



Wake County

301 South McDowell Street
Raleigh, NC

Meeting Minutes Board of Commissioners

Monday, January 12, 2026

2:00 PM

Wake County Justice Center

Work Session

Meeting Called to Order: Chair Don Mial

Meeting called to order at 2:00 pm.

Commissioners Present: Chair Don Mial, Vice-Chair Safiyah Jackson, Commissioner Vickie Adamson, Commissioner Susan Evans, Commissioner Shinica Thomas, Commissioner Cheryl Stallings and Commissioner Tara Waters.

Staff present: David Ellis, County Manager; Roger Askew, County Attorney; Emily Lucas, Deputy County Manager; Ashley Jacobs, Deputy County Manager; Duane Holder, Deputy County Manager; Ben Canada, Chief of Staff; Michael James, Assistant County Manager; Yvonne Gilyard, Clerk to the Board; Toni Womack, Deputy Clerk to the Board; Jason Horton, Strategic Initiatives Director; Portia Johnson, Senior Executive Assistant; Tanika Cooper, Senior Executive Assistant; Dara Demi, Chief Communications Officer; Stephanie Mintz, Communications Consultant; Michelle Venditto, Director of Budget & Management Services; Sheriff Rowe; Frank Cope, Director of Community Services; Mark Forestieri, Director of Facilities, Design & Construction; David Rutherford, Deputy Director of Facilities Design & Construction; Dr. Jennifer Federico, Animal Services Director; Matt Roylance, Deputy Director of Community Services; Ann Burlingame, Library Assistant Director; Antonia Pedroza, Director of Social Services; Jenny Coats, Community Services Administrative Director; and Sean Womack, Chief Human Resources Officer.

Others present: Philip Isley, Lobbyist, Blanchard Miller Lewis & Isley; Perry Safran, Centennial Authority; Patrick McHugh, FD&C Sr. Facility Project Manager; Rhonda Zak, RND Architects and Heather Lewis, Animal Arts.

1. Agenda

Attachments: [Agenda 01.12.2025 work session.pdf](#)

Chair Mial shared today's Work Session Agenda:

- I. 2026 Legislative Outlook
- II. Library bond Updates
- III. Animal Center Schematic Design

2. 2026 State Legislative Outlook

Attachments: [BOC Leg Update Jan 2026.pdf](#)

Mr. Ben Canada, Chief of Staff, shared background context for 2026 Legislative Outlook.

He shared all updates relate to Board of Commissioners' strategic plan, in one fashion or another. He shared today's Agenda:

- Item #1 ties to the Board's strategic Community Health and Well-being goal
- Item #2 ties to the Board's strategic Lifelong Learning goal
- Item #3 ties to the Board's strategic Foundations for Service goal

He shared today's agenda ties back to the Commissioner's September, 2025 retreat, when the Board shared a request for more time to discuss budget issues. He shared all three agenda items relate to the County's budget. He shared the Legislative Outlook discussion will cover items that will impact Wake County's Operating budget, and the discussion for the Library Bonds and Animal Center design will impact Wake County's Capital budget.

Mr. Canada shared a reminder of the Three-Prong Approach to Legislative Priorities:

- General Guidance statement (provides permission to speak up on behalf of Wake County)
- Top Three Asks (a short list of priorities)
- Opportunity List (provides flexibility regarding concerns of the Board)

He shared the Top-3 State priorities:

- Housing Affordability
- Foster Care Improvements
- SNAP and Medicaid

He shared a pie chart (defense and offense); and an example of political capital "gambling chips".

He shared The Biennium Cycle:

- Year 1-2025 = Lots of bills introduced
- Year 2-2026 = Short Session / Budget tweaks/ Selected topics

Mr. Isley, Lobbyist, Blanchard Miller Lewis & Isley, shared 2026 Legislative

Outlook. He shared update on what is taking place and not taking place in the general assembly. He shared cautionary situations happening to other local governments.

He shared that at the beginning of 2026, the General Assembly entered what is known as a short session year (Biennium), which is primarily designed for making amendments to budgetary items. He noted that a significant number of bills were not passed last year. He shared hope that the Chambers will reconvene once a budget agreement has been reached. He shared if a budget is not reached this year, the Biennium budget from last year, will still be in place. He shared once the primary session is complete, this may provide a better idea of what will happen moving forward. He shared several major issues are under discussion, including Hurricane Helene relief efforts and staffing for Medicaid funding. He shared these are priorities for the NC Association of County Commissioners. He shared as updates are received, the Commissioners will be alerted with respect to a State budget being reached.

