

Buncombe County Board of Elections
Asheville/Buncombe County Board of Elections

Monitor Names: Elaine Elam, George Elam, Cheryl Williams

Date & Time: May 21, 2026, 3:30 PM

Names of Board Members Attending:

Glenda Weinert, Chairman (R), Jake Quinn, Board Member (D), Mary Ann Braine, Secretary (R), Sally Stein, Board Member (D), Courtney Blossman (R)

Names of Buncombe Co Staff Attending:

Corinne Duncan, Director; Gabrielle Corey, Elections Administrative Coordinator; Neggy Fox, Assistant Director; Rachel Wonderlich, Recruiting and Outreach Coordinator; Amy Broughton, County Attorney

Location of Meeting: 35 Woodfin Street, Asheville NC

Observers: 12 total including 4 Democrat, 4 LWVAB. Guests included Tim Love, Assistant County Manager for Election Services; John Hudson, Buncombe County Budget Director, and; Shawna Shepherd, Buncombe County HR Director.

I. Approval of Agenda – passed 5/0

II. Office Updates – Corrine Duncan

- Ms. Duncan said that Board Members had been sent an email with the budget dashboard that had been mentioned at the May 19 meeting.
- Also, at the May 19 meeting members had asked what other counties, besides Buncombe, were included in the audit. They are Ashe, Bertie, Brunswick, Durham, Gaston, Nash, and Orange.
- The public feedback survey on the draft Early Voting plan is live. Copies of a flyer announcing the survey were shared with the Members and the observers.
- At the May 19 meeting, members had asked whether radio could be used to get the word out about the survey. Ms. Duncan learned that the turnaround is tight but it's possible; most likely for the last 2 weeks the survey is open.

- Members seemed to agree that the message was a Public Service Announcement which should be at no charge. Ms. Duncan said she would explore that option.
- The Office will use FB, other social media, and will explore using WLOS.
- At the May 19 meeting, members had asked for updates from the State Board;
 - Ms. Duncan has a meeting with the County's State Board liaison soon about getting regular updates from the State Board.
 - Mr. Quinn said that the General Assembly is considering S.B 1084 which would reduce the number of Early Voting days from 17 to 10 and becomes effective on passage. His concern is that the deadline to present the Early Voting plan to the State Board is July 24, but if the bill passes, the current draft will be obsolete. Should the staff and Board prepare a contingency plan?
 - Ms. Duncan said another bill under consideration would prohibit the use of fire stations as voting sites.

III. Human Resources and Budget Information Session

- Ms. Duncan introduced the guests and thanked them for agreeing to brief the Board on budget processes and human resources on how salaries are set for employees.
 - The Board has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the County that helps support Election Services.
 - At the beginning of 2020 the Office had a budget of \$2.3 million with a staff of 7 and today's proposed budget is \$3.3 million with a staff of 12.
 - She also noted that the agencies represented by these managers do not reflect all the services that Election Services receives from County agencies and said the Office is well supported by the County.
- **John Hudson, Budget Director (how salaries are budgeted:**
 - The Budget Office is in the midst of passing the budget. A public hearing was held this past Tuesday with the goal of passing the fiscal 2027 budget by June 2.
 - The operations of his office are governed by the Local Budget and Fiscal Control Act which requires a balanced budget and does not allow deficits.

