

Greg Edds, Chairman
Jim Greene, Vice-Chairman
Mike Caskey
Judy Klusman
Craig Pierce



Aaron Church, County Manager
Sarah Pack, Clerk to the Board
John W. Dees, II, County Attorney

Rowan County Board of Commissioners

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MINUTES OF ANNUAL PLANNING RETREAT OF THE ROWAN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS March 16, 2026 – 10:00 AM ROWAN COMMUNITY CENTER

Present:

Greg Edds, Chairman
Jim Greene, Vice-Chairman
Judy Klusman, Commissioner
Craig Pierce, Commissioner (exited where noted)
Mike Caskey, Commissioner

County Manager Aaron Church, Clerk to the Board Sarah Pack, Deputy Clerk Rebecca Saleeby, Finance Director Anna Bumgarner, County Attorney Jay Dees, and Assistant County Attorney Eli Hardin were also present.

Chairman Edds convened the meeting at 10:13 a.m. Chaplain Michael Taylor provided a solemnizing prayer. Chairman Edds led the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Rowan County Board of Commissioners convened on March 16, 2026, for its annual retreat. The retreat was held in Meeting Room B at the Rowan Community Center and served to update Commissioners on relevant Rowan County topics and get a sense of Commissioners' priorities for the coming fiscal year. The retreat was facilitated by FountainWorks, Inc.

The attached meeting summary (Attachment A), prepared by Facilitator Rachel Werz of FountainWorks, acts as a summary and general account of the meeting, and captures the key points of discussion during the retreat.

Commissioner Pierce exited the meeting at approximately 11:45 a.m. during the Capital Improvement Projects presentation.

At approximately 5:00 p.m. on motion of Caskey, seconded by Greene, the Board voted 4-0 to adjourn.

The above summary, combined with the Annual Retreat Meeting Summary prepared by Facilitator Emily Wilson, are hereby submitted as the minutes of the Planning Retreat/Work Session.

Sarah Pack, NCCCC
Clerk to the Board

ROWAN COUNTY

NORTH CAROLINA

Be an original.™

Attachment A
Annual Planning Retreat
03/16/2026
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ROWAN COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

ANNUAL RETREAT

MARCH 16, 2026

 PREPARED BY:
fountainworks

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- 1,300 attendees
- Record number of participating employers
- Ongoing focus on expanding competitive, shovel-ready sites to strengthen recruitment

Manufacturing Sector Support

- Annual manufacturing survey conducted to understand employer needs
- Employer and student engagement activities included:
 - Manufacturing appreciation luncheon
 - Women in Manufacturing event
 - Tours and outreach reaching 400 students
- Emphasis on supporting the long-term manufacturing talent pipeline in Rowan County

Pipeline and Site Readiness

- Next anticipated development area: Route 70 corridor
- Rowan County continues to be a leader in the Duke Energy Site Readiness Program, which:
 - Verifies shovel-ready conditions
 - Saves developers time and money
- Project pipeline includes:
 - \$2 billion in potential capital investment
 - 4,000+ jobs

Growth and Competitiveness

- Rowan County is moving from attracting growth to managing growth, driven by:
 - A strong existing workforce
 - Available developable land
 - Continued industry interest
- Permitting strength:
 - County maintains a 7-day permit approval guarantee
 - Recognized as highly responsive and business-friendly
- Considerations for continued growth include workforce transportation, childcare challenges, and potential impacts of tariff conditions

Questions from Commissioners

- **Commissioner Edds: Is the youth program still funded by Duke Energy?**
 - Yes. The youth workforce program continues to receive funding support from Duke Energy.
 - Duke Energy also typically covers \$10,000–\$15,000 per site for Site Readiness Program assessments.

- **Commissioner Caskey: Do we track how many jobs we attract each year, and can we break those down by job type?**
 - Companies provide job-type breakdowns when applying for state incentives.
 - The EDC collects this information but does not currently publish it in reports.
- **Commissioner Edds: How does our Tier 2 status impact the amount of state support we receive?**
 - Rowan County sits in the middle of the state’s need-based tier system.
 - Higher average wages can reduce eligibility for certain state incentives, requiring a balance between attracting high-wage jobs and meeting broader workforce needs.
- **Commissioner Greene: How are private funds being used to support EDC projects?**
 - A feasibility study confirmed strong private-sector interest in supporting economic development.
 - Private fundraising now diversifies the EDC’s revenue stream.
 - First campaign: \$1.4M goal → raised over \$1.5M.
 - Recent campaign: as of this month, \$1.7M raised.

Commissioner Comments

- Rowan County’s permitting process remains a competitive advantage due to its responsiveness and the 7-day approval guarantee, though some challenges persist.
- Municipalities differ in permitting philosophies; Commissioners expressed interest in helping cities and towns adopt more efficient practices.
- Wage growth in Rowan County continues to accelerate:
 - County moved from 15th to 14th highest wages in the state.
 - As part of the Charlotte metropolitan region, Rowan is within the 4th highest wage region statewide.
 - Competitive labor demand continues to push wages upward.
- Transportation remains a significant barrier for young workers, particularly those caught in the “no job, no car; no car, no job” cycle.
- Childcare affordability continues to constrain workforce participation.

