



# Chatham County, NC

## Meeting Minutes

### Board of Commissioners

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Tuesday, May 21, 2024

6:00 PM

Siler City Town Hall

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#### Special Session - 6:00 PM - Town of Siler City Courtroom

**Present:** 5 - Vice Chair Karen Howard, Chair Mike Dasher, Commissioner David Delaney, Commissioner Franklin Gomez Flores and Commissioner Katie Kenlan

#### CALL TO ORDER

*Chair Dasher called the meeting to order at 6:01pm.*

#### PUBLIC HEARINGS

##### [24-5307](#)

Hold a public hearing for the recommended fiscal year 2024-2025 Chatham County budget

**Attachments:** [Recommended Budget Presentation--BOC Initial Presentation FY2025 Final updated](#)

*Assistant County Manager Bryan Thompson presented an overview of the fiscal year 2025 Manager's recommended budget.*

*The following individuals spoke during the public hearing:*

*Alirio Estevez*

*Good evening, commissioners. I am glad to be here to talk to you. Estevez spoke to the audience in Spanish. He then told the Board that he would help interpret those speakers signed up to speak in Spanish. He asked those in the audience to stand if they were here to support the schools. He continued, as you can see, there are a lot of people here to support our schools. We have talked a lot about teachers and that is important. There are several schools on this side of the county including Jordan Matthews and Chatham Middle that lack teachers, Chatham Middle especially. Hopefully you will hear about the experiences, but we need teachers. I am here to talk about another person in the schools, the custodians, lunch ladies, assistants, etc. He gave two examples of individuals that drive buses and teach. We need to keep people like that. People who love our schools. We need to raise their pay. We need teachers. Thank you.*

*Janet Ramirez Ramirez*

*Good afternoon commissioners, my name is Janet Ramirez Ramirez. I am a resident of Siler City. I have been a county resident for over twenty-two years. I graduated from all three schools, here in Chatham County. In Siler City particularly. The reason I am here is because my son, who is a twelve-year-old sixth grader in Saba, which is a private school, wants to attend Chatham Middle. My concern here is the lack of teachers and I am afraid that the investment and education that he has gotten from*

Saba have been such a great development for him, and I have seen him grow, and as a mother, I get to see within a year of a supportive school and staff, my son is determined, disciplined, and his education level has increased in the ways that he reads and writes better. I want him to have more opportunities than I had. I am an immigrant. I just hope that he can surpass my education levels. I should get support from the county to help me achieve that and help my son grow. It is important to build strong boys and prepare them. I asked that you approve a higher pay rate for the teachers and to give an incentive for the Chatham Middle School teachers. It is a very frightening thing for me to see my son coming to that school. But as a mother that knows more about the system and can support him. He grows more than I ever did. I hope you understand what it is to be a mother and learn everything from zero. I am here to support my child on the path to a better education, but to come back to Chatham County and give back. Thank you.

*Lilia Lara Valiente*

Hello, good afternoon, my name is Lilia Lara. I have two children, one who is in Chatham Middle, and the other is in JM, soon to graduate. I have been living in Siler City for sixteen years. Today I want to express my concern about the crisis that our schools are experiencing with the lack of teachers and the limited support for existing teachers. I beg you, as a mother, to provide all possible support to our teachers since I consider that they have the enormous responsibility of supporting our children who are the future of our city. I ask that you increase the supplement for teachers and school staff as proposed by the Board of Education. We need to attract and retain quality educational professionals.

*Nancy Hernandez*

I have been living in Siler City for twenty years. I have two children: one teenager at JM and a 3rd grader at Siler City Elementary. Today I am here to use my voice in support for the budget for the teachers of Chatham County; since my daughter, Alexa, of nine years of age dreams of being a teacher one day; and maybe she will be able to see this dream come true if it benefits her economically due to the fact that it is not convenient in these times to work and earn a minimum wage. Sometimes to settle costs one must look for a way to bring in extra money to get through the month and believe me it is stressful to not be able to rely on enough money to cover the necessities of the household. As a resident of the county and citizen that pays taxes, I have the right to demand that the budget to increase the salaries of teachers be considered; as it is a problem that we have in schools due to lack of teachers and is a problem for our children to receive substitute teachers that do not care if our children learn as they are only in the classroom for one or two days. Thank you.

