

**Budget Public Hearing and Wrap Up  
May 26, 2026, MB#58**

**Minutes  
Catawba County Board of Commissioners  
Budget Public Hearing and Wrap-Up  
Tuesday, May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2026, 7:00 pm**

The Catawba County Board of Commissioners met on Tuesday, May 26, 2026, 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 2026/27.

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 Adam Lindsay, 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 FY27 Budget process, an overview of the proposed FY27 Budget being recommended for adoption, which is scheduled for Monday, June 1, 2026, 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 Friday, May 22, 2026, 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 FY26/27 Budget. The following spoke:
  - Daniel Melton, Fire Chief with Bandys Fire; spoke on behalf of Bandys Fire District and expressed appreciation to the Commissioners and County staff for support of the Bandys department.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 FY26/27 Budget:
  - Newton Fire District - Tax Rate. Recommendation: 1 cent increase.  
Commissioner Robert Abernethy raised concerns with increasing Newton Fire District tax rate by one cent, noting Newton received an increase last year and compared the number of calls made by Newton versus Hickory. Commissioner Abernethy further noted his preference to keep Newton's current tax rate as is, in the context of the increase granted last year. Chair Randy Isenhower and Vice-Chair Austin Allran noted Newton utilized funding to pay fixed debt expense on their new fire station.
    - Chair Isenhower made a motion to support the County Manager's recommendation of a one-cent increase. The motion carried with a 4-1 vote, with Chair Isenhower, Vice-Chair Allran and Commissioners Barbara Beatty and Cole Setzer in favor. Commissioner Abernethy opposed the motion.
  - Salt Block Funding. Recommendation: \$10,000 increase.  
Commissioner Abernethy addressed concerns with increasing charitable contributions to tax paying

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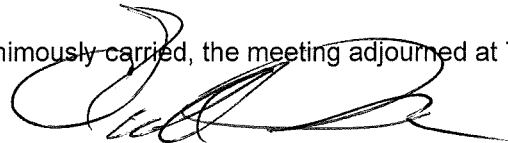
citizens, with Commissioner Setzer agreeing. Vice-Chair Allran noted the funding request is for the building. Commissioner Abernethy noted the Foundation also has a 12/13-million-dollar endowment and pointed out poor timing with a request of a 2.5% tax increase pending.

- o Vice-Chair Allran made a motion to table the item until a decision is made on the recommended 2.5% tax rate increase. The motion carried unanimously.

- Arts Culture Catawba Funding. Recommendation: \$10,464 increase. Chair Isenhower proposed keeping funding for Arts Culture Catawba as we have had in prior budget years.
  - o Chair Isenhower made a motion to deny the recommended \$10,464 increase in funding. The motion carried unanimously.
- Tax Rate. Recommendation: 2.5-cent increase to support \$264 million in project capacity. Commissioner Setzer began discussions to include reviewing other areas that can be cut in the budget, including Social Services, and noting it will require cuts in other departments. Commissioner Abernethy agreed, noting the need to review educational needs first. Chair Isenhower noted pressures must be addressed including officers for the Sheriff's Office and operating funds for schools as school capital funds need to be met. Vice-Chair Allran agreed with Chair Isenhower and added continued care for employees as an added pressure that should be met. Commissioner Abernethy proposed following Burke County on COLA and merit-based salary increases by providing half on July 1 and the remaining at a later date. After further discussion on options to cut funding in areas to avoid the full 2.5-cent tax increase, the Board requested additional information from the County Manager and staff to be reviewed at a later meeting. County Manager Furtado offered calling a Special Meeting of the Board on Monday, June 8<sup>th</sup>, directly after the regular scheduled subcommittee meetings at 8:30 a.m. Due to this need, the Fiscal Year 2026/27 Budget Ordinance Adoption will be held at a Board of Commissioners' meeting on June 15<sup>th</sup>, instead of June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026.
  - o Chair Isenhower made a motion to table the item until Monday, June 8<sup>th</sup>. The motion carried unanimously.

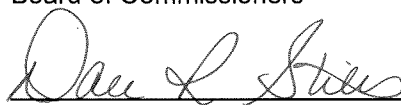
7. No other items were discussed. Budget Adoption is scheduled for Monday, June 15, 2026, at the Board's Regular scheduled meeting. A Special Meeting of the Board of Commissioners will be held on Monday, June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2026, at 8:30 a.m.

8. Upon a motion by Commissioner Beatty which unanimously carried, the meeting adjourned at 7:54 p.m.



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Randy Isenhower, Chair  
Board of Commissioners



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Dale Stiles  
County Clerk