BUDGET UPDATE

Aaron Church, County Manager

What We Heard

- Manager Church noted that some budget numbers still contain errors at this stage because many are early estimates
- He reviewed the budget schedule, sharing that:
 - The proposed budget is planned to be delivered to the Board by May 18
 - The Board must adopt the budget by July 1
- Since 2015, the County’s fund balance has grown from \$45 million to \$178 million

- Commissioners were reminded to interpret this growth alongside inflation and rising project costs
- The unassigned fund balance is \$117.4 million, which is not committed and can be allocated at the Commissioners' discretion
 - The Manager noted that the County had planned to spend some of this on capital projects but was not as successful as expected, causing the unassigned amount to spike
- Sales tax revenue has doubled since 2016
 - Last year, the County budgeted \$40 million but brought in \$44 million, creating a surplus
 - The Manager is keeping the projection at \$40 million for the upcoming year to remain conservative, though he believes it may reasonably reach \$42–\$45 million
- The County saw increased revenue this year due to a 2.7% increase in the property tax base
- Departments collectively requested \$345 million for FY27
 - With only about \$216 million in expected revenue, this leaves a \$138 million gap
 - Even using the entire unassigned fund balance would not be enough to fill the gap
- Many departments submitted significant requests, including:
 - Sheriff's Office
 - Emergency Services (ambulance needs)
 - Parks and Recreation (maintenance and repair)
 - Multiple departments requesting new positions and upgrades
- Personnel requests total \$8.1 million, reflecting:
 - 70 new positions
 - 10 position upgrades
- To fully fund every departmental request, the property tax rate would need to increase by 60 cents, rising to \$1.18
 - This figure is not a recommendation, but rather an illustration of the scale of needs

Commissioner Comments

- **Commissioner Klusman:** Stressed that Parks & Recreation improvements are essential, speaking to their importance for families and grandparents.
- **Commissioner Edds:** Clarified that the 60-cent tax rate example is simply what would be required to fund every request—not an indication that the Board will raise taxes that much.

- **Commissioner Greene:** Asked what is driving the increase in the tax base.
 - Staff noted it is due to housing developments, growth along the I-85 corridor, and industrial expansion.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN / PROJECTS UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Anna Bumgarner, Finance Director

What We Heard

- Over the next 10 years, Rowan County has \$466 million in identified capital projects
 - Some projects appear in the budget presentation; others are new or emerging needs
- The Capital Improvement Project(CIP) model Anna shared allows the County to:
 - View projects by department
 - Adjust funding scenarios (cash, debt, grants)
 - See long-term financial impacts in real time
- Currently, all projects are set to “cash” in the model, but this can shift once actual funding sources are determined
 - The Manager emphasized that changing a project to debt or grant funding automatically updates projections
- A good, realistic, and prioritized CIP improves the County’s bond rating, and staff (with support from First Tryon) are refining the model to ensure it's more than a wish list
- Department-level highlights:
 - **Emergency Services:** Includes a \$6 million telecom project, plus future station needs
 - **Parks and Recreation:** Many projects spread out over multiple locations; effort was made to distribute costs over several years
 - **Rowan-Cabarrus Community College:** The \$38 million automotive building is placed in FY28, along with additional requests that were not previously known
 - **Rowan-Salisbury Schools:** Immediate needs prioritized; other projects placed into later years
 - **Sheriff’s Office:** Storage, camera systems, and a new jail complex planned within the next five years
 - **Department Relocation Projects:** Currently slated for FY29, but timing depends on broader County facility planning conversations
- The County is interested in eventually building a capital reserve fund, and the CIP model will help determine:
 - Which projects should be cash-funded
 - Which should use debt or grants

- How to plan for future years more strategically
- Commissioners will also hear from Kannapolis City Schools later in the retreat, which may shift priorities and timelines based on their capital needs

Questions from Commissioners

- **Commissioner Edds: Will the South Rowan EMS Station be funded by debt service in FY27?**
 - Staff noted that based on the current model, yes, the South Rowan station would fall within the FY27 debt service window.
- **Commissioner Pierce: The \$20 million for the Public Health Department—was that part of the \$117 million?**
 - No, it is not part of the \$117 million.
 - The Health Department project was funded through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.
 - The County originally budgeted \$10 million, but the project came in under budget and the County received more ARPA funding than expected, reducing the amount of County dollars needed.

CURRENT PROJECTS UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Craig Powers, Director of Engineering

Craig shared that his team meets monthly to review all ongoing projects, track timelines, and work from a shared worksheet used across departments.

What We Heard

- EMS Station:
 - Using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data for predictive analysis to determine optimal locations based on future growth
- Landfill Permitting:
 - New permitting required due to increased tonnage
 - Methane production levels are drawing interest from companies exploring renewable natural gas opportunities
- High Rock Lake:
 - Dredging work underway
- Telecommunications:
 - Server room and HVAC upgrades in progress
- Nature Center Renovations:
 - Quotes being gathered for upcoming work
- Airport Layout Plan:
 - On hold for the next few months
- New Corporate & Box Hangar Project:
 - Near completion

- AWAS System:
 - Planned for next year's budget

Other ongoing items:

- Courthouse
- ADA site upgrades
- Sewer project
- Maintenance building
- Initial facilities needs & space study
- Health Department opening July
- Concourse plan going out to bid
- Relocation of County departments
- Storage building going out to bid
- Recreation Center
- Bathrooms
- Train projects (under design)
- Parks Master Plan
- Playground (completed)
- Woodleaf (completed)

Questions from Commissioners

- **Commissioner Edds: Are we looking into limiting landfill use from outside the County?**
 - Staff shared that the County is not currently considering limiting outside use, though it is part of broader budget discussions.
- **Commissioner Edds: Should we consider prohibiting outside use?**
 - Staff noted this can be evaluated.
- **Commissioner Klusman: Can we charge two levels of fees?**
 - Yes, the County already charges different rates, though the difference is small—about \$5.
- **If we stopped serving other communities, how would that impact the budget?**
 - Staff said they can look into impacts and bring back information.
 - The landfill has worked through about half its phases and is taking in more than in the past.

