



Chatham County, NC

Meeting Minutes

Board of Commissioners

Tuesday, May 20, 2025

6:00 PM

Siler City Town Hall

Regular Session - 6:00 PM - Siler City Town Hall

Present: 3 - Chair Karen Howard, Vice Chair Katie Kenlan and Commissioner Franklin Gomez Flores

Absent: 2 - Commissioner David Delaney and Commissioner Amanda Robertson

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Howard called the meeting to order at 6:00pm.

INVOCATION and PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Howard asked for a moment of silence which was followed by the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.

ADJUSTMENTS AND APPROVAL OF REGULAR SESSION AGENDA

Chair Howard called for a motion to approve the regular session agenda.

A motion was made by Commissioner Franklin Gomez Flores, seconded by Vice Chair Katie Kenlan, that the agenda was approved. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Chair Howard, Vice Chair Kenlan, and Commissioner Gomez Flores

Absent: 2 - Commissioner Delaney, and Commissioner Robertson

PUBLIC HEARINGS

[25-0236](#)

Hold a public hearing for the recommended fiscal year 2025-2026 Chatham County budget

Attachments: [Recommended Budget Presentation--BOC Initial Presentation FY2026](#)
[Click Here To Sign Up For This Public Hearing](#)

Chair Howard opened the public hearing for the 2025-2026 Chatham County Budget. Chair Howard reminded speakers that they have three minutes to speak. Chair Howard called on the Clerk to the Board to read the name of those who signed up to speak.

The following comments were received by the Board of Commissioners.
Written Comments Received:
Adrienne Lallo

As an absentee (early) voting and Election Day poll worker for the last three major election cycles, I applaud Chatham County citizens' peaceable use of the ballot box to express themselves. Based on the "thank you" I've heard at the Check-In tables through the years; most seem satisfied with our temporary work because we've been well-prepared by Chatham County Elections Office. I encourage the Chatham County Commissioners to increase the Chatham County Elections Office budget to ensure the Elections Office can continue to recruit and retain a talented and skilled team. The Elections Office staff serve a growing population under constantly changing directives; recruit, train and schedule a temporary workforce that requires a generous amount of support; and soon, will untangle myriad ballot mysteries in a compressed timeframe. After a career in corporate and start-up environments, I recognize the continual improvement undertaken by the staff under the guidance of the Board of Elections. The pace of improvement matches or surpasses that of many a for-profit enterprise. The Elections Office needs a budget that enables them to respond to increasing demands and keep Chatham voting.

Don Wollum

To my reading of the county budgets 2021-2025, Only in 2024-2025 budget page 20 did Chatham Official Budget reference the over 31.8 million dollars fed awarded Chatham County for covid and relief in 2022 and later 2023 Economic Recovery Act. The official revenue sources began on page 18, it was only on page 20 under state and fed other economic data last item 7 if count them, states CARES and ARPA that direct funds to counties. This is the only place where 31.8 million is listed. Where is the list of projects and programs the commissioners approved for spending, and where in the budget are these specified as a one-time fed funding event? It appears that 31.8 was rolled into the last 3 budgets and is now reflective of baked in county budgets going forward. The point I do not see is where these windfall funds were explained the expenditures to the taxpayers. I asked for clarification in 2023 and was told schools set their own budget, yet schools superintendent was quoted she was going to keep the 50 teachers and staff, in the next budget. In 2023 after seeing job offering 23-0241, the county stopped publishing county job postings. One query I asked is job listed with a funding sunset, and next ad in Chatlist said As such. One-time fed funding. ONE job??? So if household living on 145,000, received unexpected windfall dollars of 30 million or more, like a household in Chatham getting 31.8 lottery or an 31.8 M inheritance, IN 2025-2026 the budget should reduce by at least 20 million, yet the fed relief dollars seem baked into the numbers. For two years we Chatham County taxpayers were not made aware HOW exactly these two Fed Relief windfall were used and where they now stand out and removed going forwards. We are given the lottery boosted baseline. Can you make a report explaining how citizens' federal tax dollars behind these FED projects were used. Time events, certainly 2025 these 2 will not be available as funds left over are repurposed now. The story is both Chatham County and school board incorporated 31.8 and now that became part of the baseline budget. Instead of 188 million, plus inflation county should be at 158M. If we got inheritance or lottery once (twice in this case) how irresponsible if not dishonest to build future budgets on winning lottery or gaining inheritance. Plus, there is no free ride: Fed dollars are our Fed tax dollars. Finally, all federal grants give Chatham County "indirect monies for applying the grants and oversight. What was or is the county internal oversight indirect that was withing county government to govern these 2 relief grants.