He shared in his role, he represents various other local county governments. With this, he has seen a growing interest from local governments with respect to the State Auditor asking questions about municipalities and counties. He shared government operations DOS committees are having hearings in earnest. He shared there is a formed Property Tax Reform Committee, describing these as off-cycle committees created to address specific concerns. He shared that the City of Raleigh attended a committee to present its stance on DEI programs, and there were also discussions regarding Asheville and Buncombe County-he was not sure of the subject. He shared that this was unusual since no representatives from Asheville and Buncombe counties were present.

He shared the State property tax reduction efforts in Wake County are being addressed by a fairly sizable committee, which includes some Wake County representatives. He posed the question raised by the General Assembly and that is if property taxes are too high, is there is a universal way to levy property taxes and if so, what are the best practices. He shared that core governmental functions are currently under the microscope by the General Assembly, but reassured the Commissioners that Wake County is not a target. He commended Wake County for fulfilling its responsibilities as elected officials, stressing that the County is not being asked to defend any actions.

He mentioned that Mecklenburg County has been invited to attend a meeting in January, while Wake County has done an extraordinary job maintaining funding for core values and moving forward effectively. He praised both the governing staff and the county leadership for their performance.

Finally, he offered his availability to speak with Commissioners at any time, if needed.

Mr. Canada shared handouts of SNAP Medicare and Property Taxes in Wake County.

Vice-Chair Jackson asked what has been heard recently about SNAP.

Mr. Isley shared there is no temperature response.

Mr. Canada shared SNAP benefits is a hard topic for the State of North Carolina. Mr. Canada shared the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) is actively defending all 100 counties.

Commissioner Stallings asked about Medicaid rebates.

Mr. Isley shared Medicaid rebates has become very political. He shared this is a situation that has to be clarified regarding budget process. He shared other chambers want to talk about rebates being important.

Commissioner Stallings asked about communication for property taxes and school funding, noting that Wake County is contributing towards property taxes.

Mr. Isley advised Commissioners to watch the last legislative meeting. He shared comments were made by both sides of the isle regarding capital requirements and disparity of large counties versus smaller counties. He shared the Speakers office has been good about listening to everyone. He shared this has been seen by the House committee; not the Joint Committee.

Commissioner Thomas shared thoughts about property tax, levying and uniformity regarding urban and rural counties are different. She asked what would uniformity look like regarding funding mechanisms. She shared since there are differences between urban and rural counties, she asked Mr. Isley if he thought that discussion would create issues between counties.

Mr. Isley shared that rural counties are concerned about property tax, levying and uniformity as well as large urban counties. He shared the NCACC is trying to speak with one voice. He shared counties should not want the General Assembly indicating what works for one county will work for every county. He shared people are looking to see where funding is going and this is not as prevalent in message public. He shared when Commissioners are looking at budget funding, it is now the focus of the

General Assembly.

Commissioner Thomas shared NCACC is concerned with local government maintaining control of their own statutory financial responsibilities. She shared with the growth of Wake County, the Board has been very intentional with allocating dollars when it comes to public safety, public education and the overall public good. She shared she, as well as Commissioner Stallings, serve on the board of NCACC, and she has a personal responsibility to the NCACC in her role as 2nd VP, and will be present at the General Assembly meeting on January 14, 2026, for the property tax discussion.

Commissioner Adamson shared she is coming into this year with anxiety regarding property tax issue from federal and state government. She asked about unfunded mandated issues sent to Wake County. She shared perspective that the State should possibly stop issuing mandates, if they want to control property taxes within the County. She shared whenever there is a State tax cut, it is passed along to the local county government, and that puts the County in a position to possibly cut services or raise taxes. She shared when budgets are cut, that affects someone. She shared that she is seeing an increase in non-profits who are in a crisis mode and struggling to stay afloat. She shared non-profits supplement what the County does. She asked if there are any discussions at General Assembly level about crisis in non-profit sector.

Mr. Isley shared this is discussed at the General Assembly. He agreed cuts at federal level do have a trickle down effect and the ones impacted the most are at the local level. He shared it is difficult to answer the Commissioners question with specificity, as it is still difficult to do this without a budget. He shared he was pleased that the General Assembly acknowledged there are two sides to the property tax issue.

Commissioner Adamson asked for the link in order to watch the General Assembly meeting.

Commissioner Thomas shared NCACC sends links to join past meetings and shared that may be a good starting point. She asked Mr. Isley about the unfunded mandates and has there been any conversations regarding property tax reform; post committee.

Mr. Isley shared he has been having conversations about the County's constitutional obligations. He shared the general assembly bill is an exercise to see how property tax levies impact what county funds are being spent on.