Commissioner Comments

- The landfill brings in revenue but also uses up a limited County asset more quickly, which should be part of long-term planning.

FUND BALANCE / DEBT / CAPITAL PROJECT RESERVE POLICIES

Anna Bumgarner, Finance Director

What We Heard

- These proposed policies were developed following work with First Tryon Advisors and reflect best practices for long-term financial management
- Fiscal policies:
 - Provide guidelines and goals
 - Help insulate the County from financial crisis

- Improve credit and bond ratings
- Strengthen long-term planning and stability
- The Local Government Commission (LGC) recommends counties look to peer communities when setting policies to ensure consistency

Types of Fund Balance

Anna reviewed the different components of fund balance:

- Non-spendable – items that cannot be spent (inventory, prepaid items)
- Restricted – must be spent as directed by an external party (grantor, statute, creditor)
- Committed – set aside for specific purposes by Board action
- Assigned – intended for specific future purposes but not formally restricted
- Unassigned – fully spendable and not designated for a specific use
- Available fund balance removes amounts that legally or structurally cannot be spent
- Fund balance is calculated once each year on June 30; fluctuations often come from projects not completed or funds not yet committed

Proposed Reserve Policy

- Anna recommended setting unassigned fund balance at a minimum of 20% of the following year's General Fund budget
 - This aligns with peer communities
- If the balance falls below this threshold, the County would develop a plan to restore compliance within a defined (or undefined) timeframe
- Excess reserves could be transferred to a capital reserve fund, making them committed and available for future capital projects

Debt Policy

- Debt can be used strategically to leverage resources, and major projects may use a mix of cash and debt
- Certain types of debt require LGC approval, which can extend timelines.
- A formal debt policy helps the County:
 - Manage finances and obligations
 - Decide when to take on debt
 - Identify appropriate types of debt
 - Structure repayment over time
- Benchmarks discussed:
 - Debt service as a percentage of assessed value – Rowan is in good shape
 - Debt per capita – also in a favorable range
- First Tryon recommended:
 - Keeping direct net debt below 2.5% of assessed taxable property

Questions from Commissioners

- **Commissioner Caskey: Did the 8% rule ever really exist?**
 - Anna: It was a myth.
 - The Chair added that AI also confirmed it's often cited but not an actual state mandate.
- **Commissioner Caskey: Why choose 20%?**
 - Anna: It aligns with peer counties, but the Board can choose a different number.
- **Commissioners asked what they “lose” by adopting these policies:**
 - Anna said the policy can be changed annually if needed.
 - However, not following the adopted policy would negatively impact bond ratings.
- **Commissioner Caskey: If we set 20% and fall below it, is the state going to come after us?**
 - Anna: No. The LGC does not penalize this.
 - A three-month operating floor is suggested but not mandated.
 - Falling below would more likely affect bond ratings, not state compliance.
- **Commissioner Caskey: Why the 40% number for excess reserves?**
 - Anna: It was determined by looking at the CIP and long-term needs.
 - Greg added:
 - If the County is at 22% and wants to move a few million, it can.
 - The 40% threshold serves as a mechanism to guide when to shift funds into capital reserves.

Commissioner Comments

- Commissioners noted that past school construction delays during COVID resulted in \$5 million going into the general fund without being reserved for future school needs.
- The goal is to make the unassigned balance intentional, preventing misinterpretation by the public when the number appears unusually high.
- Having a debt policy provides structure, including deciding when to use cash vs. debt.
 - Anna noted interest rates and external factors also play a role, and NC law requires level principal repayment.
- Commissioners recalled when County funds were “scattered” across accounts; a consultant helped develop a cash-flow strategy and investment policy.
 - Anna said she would like to incorporate investment guidance into these new policy documents, especially since the County is now buying bonds and earning greater returns when revenue sits for long periods.

VETERAN SERVICES UPDATE

Justan Mounts, Director Rowan County Veterans Services

What We Heard

- The Veterans Services Office provides assistance to veterans navigating the Veteran Affairs (VA) system, including:
 - Helping file claims, especially basic levels of support
 - Justin personally handles complex cases, appeals, and high-level reviews.
 - Cases he disagrees with are referred to their partner law office, preventing veterans from being left without help
- Veterans often feel passed around or overwhelmed by the VA process; the office helps guide them through each step
- Rowan County has around 9,000 veterans, many of whom are aging and primarily 65 and older
 - Approximately 3,300 local veterans receive compensation under the ‘Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics’ (PACT) Act/Burn Pit Benefits legislation
 - Their accrediting body holds power of attorney for roughly two-thirds of these veterans, allowing staff to assist directly with paperwork and filings
- While the VA cannot address veterans’ social needs, those needs significantly affect overall health
 - Staff share information about discounts, benefits, and other community resources
- Veterans Treatment Court:
 - Focused on veterans whose offenses may be connected to service-related issues such as PTSD or traumatic brain injury
 - Participation is voluntary and not a free pass—participants accept strict structure, drug tests, court check-ins, and treatment
 - Veterans are paired with mentors who help them through recovery and accountability
 - Goal: improve public safety and prevent reoffending by addressing root causes

Commissioner Questions

- **Commissioner Caskey: Can you go over the positions?**
 - The team includes:
 - A case manager,
 - A coordinator who finds opportunities and support for veterans in the program,
 - And a position focused on human capital and participant support.

