting the recommended tax increase. The motion failed with a 3-2 vote, with Vice-Chair Allran and Commissioner Beatty in favor. Chair Isenhower and Commissioners Abernethy and Setzer opposed the motion;
  - Chair Isenhower made a motion to reduce the recommended tax rate for Newton to .1110, versus granting the recommended tax increase. The motion carried with a 3-2 vote, with Chair Isenhower and Commissioners Abernethy and Setzer in favor. Vice-Chair Allran and Commissioner Beatty opposed the motion.

7. No other items were discussed. Budget Adoption is scheduled for Monday, June 2, 2025, at the Board's Regular scheduled meeting.

8. Upon a motion by Commissioner Beatty which unanimously carried, the meeting adjourned at 8:29 pm.



Randy Isenhower, Chair  
Board of Commissioners



Dale Stiles  
County Clerk