Commissioner Thomas asked about the cost of housing and the

homestead exemptions.

Mr. Isley shared there was a bill filed regarding homestead exemptions. He shared the committee has perception that overregulation creates housing market.

Commissioner Thomas asked when will more sessions be available for persons to come and speak.

Mr. Isley shared there will be one meeting in February, March and possibly April.

Vice-Chair Jackson asked about the municipal portion of tax rate and whether this has been part of the general assembly conversations (in addition to the focus on the county portion of property tax rate).

Mr. Isley shared counties levy taxes on behalf of municipalities. He shared it may feel like it is more county oriented, but NCACC shared it was a municipality issue. He shared this is a broader impact and feels like it is a county onous.

Mr. Canada shared the perception is that counties collects taxes and redistributes to municipalities.

Commissioner Waters shared regarding cuts at federal level that effect lives of families dependent on snap assistance, does the State have the capacity to use emergency funds for childcare cuts.

Mr. Isley shared this question came up in September 2025, where the State did not include the use of emergency funds for those issues.

Mr. Canada shared counties trying to cover SNAP for one year is not a sustainable solution.

Commissioner Stallings asked about the rainy day fund for Helene Recovery.

Mr. Isley shared discussions have been held on that, but nothing has been confirmed.

Mr. Isley shared appreciation to Commissioners.

3. Library Bond Updates

Attachments: [2026-01-12 BOC Work Session - LIB Bond Updates.pdf](#)

Mr. Matt Roylance, Deputy Director of Community Services, shared the

Library Bond Update

He shared Approved Bond Projects: Voters approved \$142M in 2024:

- 5 new libraries
- 1 library expansion
- 8 library renovations

He shared the Replacement of the Library Administration building:

- Originally proposed for major renovation as part of 2024 bond referendum
- \$26M
- June 2025, BOC discussed a redevelopment of Wake County Office Park
- Plan includes space for GSA and Libraries that are tightly integrated
- Hard to keep funds separate
- Use provides synergies
- Funds that were approved can only be spent on Library projects and now it is less clear for when something is being used specifically for Libraries versus a part of.

He shared the Proposed Solution:

- Pay for both projects (General Services project and Library Administration project) with the same sources of funds - Limited Obligation Bonds (LOBs) that cleans up the issue for having to account for which dollars are being used on which project.
- Repurpose \$26M for other Libraries projects
- Used the sequencing of all projects to reflect these changes

He shared Repurposing \$26M Library Bond Funds:

- Expand Green Road Library
- Replace Olivia Raney Library (location to be determined)
- Increase size of new community library branches from 12,000 to 14,000 SF - allows for dedicated programming room and more flexible uses. He shared examples that would provide space for digital literacy.
- He shared these 3 projects total up to the \$26M.

He shared the Proposed Project Sequencing Chart:

- The Library Administration was an early project, and repurposing those funds can be used for other projects.

Commissioner Adamson thanked Mr. Roylance for the presentation and shared that it is good to receive positive news about the libraries. She asked if the \$26M is added with LOBs for new GSA facility and is their debt capacity to do this?

Mr. Roylance confirmed yes.

Commissioner Adamson shared the Olivia Raney library is a historic

library, with recent renovations done to it. She asked since it is listed as the last project, does that mean the library would not open for 7 years and will the life cycle be completed by 2033 or will it change before a normal lifecycle is available.

Mr. Roylance shared it is reasonably close. He shared a lifecycle replacement is generally done within 15 years. He views this as a compromise for the County to get it's monies worth out of the initial renovations done; while also synching up with the development plans for the office park.

Commissioner Waters shared this update is wonderful news. She shared a reminder of the steadfast advocacy for the Green Road Library and how this information is a win for the community and she appreciates staff's thoughtfulness for bringing that project forward. She shared kudos for purchase of the building for the Southgate Library. She asked if the breakdown of the \$26M can be shared with the Commissioners.

Mr. Roylance shared all projects have received estimates from FD&C and he shared the Olivia Raney library replacement will be about \$16M and expansion of Green Road library will be around \$6M; leaving a balance of about \$5M and that would be allocated to the expansion of the various community branches.

Commissioner Evans shared this is a win-win. She shared having Library Administration and General Services Administration together makes sense. She shared there was great synergy around the expansion of the Green Road Library. She shared adding space for newer community libraries is helpful and she is excited about the redevelopment of the campus to provide affordable housing. She shared all of this is great news and she is excited about all of it.

Commissioner Stallings shared excitement for project and thinks this is great news.