- These positions are funded through a grant ending in October, and the grant has now become competitive, making future funding uncertain.
- **Commissioner Greene: What are the recidivism rates?**
 - The program has reported 0% recidivism among participants.
 - Veterans with serious criminal histories are not eligible for the program; it is focused on those with mental health and substance-related challenges linked to service.
- **Commissioner Klusman: Is there a connection to homelessness?**
 - Justin explained that homelessness is often tied to the availability and exhaustion of resources within a certain area.
 - Some individuals move because they believe another community may offer better or renewed support.

KANNAPOLIS SCHOOLS CAPITAL PROJECTS

Dr. Sara Newell, Superintendent

What We Heard

- Dr. Newell shared the district's updated strategic plan, including the new mission, vision, and core values
- 23% of Kannapolis City Schools (KCS) students reside in Rowan County
- District demographics include: 43% Hispanic, 27% Black, 22% White, 8% Multiracial; 69% economically disadvantaged; 17% multilingual learners; 13% receiving special education services

Academic Growth

- Local scholarships: \$49,800
- General scholarships: \$1,832,865
- 2,314 industry credentials earned last year; on track to exceed that this year
- 89.3% graduation rate
- 12% increase in Advanced Placement (AP) participation since 2022
- 40% dual enrollment participation
- Career development plans begin in 8th grade and continue through high school
- Students have access to 16 Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathways, including new HVAC and welding programs
- Students participate in internships with numerous community partners

District Development

- Enrollment has remained steady with slight increases in charter school participation, and the district now sees enrollment trending upward

- 842 residential units are under construction or newly completed in Rowan County attendance areas, representing approximately 480 projected new students

Funding

Dr. Newell reviewed district funding sources, including Rowan County's contributions.

- Instructional Services: **\$3,177,893** (93.10%)
- Teacher Classroom Supplies: **\$27,926** (0.82%)
- Charter Schools: **\$168,722** (4.94%)
- Career Academics: **\$851** (0.02%)
- Fines & Forfeitures: **\$38,000** (1.12%)
- **Total Rowan County Funding: \$3,413,392** (100.00%)

Capital Outlay:

- Restricted sales tax: **\$69,307**
- Carryover from prior years: **\$500,000**

2025–2026 Budget Cuts

- 7.5 district-level positions eliminated
- 12 school-level positions eliminated
- Trilogy program ended and replaced with behavioral interventionist support
- Adjustments to administrative roles and EC contracts
- Spending reductions across all departments and schools

Use of County Funds

County support covers capital needs, maintenance, instructional resources (CKLA), the local supplement bonus, teacher supplies, and compensation adjustments tied to state salary actions.

2026–2027 Needs (Projected)

- CKLA renewal
- Possible discontinuation of Canvas at the elementary level
- Dual enrollment textbook costs
- Technology upgrades and refresh cycle
- Recruitment and retention initiatives
- Contracted services (reductions where possible)
- School Resource Officer (SRO) grant match requirements

Instructional Services Requests (2025–2026)

Dr. Newell reviewed projected local salary needs and Rowan County's proportional share

Capital Projects

- Life safety improvements

- Building upgrades: playgrounds, ceilings, flooring, paint, concrete
- Parking lot repairs
- Technology infrastructure improvements for rapid device replacement

Current Capital Projects

- North Kannapolis roof replacement (~\$350,000)
- Water pipe replacement and asbestos abatement at A.L. Brown High School
- Jackson Park Elementary Addition
 - Driven by rapid growth in the attendance zone
 - Rowan covers 51% of the cost based on student residency
- A.L. Brown High School Addition/Renovation
 - School has been at capacity for 3–4 years
 - Rowan funds 19–21% of total cost based on student residency
- Architectural designs for both major projects are complete; updated cost estimates are expected to decrease
- KCS requests \$18 million from Rowan County for these large projects

Commissioner Questions

- **Commissioner Edds: Is everyone under the 9.5% Kannapolis Schools supplement?**
 - Yes. All Kannapolis City Schools employees receive the 9.5% local supplement.
- **Commissioner Caskey: Is Cabarrus County planning to complete both large projects at once or one at a time?**
 - The district has not asked Cabarrus County directly. Cabarrus funded design work for both projects and agrees both need to be done, but it would be a difficult choice between them. They have explored multiple options, but there is no clear indication yet on sequencing
- **Commissioner Caskey: Is there any indication of the project timeline?**
 - Kannapolis City Schools is ready to begin as early as this summer but understands that funding or coordination may delay the start.
- **Commissioner Greene: So the funding amounts going into these two projects are \$26.5 million and \$31.5 million?**
 - Yes. Those are the initial project estimates for the Jackson Park Elementary addition and the A.L. Brown High School expansion/renovation.
- **County Manager Church: Are the architectural schematics completed?**
 - Yes. Architectural work has been completed and teams continue refining the plans.
- **Commissioner Edds: Are we involved in the decision-making process, or are we simply funding our percentage?**
 - Historically, Cabarrus County Schools has taken the lead on construction management, including projects where Rowan contributes funding. Rowan

County did not take part in design decisions for Fred L. Wilson, for example. However, Kannapolis City Schools stated that Rowan is welcome to participate more directly if it wishes.