*Shawn Roblero*

Hi, my name is Shawn, I'm a sophomore at Jordan Matthews High School and I want to talk about my experiences with the struggle of not having a teacher and why raising their pay is important. Not having a teacher is a very big struggle. I had a math class last semester that was fully online, and I did not even know until about a week before school started. I had no time to prepare, and I did not know how it was going to be. Normally when a new math class starts the teacher reviews the class and helps the students that do not fully remember some topics. When online one helps you and it feels like you are reading off a textbook, it is difficult reviewing a topic you have not touched since 8th grade and much more if there is no teacher to help. At this point beyond the review phase everyone is confused and there is no way to get any help since trying to contact the virtual schoolteacher seems impossible. There is work that no one understood due to this and every day it would get piled on these students to the point where there is no way for them to get on top of everything. Lots of students failed

*this class and thus messed up their GPA. There were so many students failing that they had a whole credit recovery class after school with I had not heard of before. All this has impacted so many students and I think if we raise the teachers' salaries, more students will have that motivation to study to become teachers and more teachers to continue working because right now the salary for the teachers and the struggle of paying off student loans do not weigh out. I hope you take this into consideration to help not only the teachers but our students as well, who are the future of our community.*

*Evelia Ibanez Grimaldo*

*Good afternoon, my name is Evelia Ibanez. I am a mother of three children, one is in 5th grade, a teenager in 10th grade, and the oldest who will be graduating this year from Seaforth High School. I want to start by thanking the hard work that is done every day to improve the academic level of our children, and regarding this, today we come to support teachers, since we are convinced that they are a fundamental part of the intellectual to avoid their desertion. As a mother, I have had to see the frustration of my children when they are left for (prolonged) periods without teachers and left adrift without that guide. I know that there are incredible teachers who do everything possible to make their work possible, but I also know that behind each of them, there are fathers, mothers, and children who need to take care of their families, and my request today is that they be listened to and supported together to continue working hard for this county, seeing future prepared leader's graduate.*

*Maria Mercedes Garcia Espitia*

*Good afternoon, everyone, my name is Mercedes Garcia and I'm here as a parent from the Chatham County School System. I want to show my solidarity with our teachers and administrative staff by asking for a better salary. We have always said that school is our children's second home and for that reason I would like to have better paid staff because many of them like us have a family that we must provide for daily. I really think that this profession should be better paid since they, along with the family, help us build a better future, children driven with the passion to learn, explore, and build. Making a better world for everyone because education is the best tool for everyone. There is a saying in my country that parents always tell their children. Study because education is the only inheritance I can give you. And it is very true. But this is not possible if we have classrooms without a teacher present, classes that have several substitute teachers who, no matter how hard they try, do not get to know their students. That is why it is very important to me that our teachers never lose that passion for teaching. Because with the education they receive at home and the teachings transmitted by their teachers we will achieve safer children and a stronger and more educated community. That is why with better salaries and incentives for our teachers we will achieve better performance in our schools. Thank you.*

*Eimy Acosta*

*Good afternoon, my name is Eimy Acosta and I am a sophomore in school. I would like to share with you that I did not have a teacher. Because of not having a teacher present, I was not able to understand what we had to learn. If we had a teacher, I would have been able to learn and understand the assignment and the subject. I and another student in my class ended up with a low grade that affected our GPA. At the end of the semester, students who wanted to make up for it had to stay after school to make up the credit. Please consider giving to the teachers, so this does not happen again.*

*Araceli Nolasco Hernandez*

*Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Araceli Nolasco and I have been a resident of Chatham for twenty-three years. I have three children in the county schools. Two at*

*Siler City Elementary and one at Jordan Matthews. One of my children has special needs (autism) and since the beginning of this school year he had to receive special speech classes and unfortunately seven months passed, and he could not receive them due to lack of teachers. He lost a lot of time, and that time will not return. And for me as a mother, the education of my children is very important and my other son at Jordan Matthews will not have teachers either. Please consider our needs in schools because we also need bus drivers. Thank you so much.*

*Belle Boggs*

*Good evening, commissioners. Thank you so much for all you do for Chatham County. Your work is so important to our quality of life, and I appreciate you. My name is Belle Boggs, and I am a proud parent of two children at Perry Harrison Elementary. They have a long way to go in our school system, so I hope you'll understand why I'm speaking to you twice in one month! I'm here tonight to ask you to fully fund the Chatham County School Board's revised budget, including a \$2700 raise for all teachers and a \$500 raise for all classified staff, including bus drivers, teaching assistants, and cafeteria workers. These workers do the most important jobs in our community, educating and taking care of our kids. Unfortunately, our district suffers from a 13.6% attrition rate, which is even higher than the state's rate of 11.5%. This budget will make us the number one district in the region and keep us from losing more teachers to Wake County or Chapel Hill's better-paying districts. Though I understand that it is the state's responsibility to fully fund our public schools, that has not happened and it's not likely to happen this year. In the same way that I put aside many hours and dollars each fall to make sure that my kids' schools have everything they need, from books to technology to playground equipment, I'm asking our county to step up with our shared resources. Let me tell you a little fact that I think illustrates the difference between the \$1200 increase we heard about last time, and Dr. Jackson's requested \$2700 raise: I am a state employee, and I know from experience that our state employees' health insurance takes a big cut out of our pay, especially when teachers support a family. The least expensive health plan, 70/30, costs \$218 a month for a teacher plus her kids. Your proposed \$1200 raise would not get that teacher even six months of health care. But the \$2700 would pay for an entire year of health insurance. That's the difference between \$1200 and \$2700. It's real, and it matters to the teachers who work in our counties, to their families, and to the nine thousand kids in our district, who deserve fairly compensated teachers. This is why I'm asking you to fully fund the budget that Dr. Jackson presented in April. This budget will position Chatham as a leader in education, attracting the best teachers and demonstrating that our community fully supports our kids.*