In Person

Laura Newman

First off, I want to thank Superintendent Jackson for including the reinstatement of Masters pay to the proposed budget. I am here because I believe in the importance of masters pay. I want to share my story. At the time I was in Lee County and there was a

freeze in teachers' pay that lasted 7 years. So needless to say, times were tough. But I was looking to the future and choose to pursue My master's in art education from UNCP. This was a big leap! I remember having to go to a testing center to take an exam in-order to be accepted. I worked really hard for this degree that I received in 2016 taking summer courses driving to Pembroke, constantly working on assignments, but I got a lot out of it. I won awards for my artwork. I wrote a really large thesis created a body of work that I exhibited and went on to have a one woman show. I had my master's in art education, and I worked really hard for it. I also put a lot of money into it and time! Time away from my family. I think a lot of you know what it's like to work full-time and attend university! When I got hired here at Chatham County with my master's degree, I was so excited I felt like I had made it! Made it to the county I wanted to be in with the degree I had worked so hard for. But instead, I was crushed! I was told that they passed a bill 2015 that revoked masters pay. I thought I would have been grandfathered in because I started before the bill was passed but they backdated it to 2013. I started a semester too late. Today I owe 40,000 in debt for my master's in art education and I have never received a pay raise for it. Having this pay would mean A lot to me because I put a lot into it.

David Reeves

I reside at 5089 Pine Forest Drive in Siler City. Thank you for allowing me to speak today regarding the funding cut to Chatham County Rescue Squad. I'm speaking as a concerned volunteer who served with the rescue squad, beginning in 1977, whereas updates to emergency responses are certainly required. A paramedic on an emergency with no pill puts us right back to 1982 more amazing. Someone at the county came up with a tiered reimbursement, allowing less than 100% of the emergency calls to be answered. That sounds like a great fiscal idea until your needs fall in the non-response category. You hold the rescue squad accountable to a response standard that other departments maintain with millions of dollars in budget and full-time staff chartered in 1957. The rescue squad carried much of a load for out of hospital care over the years, and they provided rescue services. The rescue squad built 3 rescue trucks over the years in house used for patients trapped in auto accidents and rescue situations. This was a necessary service, ignored at the time by the county. The rescue squad support extended to multiple neighboring fire departments, providing rescue trucks, tools, and training to adequate their respective citizens. These trucks were built with minimal to no funding from the county. Early Sunday morning I responded to a fire call which resulted in a civilian death. While on that call 2 women, with tears in their eyes, told me, Thank you. Thank you so much that 5 seconds of recognition was more gratitude than I received as a volunteer for Chatham County in 47 years. Out of easily 30 volunteer firefighters. On that scene 2 firefighters were paid with most businesses. If you have free labor, your business will be wildly successful. One of the things Chatham County did for the rescue squads was to financially assist the ambulance replacement with 75% county and 25% rescue squad funding over the years. Instead of keeping this funding focused on the rescue squads. It got turned into a fire department pickup trust fund. Unbelievably the county gives this money to the fire departments who have a tax-based funding strength which the rescue squad never had. \$50,000 sits in that fund is just about the exact amount you cut from the rescue squad. It is my understanding. The last rescue squad vehicle request from this fund was denied. I never understood why we had to volunteer our time to raise money, to have money to volunteer our time in closing. All 3 rescue squads have failed in Chatham County, due to lack of funding which the Chatham County Commissioners control. Volunteerism is fading, and as you get hammered over increasing taxes, I would like you to ask. I would like to ask you to be more cognizant of what volunteers do for the county, the tangible impact on the budget, and ultimately the local community. And I, I have one request. If I could make that, it came to my attention

this afternoon that the rescue squad was denied vehicles because they did not respond to outline fire districts, which is ridiculous because the fire departments cover that. So, if the rescue squad was told they did not qualify for funding, there's evidently some criteria placed on that fund. So, I would like to know what the criteria are with this 1st component number out of that.