Vice-Chair Jackson shared this is wonderful news. She asked clarifying question regarding key of renovation, expansion and replacement. Does expansion mean moving from community status to regional status.

Mr. Roylance shared it will still be a community library, but bigger in size - going from 8100 square feet to about 12,000 square feet. He shared the remainder of the library will be renovated brought up to standard (new and old).

Vice-Chair Jackson asked what does a renovation expansion look like versus a replacement.

Mr. Roylance shared replacement is when there is an existing library and renovations can't be done on the existing site. Renovation means library will remain on same site and about the same size.

Commissioner Adamson shared if it is the will of the Board, is there a vote or authorize changes in today's work session. Is there a media press release on this?

Mr. Roylance shared the Board will only need to authorize changes during today's work session. He shared that Community Services will work with Communications on a press release.

All Commissioners gave approval of this agenda item.

4. Animal Center Schematic Design

Attachments: [Animal Center presentation 01.12.2026.pdf](#)

Mr. Patrick McHugh, FD&C Sr. Facility Project Manager; Ms. Rhonda Zak, RND Architects and Ms. Heather Lewis, Animal Arts jointly shared Wake County Animal Center Schematic Design Presentation.

Mr. McHugh shared the Agenda:

- Existing Facility
- New Animal Center Location
- Rezoning/Special Use Permit
- Programming Summary
- Site Planning
- Animal Shelter Best Practices
- Building Plan
- Sustainable Design Components
- Project Schedule

He shared Purpose:

- Present the schematic design for the new animal center
- Review two design alternatives
- Seek Board approval of schematic design for Jan. 20th meeting

He shared Background = Facility History and Site Selection.

He shared the Current Animal Shelter Facility Aerial Image.

He shared the New Animal Center Site (noting Wake County and City of Raleigh amended Inter Local Agreement for use the site).

He shared Rezoning & Special Use Permit:

- Rezone portion of southern Randleigh Farm Parcel for new animal center
- City of Raleigh Jurisdiction
- Current R-4 zoning does not permit animal center facility

- Rezoning approx. 24 acres to mixed use industrial
- Special Use Permit required

Ms. Rhonda Zak, RND Architects, shared the Program Summary:

- Building Area: 56,4000 SF
- Exterior Covered Area: 8,000 SF
- 265 Dog Kennels (Project Goal)
- 184 Cat Condos
- Four Separate Public Entrances (Pet adoption, Veterinary services, Foster services and Pet surrender)
- Animal Control Entrance Separate and Secure

She shared the Animal Housing Capacity:

- Building Area: 25,160 SF (existing); 54,600 SF (new)
- Dog Capacity: 135 (existing); 265 (new)
- Cat Capacity: 121 (existing) 184 (new)

She shared Site Planning Rendering.

Ms. Heather Lewis, Animal Arts, shared Animal Shelter Best Practices:

- Best Practice Animal Housing Design for dogs and cats
- Biological Risk Management
- Efficiency of Veterinary Services
- Safe, Customer-Focused Public Area

She shared Animal Housing design.

She shared Biological Risk Management data.

She shared Efficiency of Veterinary Services data.

She shared Safe, Customer-Focused Public Areas data.

She shared the Overall Floor Plan - Sections A, B, & C (sharing that animal shelters are very expensive buildings).

She shared Floor Plan Section A rendering.

She shared Floor Plan Section B rendering.

She shared Floor Plan Section C rendering.

Ms. Rhonda Zak, RND Architects, shared the Concept Rendering.

Mr. Patrick McHugh, FD&C Sr. Facility Project Manager, shared Total Project Budget is \$57million.

He shared a chart of the Building Size and Budget Summary

He shared the proposed schedule:

- Design: Q3 of FY26 to Q2 of FY27
- Bidding: Q2 of FY27 to Q3 of FY27
- Construction: Q4 of FY27 to Q2 of FY29

Commissioner Stallings asked about the building's energy efficiency - are

there trees on site, and will there be preservation of the existing trees.

Mr. McHugh shared yes, the City of Raleigh has a required Tree Conservation program and there will be 2.5 acres of trees preserved.

Commissioner Stallings asked if there will be solar panels.

Mr. McHugh confirmed yes, there will be.

Commissioner Stallings asked about lighting and energy efficiency.

Mr. McHugh shared all lights will be LED.

Ms. Lewis shared all interior lighting will meet energy efficiency codes. She shared the lighting will be intentional in that the hallways will be lit less, so that animal areas can be more lit. She shared the goal is to not over light the facility. She shared that there will be dimmable lights for certain areas and reducing light in the day which reduces stress for the animals and saves energy.

