



Local Government Committee for Cooperative Action “LGCCA”

Henderson County Historic Courthouse
1 Historic Courthouse Square
Hendersonville, NC 28792
Tuesday, July 15, 2025 - 3:00 p.m.

Minutes

Present: City of Hendersonville: Mayor Barbara Volk, Council Member Melinda Lowrance
Henderson County: Chairman William Lapsley, Vice-Chair Michael Edney
Village of Flat Rock: Mayor Anne Colleta, Vice Mayor Matt Toner
Town of Fletcher: Mayor Preston Blakely, Council Member Keith Reed
Town of Mills River: Mayor Shanon Gonce, Council Member Sandra Goode
Town of Laurel Park: Mayor Carey O’Cain

Also Present: Henderson County- County Manager John Mitchell, Assistant County Manager Christopher Todd, Clerk to the Board Denisa Lauffer, Financial Services Director Samantha Reynolds, Emergency Services Director Jimmy Brissie, City of Hendersonville- City Manager John Connet, Flat Rock- Town Administrator Pat Christie, Laurel Park- Town Manager Cara Reeves, Town Clerk Stephanie Banks, Chief of Police Bobbie Trotter

Called to Order

Mayor O’Cain called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM and welcomed those in attendance.

Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor O’Cain led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comment

Mayor O’Cain noted there were no public comments.

Approval of the Agenda - Additions/Deletions

Motion to approve the agenda was made by Mayor Coletta, the vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Approval of the Minutes - April 15, 2025

Motion to approve the consent agenda including the minutes of April 15, 2025, was made by Commissioner Edney, the vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Old Business

There was no old business to discuss.

New Business

Discuss City/County Interlocal Agreement and State Senate Bill (S869)

County Manager John Mitchell and City Manager John Connet presented the item as a team, taking turns explaining various aspects of the agreement. Mr. Mitchell began by acknowledging this agreement was a "heavy lift" accomplished during the largest natural disaster in state history. He thanked board members who worked on the agreement while managing day-to-day operations during difficult circumstances. He also thanked members of the General Assembly who worked with them.

Mr. Connet provided background on Senate Bill 69, Senate Bill 69 as the original bill number that was given to legislation that Senator Moffitt introduced in the Senate. He explained that several key issues led to this agreement:

- Operation and management of the utility system (noting that 70% of water customers are outside the cooperate limits of the city)
- Growth in and around Hendersonville and Henderson County
- Annexation
- Zoning

Mr. Mitchell added context about the four utility systems in the county: MSD in the north serving the Fletcher area, the City of Hendersonville's system in the Mud Creek drainage area, the county's Etowah system, and the soon-to-be Clear Creek system.

Mr. Connet detailed the proposed Water Sewer Commission structure:

- Nine members (4 appointed by City of Hendersonville, four by Henderson County, with alternating chair every 2 years between a county and city appointment)
- First term would be a county appointment for Chair.
- They are proposing no elected officials or city/county employees would serve (to maintain professionalism).
- Mayor and County Chair would serve as ex-officio non-voting members.
- Focus on making decisions based on what is financially sound for the overall system.

Mr. Mitchell explained that the commission structure (rather than an authority) was chosen to keep costs down while still having effective governance. He noted the city would maintain its assets while the county would maintain its assets, preventing the need to hire additional staff or take on additional debt.

The agreement includes:

- Water rates would be equalized by 2030 and sewer rates by 2035.
- The Mud Creek agreement would remain in place until a new agreement is approved by both governing boards.
- New annexation standards prevent the city from requiring annexation for properties outside the Mud Creek drainage basin.
- Existing developments outside the city would not need to petition for annexation to receive water/sewer service.

- New or redevelopment would need to petition for annexation in the city's proposed growth area west of I-26.
- The city would contract with rural fire departments to serve newly annexed areas and would be compensated based on a new tax base for serving annexed areas.
- County would maintain zoning authority for areas outside current city boundaries. Individuals could, where there is development greater than 50% petition for annexation into the city and could exercise their rights under the Mud Creek agreement the Board of Commissioners desire. Once the petition has been made with the city for annexation, the county will have 30 days to assume that.
- Municipal ETJ (extraterritorial jurisdiction) would be eliminated. Fletcher and Laurel Park's ETJ is still in existence at this point. There are some questions as to whether legislation will eliminate that.

City Manager Connet spoke about the Interlocal Agreement stating that the Water and Sewer Commission will assist in the development of affordable housing, work closely with HCPED to serve existing and new industries, and work closely with Henderson County and AgHC to meet farmland preservation and agriculture development goals. Will not require annexation for Flat Rock Cidery or Baystone Glen Developments. Waives City Attorney conflict of interest from two thousand Mud Creek agreement and City/County staff to work together on planning and zoning items.