- We start in October by asking agencies for proposed budgets with a due date in January, generally operational budgets.
- Salaries and benefits are about 46 percent of the budget.
- His office prepares a report in January of all positions and salaries that is the starting point for building a base salary budget.
- By the second half of January, we adjust figures for the cost of living.
- They also look at turnover to reduce the budget to account for vacancies. The salary budget is not based on 100 percent filled positions because don't expect all positions to be filled throughout the year. Instead, the budget is based on about 96 percent filled positions.
- The County self-insures so it pays into an internal fund to cover employee health coverage which has risen by \$2,000 this year to a total of \$20,000 per employee.
- The Election Services Office is one of 19 agencies in the General Government function. The total budget is about \$485 million with about \$73 million for salaries and benefits.
 - Dr. Weinert and Ms. Stein asked Mr. Hudson to elaborate on the 19 agencies. Mr. Hudson said Education is the largest function with Public Safety the second largest. Election Services is about fourth or fifth largest of the 19 General Government agencies which also includes, among others, General Services and IT.
- The Budget Office has an online detailed budget, which Ms. Duncan has already shared with members.
- Mr. Quinn said that Election Services is a mission agency while the others are support agencies.
 - Not all parts of Education and Public Safety are strictly support activities.
- Mr. Quinn further said the presentation at the last Commissioners meeting included an incorrect organization chart. Specifically, he said that in the upper left-hand corner are 2 mission agencies, Sheriff and Registrar of Deeds. Election Services is listed under the portfolio of Mr. Love. This error, he said, may be part of

our problem because Ms. Duncan and the Board report to the State which gives it a different chain of command than the other agencies. This misunderstanding is a lingering problem.

- Ms. Blossman said she wasn't aware of that difference but wondered whether the Director and Board have authority to hire staff.
- Dr. Weinert granted that Mr. Quinn's point was appropriate but to respect the time of the guest, she reminded folks they were present to learn from them.
- Ms. Brain questioned why the budget doesn't flow straight from Election Services to HR instead of going through the Budget Department.
- Mr. Hudson said the County Commissioners directed the Budget Office to budget by function.
- Ms. Stein asked why the Board could not see Election Services salaries broken out from the other agencies.
 - Mr. Hudson directed her to the Budget Dashboard.
 - Ms. Duncan said the staff can likely develop that report for the Board.
- Dr. Weinert asked whether budgets for Public Safety and Deeds are pass through budgets.
 - Mr. Hudson said those 2 agencies are treated like all the rest with regard to process.
- Ms. Braine asked whether the individual amounts for salaries are set by the Board or by the Budget Office.
 - Mr. Hudson said the time lag in developing a budget does not allow budgeting by individual position such as at any given time positions may or may not be open and salaries can differ depending on who holds them.
 - He also said that requests for additional positions need to be made at the beginning of the budget cycle and must be approved by the Commissioners.
 - Ms. Blossman expressed concern that large differences in individual salaries could adversely affect staff morale.
- **Shawna Shepherd, Human Resources Director (how salaries are set and how changes are made):**
 - Ms. Shepherd said she began her position in January 2026.

- She noted that the agencies in the upper left corner of the organization chart, Sheriff and Deeds, are headed by elected officials who report to the public. Other positions, such as the County Attorney, have appointed officials as leaders. They also have separate Boards and Directors but they still report to the County Manager.
- County Commissioners determine the final organization chart.
- Mr. Quinn asked whether, aside from the Board of Elections, Chairs of those separate Boards report to the State.
 - Ms. Shepherd said her expertise is in how salaries are developed, adjusted, and classified, not organizational structure.
 - She acknowledged that people can disagree on how a position is classified and will discuss the process for resolving those disagreements.
- Ms. Shepherd said that pay rates are established for each position on the date of hire based on the employee's qualifications compared to job requirements. Once that match is made by HR, the process returns to the agency where HR and the agency hiring director work together.
- Qualifications are not based on education alone. It's important for the applicant's qualifications match the mission and values of the County and the agency. Together HR and the agency hiring official make the offer to the applicant.
- Pay levels are adjusted by the cost of living, which HR proposes and Commissioner determine whether to approve.
- HR sets position classifications. Agencies may express concerns about those decisions and the working title for the position. Depending on the resolution of those concerns, the title and/or classification can be adjusted to support the decision.
- County managers and the Commissioners totally support County staff, but HR needs to pivot on occasion to help ensure the County hires and keeps the best candidates.
- HR is currently finalizing a pay and classification study to set salaries as well as the minimums and maximums that can be offered.
 - Department heads will be surveyed for their input on the study.