Mr. McHugh shared for the exterior, lighting from local power company will be used. He shared LED lights will be used in parking lots. He shared that there will need to be balanced lighting for the facility for safety and security.

Commissioner Stallings asked about housing for other stray animals. Will there be space added in the design in those particular instances.

Ms. McHugh shared for smaller critters there will be a space designed for them.

Manager Ellis shared that discussions are being held to determine if Wake County is the best agency to house those types of animals.

Commissioner Waters shared how impressed she is by the level of detail and thoughtfulness gone into this project. She asked about partnerships or collaborations that may exist.

Dr. Federico, Animal Services Director, shared there are transfer partners across the state and every organization has their own way of doing business. She shared partnerships are diverse amongst state for moving animals in and out of the County. She shared the amount of animal rescuing in Wake County is full. She shared vet schools are a good partnership.

Commissioner Adamson thanked presenters for this item and shared this discussion has been a long time coming. She shared she feels excitement

and sadness at the same time. She shared the challenge is to not have long term pets in this facility. She shared for the animals that come in through Sally Port, what happens when the animals have to be cleaned.

Ms. Lewis shared yes, a high tech bathing tub will be available to provide a way for the technician to properly bathe the animal, while using safe containment.

Commissioner Adamson asked what happens with high aggressive dogs.

Ms. Lewis shared the new facility will be designed to address those factors.

Commissioner Adamson asked about competition for private vets.

Ms. Lewis shared there are opportunities for partnerships with private veterinarians. She shared undersized vet services can be regretted.

Commissioner Adamson asked County Manager Ellis for update on how partnerships with private vets can be created.

She asked about volunteers and will there be space to accommodate them.

Ms. Lewis confirmed yes, there will be space for volunteers to check-in.

Commissioner Adamson asked about distance of new facility to Raleigh.

Mr. McHugh shared the new facility is about nine miles from the old facility. He shared ten miles from Battlebridge road.

Commissioner Adamson shared having designated play areas for the animals will be helpful.

Commissioner Adamson asked how will dogs, who are considered long-term, because of court cases, be handled in the new facility. How will this stress be alleviated.

Ms. Lewis shared the indoor/outdoor is critical with heating and ventilation. She shared there are no dogs facing other dogs to eliminate stress. She shared environment is key.

Commissioner Adamson asked about euthanizing animals. Will the new space be conducive for that.

Ms. Lewis shared absolutely. This facility provides dignified ways to

reduce stress for pet and for families.

Commissioner Evans shared the design is amazing and elevates the care of animals, staff and patrons of the facility. She shared she's concerned about location and if it makes long term sense to have a facility on the western side of the County. In the future, there should be a facility closer to the western side of the County, as this may help with adoptions, rescuing. She shared maybe a location more centrally located is something to consider for a possible second location.

County Manager Ellis confirmed conversations are being held.

Vice-Chair Jackson shared appreciation for thoughtfulness and planning of this conversation. She shared the questions posed show how different animal shelters are from daycares. She hopes that the same level of attention is devoted to building schools for young children. She emphasized this is to not take away from the wonderful work staff have done to care for the animal population.

Mr. Canada shared what staff has heard is the Commissioners level of comfort to continue with the schematic design of the animal shelter as this will be placed on the Jan. 20th Regular Meeting agenda. He shared stemming from early discussions, are the Commissioners okay with having the item placed on Consent (no further discussion) or elevated to the Regular Agenda (have further discussion before voting).

Commissioners shared responses as follows:

Commissioners Waters/Stallings/Adamson = place on Regular agenda
Commissioners Evans/Thomas/Jackson/Mial = leave on Consent

Based on responses, Chair Mial confirmed the Animal Shelter Item will remain on Consent Agenda.

Mr. Canada reminded Commissioners that in the agenda development process, there are two options for a Commissioner to add an item to the agenda:

- In advance of the final agenda being published
- Under current Rules of Procedure, any Commissioner can pull an item off of Consent for discussion.

Attorney Askew confirmed the second option is correct, and this can be done at the meeting.

Mr. Canada shared if the item is going to be pulled, staff may need to prepare a truncated presentation for the Jan. 20th Regular Meeting.

Chair Mial confirmed since there is one Commissioner requesting the item to be moved to Regular Agenda, the Animal Center item will be moved for the January 20, 2026 meeting.

Ms. Lucas, Deputy County Manager, shared there is no funding request before the Board at this time. She shared staff will continue with the design process, and will run parallel with County's annual budget process, and then come before the Board at a later date with funding decisions.

Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 4:07 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Antoinette H. Womack, NCCCC
Deputy Clerk to the Board of Commissioners
Wake County Government