Max Haromon

Hello! Good afternoon. My name is Max Parman. I teach carpentry and construction a lot. I want to share with you 2 quick stories of pay cuts and then tell you a little bit about what I think is the meaning of master pay. I moved to this county after working for several years as a high school, mostly U.S. History teacher in upstate it turned out that when I started my job here, I was actually taking a pay cut from where I had to move from. I wasn't aware, prior to sort of like actually signing the contract that that was going to be happening and I didn't move from New York. I didn't move from Pennsylvania. I didn't even move from Virginia. I moved from the State of Mississippi, which is the poorest state in the nation. One of the lowest teacher salaries in the nation is down there and pay cut, because in North Carolina the other pick that I took when I don't teach high school I work in. I work as a carpenter, and when I work as a carpenter, I don't tell my boss that I have a bachelor's degree. I don't tell my boss that I have a master's degree, and I make more as a carpenter than I do as a teacher with a master's degree. And I do that work because I want to. Right. I think it's important and sacred work to think about the development and growth of our young people. What I think the reinstatement of master's pay means in this county. You've heard about the importance of money. Money does matter to teachers who are often really struggling to make it work. It does matter if teachers go to death to get their master's degrees. Like, like Miss Newman, for example, the money doesn't matter but what I want to speak to a little bit more than the money is, is, I think, what else it says about this county to be restoring masters' pay here, even when the State refuses to do so to me. What it says is that this county believes that the work of educators is sacred and important to me. What it says is that you believe that public schools and public-school students deserve to have excellent teachers and to me what it says is that you believe the public-school students deserve to have an excellent education, regardless of the wealth of their families, and in the moment that we're living through in this country. I believe that it is a deeply important thing for all of us to stay in affirm whenever we possibly can so know that we, as a County Association of educators, public school workers across this county. We are not just going to be here every year asking for more and more money from y'all knowing that the problem lies at state level and the national level. So, what I'm giving to you is an affirmation of why this does matter to us now, and a promise that we are going to work together collectively as public-school workers across this county with county leadership. And we're coming for the people who are really denying our children what they deserve. So, we're coming for the state we're coming for the people who are telling us that our students don't serve the world, and we know that. So, thank you.

Susan Blalock

My name is Sue Blalock I am Chair of the Chatham County Democratic Party. I am speaking on behalf of the Chatham Dems in support of the Board of Elections' request for a full-time Election Coordinator. I know that others have come before you and described the need for this position in detail, and I am not going to repeat that. But I do want to take a moment to explain why I think this position should be one of the County's very top funding priorities. I am going to speculate that in this room there are lots of differences of opinion about many, many things. But I think there are a lot of things we agree on as well. I imagine that most of us in this room are registered voters. And, when we go to vote, we want to be sure that: That are able to cast our ballot and

be confident that our votes will be counted. That knowledgeable poll workers are available to answer our questions. That we don't encounter long lines because there are not enough trained poll workers. That poll workers understand all of the rules and regulations that apply to the voting process, including the safeguarding of ballots after the polls close. Our Board of Elections does an outstanding job in ensuring the integrity of the election process, from ballot preparation to counting (and sometimes recounting) the votes. They know the resources they need to continue to do an outstanding job and I am asking that you and the County Manager not second guess their expertise. Voting is a priceless right that we all share as US Citizens. It is not the place where we want to cut corners. Therefore, I am asking the Board to support the Board of Elections request for a full-time Election Coordinator.