ROWAN-SALISBURY SCHOOLS CAPITAL PROJECTS

Dr. Kelly Withers, Superintendent

What We Heard

- Above-average graduation rate
- Over 9,000 students enrolled in CTE programs
- Rowan-Salisbury is 4th in North Carolina for work-based educational opportunities
- 36% of students participate in dual enrollment through Rowan-Cabarrus Community College
 - Priority areas include increasing participation at certain schools
 - District is focused on improving dual-enrollment pass rates and retention
- **Capital Needs Overview**
 - Average facility age: 1959
 - 2017 facilities assessment identified \$181 million in needs
 - Air-quality and roofing needs have decreased due to Elementary and Secondary Schools Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds and county support, but inflation and new issues continue
- **Five-Year Capital Plan**
 - Athletics: gym floors, tracks, tennis courts
 - Paving projects
 - HVAC systems
 - Window and door replacements
 - 1–3 year priority: South Rowan Elementary
- 2026–2027 Priority Needs: \$17.4 million
- **Compensation Requests**
 - Teacher supplements increase from 9% to 12% (~\$2.6M)
 - Principal supplement to 20%; Assistant Principal supplement to 10%
 - Commissioner Edds noted high turnover and stated he will recommend moving directly to 12%
- Knox project scheduled for completion prior to the first day of school in August

Five-Year Capital Plan Figures

2026–2027 Priority Needs

- Athletics – \$2,736,230
- Paving – \$6,525,000
- HVAC / Systems – \$5,275,000
- Window & Door Replacement – \$2,885,000
- Total Priority Needs: \$17,421,230

1–3 Year Capital Project

- South Rowan Elementary: \$60 million
 - New K–5 school to address area growth and relieve overcrowding

Capital Outlay Request (FY 2026–2027)

- Annual appropriation: \$1,000,000
- Carryover: \$5,000,000
- Priority needs: \$17,400,000

Compensation Requests

- Teacher supplement to 12% — \$2,635,991
- Principal supplement to 20% — \$165,000
- Assistant Principal supplement to 10% — \$155,000

Commissioner Questions

- **Commissioner Greene: Why are supplements increasing?**
 - The district is requesting increases to remain competitive: teacher supplements to 12%, principal supplements to 20%, and assistant principal supplements to 10%.
- **Commissioner Caskey: The \$120 million—does that include \$60 million for the new school and \$60 million for deferred maintenance? If you build the new school, would it open in year five?**
 - Yes. The estimate reflects \$60 million for South Rowan Elementary and \$60 million for ongoing deferred maintenance needs. A five-year timeline is consistent with design and construction schedules.
- **Commissioner Edds: For the new South Rowan Elementary, would any existing schools close?**
 - It depends on growth. The district does not want to open a new school at or near capacity. Any closure would depend on updated enrollment trends and long-term growth.
- **Commissioner Church: Are all roofs funded and completed for the next five years?**
 - No. The district spent the \$16 million previously allocated for roofing projects, but additional roofing needs remain unfunded.

- **Commissioner Greene: So you are building with future growth in mind?**
 - Yes. Facility planning, including South Rowan Elementary, is based on population growth projections for the southern part of the county.
- **Commissioner Caskey: If we pursue the \$120 million using a mix of cash and debt, would collateral still be required?**
 - Yes. Collateral would still be required for the debt portion.
- **Commissioner Greene: With a 17.2% teacher turnover rate, how many of those are retirements?**
 - The district will provide a breakdown. Retirements occur monthly, while younger teachers tend to leave due to mobility and the competitiveness of local supplements.
- **Commissioner Greene: Why are almost 40% of students chronically absent, and what defines “chronic” absenteeism?**
 - Chronic absenteeism is defined as more than four absences per quarter (16 per year). Causes include illness, caretaking responsibilities, lack of legal enforcement for students over 16, and seasonal spikes during flu season. Social workers and principals intervene to identify the underlying causes and connect families with support.
- **Commissioner Klusman: Are substance use, alcoholism, or lack of care contributing to absenteeism?**
 - Yes. These are contributing factors and represent complex challenges the district continues to address through support services and interventions.

ROWAN-CABARRUS COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESENTATION

Dr. Carol Spalding, President

Jonathan Chamberlain, Chief Officer, College Environment

Tara Trexler, Chief Officer, Finance

What We Heard

- **Continuing Education**
 - Serves 300+ companies
 - More than 58,600 registrations annually
 - One of the largest continuing education programs in North Carolina
- **High School Programs and Partnerships**
 - Three Early College programs
 - Approximately 2,700 Career & College Promise (dual-enrolled) students in the 2024–2025 academic year
 - Dual-enrollment participation continues to grow in both Rowan and Cabarrus counties
- **Apprenticeships**
 - Rowan-Cabarrus is the 4th largest apprenticeship provider in North Carolina