- Pay levels need to be compared to other areas appropriately. For example, a county in California may not be comparable to a county in NC.
- Salary is only one part of the total benefits package. Other benefits include an 8 percent contribution to a 401K plan, free physical therapy, a family health clinic, an Employee Assistance Program for the mental health needs of employees and their families, parental leave, and paid leave.
- HR also works with agencies to recruit applicants.
 - Ms. Braine asked who had the final say in hiring decisions.
 - Ms. Shepherd said that at the executive level, the County Manager is involved and at lower levels, primarily the agency makes the decision.
 - However, if an applicant fails any required prescreening criteria, HR will get involved.
 - HR has no say in who gets elected to head an agency.
 - If an agency, wants to hire someone at a level below executive level who is unqualified, HR will get involved.
 - Ms. Braine said that as she reads the law and county policy, HR does not have authority in the hiring decisions of the Sheriff, the Registrar of Deeds, or the Election Services Director.
 - Ms. Shepherd said there are other considerations besides those sources.
 - Ms. Braine replied that the MOU says the Director of Election Services has the authority to hire, fire, and manage employees, not HR.
 - In her view, employees of Election Services are not County employees.
 - Ms. Shepherd said if they were not County employees, they would not be eligible to receive County benefits.
 - Ms. Blossman asked about recruitment.
 - Ms. Shepherd said that HR posts the positions on the County website but that the agency hiring director can post the position elsewhere.
 - She also said that HR determines whether a candidate is qualified, although she believes a process exists to

resolve such matters, including bringing the matter to the County Manager.

- Mr. Quinn thanked Ms. Shepherd for her work and noted that HR sometimes provides the agency with a list of best qualified applicants. Other times, Election Services will reach out to HR for assistance when the number of applications is 20 or more.
 - Further, he said that once Ms. Duncan selects a candidate, HR takes over to negotiate salary and make the job offer.
 - The Board wants Ms. Duncan to have the authority to be involved in salary negotiations.
 - Ms. Shepherd said the process is consistent across all agencies.
 - Mr. Quinn brought up the matter that the Board directly intervened to raise Ms. Duncan's salary because the County's then pay and classification study was inadequate to address her situation.
 - Further he said that the Board wants her to have hire, fire, manage, and pay setting authority.
 - Ms. Blossman said that Election Services has wonderful staff. The Board wants to set boundaries that allow it to hire the best people for this team.
 - She also expressed confidence that an agreement can be reached. Clearly, she said, Ms. Shepherd is quite competent.
 - Dr. Weinert thanked the guests for their time and expertise. She said further discussions may be needed because it appears that the boundaries between the County and Election Services have blurred over time. The Board wants those boundaries to be more clear.
- **Tim Love, Assistant County Manager for Election Services:**
 - Mr. Love said he appreciated the opportunity to speak with the Board about process. However, he said the questions reveal the need to get more specific about the Board's questions before the next presentation.
 - In addition, he confirmed that once hiring gets to the salary negotiation process, there is very little back and forth between HR and the agencies.
 - Mr. Quinn said that up until his comment about negotiations he was in complete agreement with Mr. Love. The negotiation

process seems to be a take it or leave it proposition for the hiring agency.

- The Board would like to see more recognition that Ms. Duncan is qualified to make the best decision for this organization. In the last 2 years however, Election Services had to hire second- or third- tier candidates which didn't work out.
- Ms. Broughton, County Attorney, said the Board has asked the County to do certain things for them and the County has done it their way. The issues the Board raises won't be resolved by Mr. Love, Mr. Hudson, and Ms. Shepherd. It will be best resolved through the MOU.
- Ms. Braine said we need to work out how to operate with our differences.
- Ms. Duncan asked the Board Members to write down their concerns for a later discussion.

IV. Badge Access Resolution– Corrine Duncan

- Because the information session did not conclude by 5:00 pm, the discussion of the resolution was postponed until Thursday, May 28 at noon, the time allotted already for a check in between Ms. Duncan and Dr. Weinert.

V. Next meeting Date: Thursday, May 28 at 3:30 pm at 35 Woodfin St.

VI. Next regular meeting date: Tuesday June 23, at 5:30 for public input on Early Voting Plan at 35 Woodfin Street

Adjourned at 5:10 pm.