*Tanya Garcia*

*I am a little emotional. I'm a proud parent of a rising twelfth grader. I stand before you today to advocate for our students and their future. We are shaping our leaders and our workforce. You are hearing about the challenges that we have. There are many students struggling because we do not have teachers. If you talk to my senior, they will tell you all his friends, they do not deserve this. They are not happy with their GPA's. I have friends that ask for time off so they can leave on time and go and get their kids. A lot of these parents cannot leave work if their child is sick. This is not an option for them. Our seniors are on the cusp of adulthood, but they feel disregarded. We weathered the pandemic, and it was our job to provide a solid foundation and we failed. I have attended all these meetings along with you. I have listened to the budget three times too. I have deep dived into the presentations. I looked at all the slides and I listened to what people had to say. I listened to others that were asking for funding. Some of the slides were very impressive but honestly, they lacked substance. What does not lack substance is our students, our community, and our teachers. They are*

asking you to fund this. This is what they need right now. We had teachers return to help us. We have parents stepping up. We have other students stepping up to tutor their classmates. These efforts are commendable, but they should not replace proper funding. We elected you and put you here so we know that you will listen to us. My ask to you today is why did you get into this position. Was it to serve the community. Make sure the budget reflects that purpose. Invest in our future, invest in our teachers, invest in our students.

*Nada Abuzaid*

Good evening, my name is Nada Abuzaid. I moved to Chatham County seven years ago. I have two special needs kids that attend high school. They are very smart kids. The probably I am coming here tonight because my oldest is on the spectrum and she has struggled because of the lack of a teacher for two months. They found a teacher and it was a good experience for a couple of months then they left. That was three months ago. They still cannot find a teacher. My daughter has not had a teacher for that long and she cannot participate with her peers because there is no material provided for her. They have found someone that can fill in, in the morning. It has been a big struggle for us. Each kid should have the best teacher available. I am leaving with you to help these teachers and give our community a chance. Thank you

*Donna Wood*

Good evening, Chairperson Howard and Commissioners, thank you for having me this evening. My name is Donna Wood, and I am a proud parent and community member in Chatham County. I am here to urge you to support the salary increases for teachers at \$2,700 per teacher and \$500 for staff members. The teachers that we have worked with at Perry Harrison Elementary are incredible and go above and beyond to meet the unique needs of each student. In fact, they are so great, that my 8-year-old daughter used her first allowance to buy something for her teacher saying "I want her to know how much we appreciate her. She does such a good job teaching us." If my 7-year-old is willing to use 50% of her allowance on her teacher, I know that our county can do more. The current raise of \$1,200 per teacher is a mere \$100 before taxes. I don't know about your experience, but right now, \$100 doesn't even cover 2 gas refills. I personally believe that the caliber of teachers that we have warrants much more than even \$2,700. But at least it is a more positive starting point. Please reward the individuals working so hard to help our children learn to love education to be curious. Please agree to invest in the future of our children. We know quality education is one of the most important things to set them up to become contributing members of our community.

*Alan Ramirez*

Hi, my name is Alan Ramirez. I am a sixth grader that goes to the School of the Arts for Boys Academy (SABA) in Pittsboro. Before going to SABA, I went to Virginia Cross. I had a good experience, and I learned a lot. For the rest of my middle school experience, I want to return and go to the Chatham Middle School. I want to return because I want to challenge myself. I also want to return because many family members have attended Chatham Middle School. And to follow my dad and his brothers in playing soccer for Chatham Middle and Jordan Matthews. Commissioners, I ask of you to please give an incentive for teachers that come to Siler City to help me learn, for me to come back. So, one day I can help our Chatham community. Thank you.

Commissioner Kelan made the following statement to those present in Spanish: I want to use a language that is not my own. I wrote it down first to express myself more clearly. I know how difficult it can be to express oneself in another language. Thank you to everyone from the community who came and spoke. I especially want to thank

*the youth. I see some future elected officials in the room. For the youth especially I would like you to know that all the commissioners here have email addresses and we do respond. Thank you for sharing your concerns, hopes and experiences with us today.*

*The Board of Commissioners thanked those that spoke.*

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**A motion was made by Vice Chair Karen Howard, seconded by Commissioner Katie Kenlan, that the meeting was adjourned. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Aye:** 5 - Vice Chair Howard, Chair Dasher, Commissioner Delaney, Commissioner Gomez Flores and Commissioner Kenlan