- 186 apprentices currently enrolled
- All apprentices are full-time, paid employees with participating companies
- **Institutional Scale and Impact**
 - Serves over 24,000 curriculum and continuing education students
 - 14,380 workforce development students
 - Public service training programs rank #1 in EMS, #1 in Fire Training, and #3 in Criminal Justice
 - Annual economic impact of \$238 million through workforce training and education outcomes
- **Budget Requests and Capital Projects**
 - Operating budget expansion requests
 - Automotive Building
 - Estimated \$30 million project
 - Goal is to be shovel-ready in 2027
 - Will add two new programs:
 - Heavy Duty Diesel
 - Auto Body Technology
 - 45,000 square-foot facility with expanded bays and classrooms
 - Emergency notification system
 - Renovations to the library and cafeteria
 - Improvements to the North Campus upper courtyard
 - Advanced Manufacturing Building and Career & College Promise Building targeted for completion in summer 2027
- **Strategically Reducing Funding Gaps**
 - Recovered funding for three projects previously at risk
 - Secured \$5 million through U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for fire training
 - Received unexpected COVID-related funding
 - Obtained state funding for parking lot renovations
 - Secured two Golden LEAF grants
 - Received funding for teaching auditorium renovations and HVAC improvements

Commissioner Questions

- **County Manager Church: Is the salary increase request just for maintenance staff?**
 - Yes. Maintenance and security staff are partially supported through local and county allocations, and the increase applies to those positions.
- **Commissioner Edds: What does the \$238 million figure represent?**
 - It represents the annual economic impact generated as Rowan-Cabarrus Community College trains students and prepares them to enter the workforce.

- **Commissioner Greene: Each year Rowan County contributes \$100,000 to the Better Jobs, Better Lives program—can you provide more information on its impact?**
 - The program has been highly impactful, serving hundreds of Rowan County residents, providing scholarships, wraparound services, career support, and helping participants gain skills that lead to better-paying jobs.

ADW – PRELIMINARY DESIGNS FOR RCC PHASE 3

Bob Lauer and Darian Walker, ADW Architects

What We Heard

- ADW presented three conceptual options for reconfiguring the Phase 3 area of the mall
- Each option explored different configurations for department placement, circulation, and use of the former retail space
- Option B includes the Register of Deeds housed in approximately 3,000 square feet, which aligns with the space request previously made by that office

Commissioner Questions

- **Manager Church: Does the price include work on the exterior of the former K&W Cafeteria space?**
 - Option A includes exterior work only for the former JCPenney space.
 - Option B includes exterior work for JCPenney and all associated interior renovations but does not include exterior renovations for the former K&W space.
 - Cost estimates for the K&W space do not include any exterior renovations.
- **Commissioner Edds: What is your estimate for the cost of a fully outfitted restaurant within the K&W space? Given the renovations and increased traffic, have you considered the potential opportunity cost of using that space for the Register of Deeds rather than a restaurant?**
 - ADW stated they could not speak to the marketability, value, or cost estimates of outfitting the space as a restaurant.
- **Commissioner Caskey: If we wanted to only complete facade improvements to the JCPenney exterior, would that result in a higher relative cost?**
 - Facade improvements to the JCPenney exterior are estimated at approximately \$3 million.
 - Completing only exterior work would result in duplicated dispatch and overhead costs, increasing the relative expense compared to bundling interior and exterior work.
- **Commissioner Caskey: I would like to see some cost estimates for bringing the exterior of the former K&W space more in line with the rest of the building.**

- ADW noted this request for future analysis and cost development

PARKS & RECREATION CAPITAL NEEDS AT DAN NICHOLAS PARK

Nick Aceves, Director of Parks & Recreation

What We Heard

- Dan Nicholas Park (DNP) encompasses approximately 425 acres and includes a campground, lake, carousel, train, gem mine, nature center, zoo habitats, trails, and other amenities.
- **DNP Maintenance Shop**
 - Existing shop is pieced together and no longer suitable for current operations
 - Lacks adequate office space, workstations, restrooms, and safe work areas.
 - Estimated replacement cost: \$750,000–\$1,000,000
- **Rowan Wild / Nature Center**
 - Rowan Wild requires infrastructure upgrades (drainage, irrigation, plumbing, electrical)
 - Exhibits are outdated; layout and ADA access need improvement
 - Nature Center has experienced mold issues (recently mitigated) and space inefficiencies
 - Storage, office, and auditorium space are inadequate
 - Estimated cost: \$10 million
- **Carousel**
 - Installed in the early 1990s
 - Mechanical systems require ongoing repairs; motors, gears, brakes, and flooring are aging
 - If replacement is required, the carousel shell and aesthetic elements would also need full replacement and repainting, including space for staff and visitors
 - Estimated cost for a new carousel: \$750,000
- **Campground Store**
 - Not ADA compliant
 - Needs electrical upgrades, HVAC improvements, storage, office space, and expanded customer areas
 - Estimated cost: \$2 million
- **Paddle Boats**
 - Units are deteriorating; some have been patched but continue to leak.
 - Pedaling mechanisms are outdated
 - Estimated cost to replace all: \$175,000
- **Gem Mine Store & Sluice Lines**
 - Not ADA compliant
 - Lacks sufficient customer intake, sales space, offices, storage, and staff work areas

- No windows, creating visibility and safety concerns
- Sluice lines and pump systems are old and require frequent repair
- Estimated cost: \$2 million
- **Other Capital Needs**
 - Rental facility by the lake (revenue opportunity): \$2 million
 - Amphitheater replacement: \$500,000–\$750,000
 - Campground expansion (revenue opportunity): \$1.75 million
 - New cabins (ADA upgrades needed): \$600,000
 - Bobcat track loader: \$125,000
 - Granite Quarry Depot repairs: \$100,000 (additional cost if adapted for train use)