Carolina McLester

My name is Caroline McLester, and I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to express my frustration today. The Chatham County Board of Elections office has requested a new Election Coordinator position, which county management has refused to recommend. The person in that position would have numerous responsibilities, but, most importantly, they would create, present, and manage poll worker training for hundreds of workers in the months leading up to every primary, municipal, and general election – training that, I should note, is required by law and must reflect up-to-the-minute changes in election process legislation. As the person who served as Chatham County's poll worker Training Coordinator for the most recent general election, I can attest to the time and effort required to provide comprehensive and accurate training. And as the Chief Judge for West Siler City, I can also attest to the critical necessity of its success. As a retired project manager and trainer, I work as a part-time temporary employee with the Chatham County Board of Elections office. However, in 2024, I ended up logging full-time and overtime hours in order to accomplish the following: create a comprehensive training plan and detailed schedule, create training materials (PPT presentations, handouts, practice scripts) in compliance with current election law and requirements from the State Board of Elections, create new websites specifically for poll workers and judges, develop and/or consolidate relevant process documentation and videos on the new websites, present over 15 training and make-up sessions, recruit for and coordinate a week-long mock polling station training develop materials for and manage a separate week-long practice lab for poll workers to attend at their convenience for additional computer training. Leading up to the general election in 2024, we trained over 300 election assistants, party judges, and chief judges. And of the total, over half were new poll workers. In the weeks following the November 2024 general election, we surveyed all early voting and election day poll workers, as well as met in-person with the chief judges, to undertake our regular post-election Retrospective. (I've attached a copy of the Retrospective Report to this statement.) One key focus of our survey questions was training. What worked? What didn't? how might we improve? The overwhelming response was a cry for MORE training, including more process, software, and equipment training for new poll workers, more in-depth judge-specific instruction for chief and party judges, and more step-by-step training on provisional ballots, photo ID exceptions, and equipment setup/breakdown. We cannot meet this demand without a full-time person dedicated to making it happen. You have the ability to ensure Chatham County's poll workers are adequately prepared to conduct future elections confidently, fairly, and – most importantly – according to ever-changing legislative requirements. Please, please, consider and approve the Board of Elections' request for an Election Coordinator.

Chance Mashburn

Good evening, commissioners, thank you so much for taking the time to allow me to speak. My name is Chance Mashburn, and I'm here today as the Deputy Director of

the Chatham County Board of Elections. I'm here to speak on behalf of our office regarding our request for a full-time Elections Coordinator position in the FY26 budget. This is not a typical expansion request. This request is a direct response to the significant changes in state election laws that began taking effect this year. As you heard in the previous comments, these laws drastically reshape the operations and timelines that county elections offices must meet, often under unrealistic deadlines. We did go through the process of requesting a new position but unfortunately it was not recommended in the current budget, and we believe that the new election laws repercussions that went into effect this year were not taken into full account. And unfortunately, we're unable to speak in January due to the ongoing election disputes and us not knowing if this new Senate Bill 382 was going to go into effect because it was under the courts to review. Counties across the state are responding accordingly. Wake County requested and received six new full-time positions; all approved without question. In Dare County, which requested a new position was one of only two positions approved in the county FY 26 Budget because they understood the urgency and gravity of this mandate. I truly wish I didn't have to stand before you today asking you to reconsider this request. But I am here because I believe you deserve to hear, directly and clearly, just how critical this position is. We are not asking for luxury, we are asking for the support we need to uphold free and fair elections in Chatham County. There's a saying: "Democracy dies in silence." And I simply cannot stay silent when our ability to meet legal obligations and serve voters with integrity is on the line. Thank you for your time, for the work you do, and for considering this request in the spirit of service to the people of Chatham County.

Chair Howard closed the public hearing.

This Agenda Item was received and filed.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business, Chair Howard called for a motion to adjourn.

A motion was made by Commissioner Franklin Gomez Flores, seconded by Vice Chair Katie Kenlan, that the meeting was adjourned. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 3 - Chair Howard, Vice Chair Kenlan, and Commissioner Gomez Flores

Absent: 2 - Commissioner Delaney, and Commissioner Robertson