Commissioner Questions

- **Commissioner Caskey: You mentioned the carousel was installed in the 1990s—is that correct?**
 - Yes. Based on manufacturer documentation, the carousel dates to around 1990 and was originally brought to the park from New York.
- **Commissioner Edds: What is the total of Parks & Recreation needs?**
 - Rowan Wild alone is estimated at \$10 million.
 - Over a ten-year period, total Parks & Recreation capital needs are estimated at \$42 million.
- **Commissioner Caskey: How many acres are in Rowan Wild, and could it be built elsewhere?**
 - Rowan Wild encompasses approximately 425 acres.
 - Keeping amenities centralized allows visitors to access multiple attractions in one location, which is a major benefit.
- **County Manager Church: We are currently under contract for a site plan for Dan Nicholas Park that can help with fundraising—when will that be ready?**
 - The site plan is expected to be completed around Christmas, and will be used to assist with outside fundraising efforts.
- **Commissioner Caskey: Is the Granite Quarry Depot currently in use?**
 - No. It was moved to the park approximately 15–20 years ago.
 - It has been used for storage and could potentially be repurposed, possibly as a future train stop or rental space.

PARKS & RECREATION THERAPEUTIC RECREATION BOARD

Nick Aceves, Director of Parks & Recreation

What We Heard

- Therapeutic Recreation consists of two divisions, each staff with two full-time employees:
 - Therapeutic Recreation

- Senior Games
- Programs emphasize socialization, inclusion, and life-long recreation/leisure skills for individuals with disabilities, seniors, and other underserved populations.
- The Therapeutic Recreation Board was re-established in January 2026 and held its first meeting on January 8.
 - The board has seven seats, with one current vacancy
 - The board meets bi-monthly
- At its first meeting, board members and staff were tasked with:
 - Establishing a mission statement
 - Developing goals to guide future work
- The Therapeutic Recreation Board will provide input on the Parks & Recreation Comprehensive Plan during the public engagement process, similar to the Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee.
- Programs serve youth, adults, and seniors across the county and are primarily based at Ellis Park, with additional community-based partnerships.

Commissioner Questions

- **Commissioner Caskey: Do you do anything with Horizons Unlimited?**
 - Nick advised that Horizons Unlimited participates in field trips and site visits, but he would need to confirm the full scope of collaboration.

EMS NEEDS ASSESSMENT UPDATE

TJ Brown, Emergency Services Chief

What We Heard

- South Rowan EMS Station
 - The County is undertaking predictive analytics and forecasting to guide station placement
 - A consulting team will analyze historical call data, response times, growth projections, and traffic data to determine the most effective location and size for the station
 - This approach ensures data-driven decisions rather than assumptions about future growth
 - ADW Architects will conduct a space needs assessment
 - ADW will tour existing EMS stations and work with staff to understand current operations, staffing, and equipment needs
 - The goal is to develop a reusable station design template that can be applied to future EMS stations
 - The South Rowan station is anticipated to house two ambulances, differing from the traditional single-truck station model
 - ADW will also assist with determining land and site requirements

- Property size and configuration will be evaluated based on operational needs and parcel constraints
- The contract has been fully executed and pre-audited
 - Kickoff meetings are being scheduled
 - ADW will begin site tours and data collection so they can understand how existing stations function and what staff are accustomed to
- The project has a budgeted estimate of approximately \$7.5 million for the station

Commissioner Questions

- **Commissioner Edds: I have \$7 million in my head—is that about right?**
 - Yes. The project is currently budgeted at \$7.5 million.
- **Commissioner Caskey: What land are you planning to buy for this station?**
 - That determination is part of ADW’s scope of work. Site shape and configuration will influence needs, and no preconceived assumptions have been made about a specific property.
- **Commissioner Greene: Are we currently renting space for EMS stations?**
 - In Landis, the County rents the EMS facility, while in China Grove, the County owns the station.
- **Commissioner Edds: How many EMS stations do we currently operate, and what does response look like for the Long Ferry area?**
 - The County currently operates nine EMS stations, each with an ambulance; two stations also house additional units.
 - For the Long Ferry area, a quick response vehicle with a paramedic is dispatched first, followed by an ambulance from the Salisbury station.
 - Long Ferry is likely the next priority area after South Rowan.
- **Commissioner Caskey: In theory, could this analysis show that the northern part of the county is a higher priority than the south?**
 - This study is focused on South Rowan, but the process may reveal other service gaps that merit future attention.

EMS BUDGET UPDATE

TJ Brown, Emergency Services Chief

What We Heard

- The overall request includes approximately \$3.9 million in capital needs and \$2.1 million in personnel needs
- Relocation of the telecommunications center will require approximately \$130,000
- Radio amplifiers are needed to improve public safety radio functionality and coverage
- Tower lighting requires updates to ensure compliance with FAA requirements
- A portable radio console is requested:

- Allows paging, dispatching, and communication from the field using a laptop and cellular connection
- Adds redundancy to the existing communications system
- The exterior of the 911 Center needs upgraded security cameras to better monitor who is entering and exiting the facility
- Replacement of the command center bus is being proposed as a command trailer instead, as it would provide better value and flexibility
- Dispatch console equipment at the 911 Center is aging and needs replacement.
- Jail Annex BDA (Bi-Directional Amplifier):
 - Radio signals are impeded inside certain structures
 - The current BDA at the jail annex has had failures several times
 - Vendors have advised it cannot be repaired again once it fails
- MASS Unit:
 - The current unit is nearly 30 years old
 - Has required frequent and expensive repairs
 - Replacement request is \$900,000
- Additional capital and personnel needs were identified in the presentation

Commissioner Questions

- **Commissioner Klusman: Can we get a graph showing the increase in call volume?**
 - Yes. Chief Brown indicated that a graph illustrating call-volume growth can be provided.
- **Commissioner Caskey: Is the Knox Box a physical key or something else?**
 - In this case, it is a keypad system, with each authorized user assigned an individual PIN rather than a physical key.

HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Alyssa Harris, Health Director

What We Heard

- The new Health Department facility is scheduled to open to the public in July 2026
- The new building is fully funded with ARPA dollars
- The current facility lacks adequate space; the new facility will expand from 25,000 to 40,000 square feet
- The new building is designed with a client-centered layout, including:
 - Dedicated entrances for Environmental Health, WIC, and HOPE/Behavioral Health
 - Improved circulation and privacy for clients
 - Community meeting space
- The department employs 80 total staff (77.75 full-time employees)

- The Smile Center Dental Program focuses on services for children and pregnant women
- Recent Community Health Needs Assessment identified priority areas including:
 - Healthy lifestyles
 - Behavioral health
- Opioid settlement funds are restricted:
 - All opioid settlement dollars must remain within the opioid program
- Citizen Reach (FY 2024–2025) included:
 - Nearly 20,000 total services provided
 - Over 6,300 clinical visits
 - Approximately 2,650 WIC clients per month
 - Over 2,400 dental visits
 - More than 1,900 Environmental Health inspections
 - Over 1,700 Narcan kits distributed
- Budget Requests
 - Request to draw additional resources from opioid settlement funds for opioid-related services
 - Environmental Health vehicle replacements:
 - Two 2005 Ford Tauruses
 - One 2015 Ford F-150
- Environmental Health services will be co-located at the Rowan Community Center (RCC)

Commissioner Questions

- **Commissioner Caskey: Is Environmental Health moving to the Rowan County Community Center?**
 - Yes. Environmental Health will be located at the RCC.
- **Commissioner Edds: I understand opioid overdoses are down—does that match what we are seeing locally?**
 - Yes. In 2022, there were approximately 200 overdoses; in 2025, that number declined to 66.
- **Commissioner Greene: Wouldn't there be overlap in the total number of services provided?**
 - Yes. Some individuals may receive multiple services, but each interaction represents a distinct service provided.

BHUC UPDATES

Jenny Lee, Executive Director Rowan County United Way

What We Heard

- Behavioral Health Urgent Care (BHUC) serves as an urgent care option for behavioral health needs, including mental health crises and substance use.

- BHUC Impact
 - Since opening in April 2025, BHUC has served 1,126 unduplicated adolescents and adults
 - Walk-ins:
 - 954 adults
 - 172 children
 - Only 37 individuals were sent to the emergency department
 - Over 1,090 hospital diversions, reducing strain on emergency rooms
- Future of BHUC
 - The plan is to collect two full years of data before determining long-term next steps for the program
- The HUB
 - Designed as a collaborative nonprofit center, bringing organizations under one roof
 - Shared administrative services reduce overhead costs and allow nonprofits to focus resources on mission-critical services
 - Benefits include shared meeting space, utilities, receptionist services, and opportunities for collaboration
 - Oestreicher Building has been purchased as the site for the HUB.
 - Total project cost for construction and startup is approximately \$6 million.
 - Rowan County United Way is requesting \$500,000 in County support toward the project
 - The HUB will support economic development by bringing employees, board members, and visitors into downtown Salisbury
 - Plans are underway to establish a separate 501(c)(3) entity to oversee the HUB

Commissioner Questions

- **Commissioner Greene: Does Daymark retain your data, and can they identify repeat walk-ins?**
 - Yes. Daymark uses a sophisticated data platform that tracks both duplicated and unduplicated visits.
- **County Manager Church: Who will own the HUB?**
 - Currently, Rowan County United Way owns the building. An attorney is assisting with the creation of a separate 501(c)(3) that will ultimately oversee ownership and operations.
- **Commissioner Klusman: Do you have an estimate of rent costs for tenants?**
 - Not yet. Anchor tenants have been secured, and rent will vary depending on each organization's budget and space needs. Rates are expected to be at or just below market value for newly renovated space.

PRIORITIZATION

Rachel Werz, Fountainworks, Inc.

After hearing the departmental requests for capital improvements, County Commissioners noted which projects they want to be prioritized in the coming budget cycle.

Commissioners noted that they want to help with all listed, but some may not be ready for prioritization yet based on project timelines. Commissioners voted for the top 3 things they'd like to see prioritized.

- Teacher Supplement (4 votes)
- Emergency Services (4 votes)
- Rowan-Salisbury Schools Capacity Needs (1 vote)
- Parks and Recreation Repairs and Maintenance (1 vote)
- Rowan-Cabarrus Community College (RCCC) Automotive Building (1 vote)
- Other RCCC needs (1 vote)
- Kannapolis Schools Capacity Needs
- Sheriff staff and jail
- RCC Phase 3
- The HUB

Following the prioritization, the Board of Commissioners adjourned. A regular Board of Commissions meeting followed the retreat at 6:00pm.