County Manager Mitchell indicated they are working closely with Senator Moffitt and Representative Balkcom. The Board of Commissioners and City Council voted to send the draft bill to our members, and we have had meetings and discussions and are hopeful they will address this in legislation. The General Assembly is currently at an impasse over the budget. They hope to have more concrete information in the coming weeks. In the meantime, both the city and county are proceeding as if the regulations are already in effect.

Commissioner Lapsley clarified that the agreement aims to codify these provisions into state law so that future boards cannot unilaterally terminate the agreement. He explained that while this began as a water/sewer issue, it expanded to include planning, zoning, annexation, fire districts, and other matters. He noted that both boards are proceeding in good faith to implement aspects of the agreement that do not require legislative approval. He also expressed hope that each municipality served by the water system would recommend someone from their community to serve on the commission.

Hurricane Helene Updates

Emergency Services Director Jimmy Brissie provided an update on Hurricane Helene recovery efforts:

- Right-of-way debris removal is approximately 95% complete, with a goal of completion by the end of July and are still tracking for that.
- Private property (FEMA eligible) debris removal has had over 1,200 applications with about 450 completed and 850 approved for work.
- Waterway debris removal is currently underway on Cane Creek, Clear Creek, Green River, both forks of Mills River, Broad River, and Mud River.
- Waterway work will continue for months, focusing on debris threatening infrastructure.

- About thirty crews are working on private property and a dozen on waterways and many of these crews are helping with the hotspots on right of way debris as well.
- Homeowner mitigation projects (buyouts or elevations) are progressing with about sixty properties recently reviewed and submitted back to the state and FEMA.
- Infrastructure project applications are being accepted by the state with an October deadline.

Emergency Services Director Brissie introduced Natalia Santana Pollard as the new Recovery and Response Director. Natalia will be working very closely with our partnerships, nonprofits, the Disaster Recovery Committee, and different folks working to help our community to build back stronger. He also noted her previous experience with FEMA.

Updates

City of Hendersonville

Council member Lowrance reported:

- Patton Pool and Whitmire Center input meeting scheduled for today at 4 PM at the Henderson County Public Library.
- Rhythm and Brews occurring Thursday July 24, 2025, at 5 PM on South Main Street.
- Hendersonville Farmers Market every Saturday on Maple Street near the train depot.
- Hendersonville Splash Day is scheduled for Saturday, August 2 from 10 AM to 1 PM.
- Free Laura E. Corn Mini Golf on Locust Street with hot dogs, snow cones and snacks.
- The North Carolina Apple Festival over Labor Day weekend with opening ceremonies on Friday, September 1, 2025, at 10:30 AM at the historic courthouse square.

Village of Flat Rock

Mayor Coletta reported:

- The council approved their budget while maintaining the current tax rate.
- The village ended the 2024-2025 budget year with a \$250,000 surplus.
- In May the council provided pizza to the Sheriff's Office during National Police Week as a thank you.
- The annual ice cream social was held the first Saturday in June and was successful.
- June 20th WSPA TV showcased Flat Rock in its weekly program "Zip Trips".
- Plans for a shred day/pill drop-off event in October date TBD.
- At the July council meeting they approved the updated park rules and hired a landscape architect to design the area in the park along North Highland Lake Road.
- Dedicated the council room as the Nick Wiedemann Assembly Room in honor and thanks to his 21 years of service.
- The August 4, 2025, agenda meeting will be on amendments to the land development ordinance.

Henderson County

Chairman Lapsley reported:

- Ecusta Trail grand opening is scheduled for Friday July 18, 2025, after 14-15 years of planning.
- Saluda Grade rail line was purchased, with efforts to secure funding underway.
- The Berkeley Mills Park project (approximately \$15 million) is under construction and working toward major improvement to the expansion of our county recreation program.
- The Mills River cell tower is up, awaiting Verizon installation.
- The county budget was approved with no tax rate increase.

Town of Mills River

Mayor Gonce reported:

- SDR cleanup on park property is progressing well.
- Plans to contract for trail and park cleanup once county work is complete.
- They attended the grand opening of the new Asheville Airport terminals, which is impressive.
- Council member Sandra Goode added that they are working on their strategic plan. We have adopted mission and vision and working on goals.
- The town passed a 2025 budget with no tax rate increase.
- An end-of-summer splash bash is scheduled for Friday, August 18, 2025, with many activities.
- The Farmer's Market is doing well, and it is up by about one-third from normal attendance with close to six hundred visitors a weekend.

Town of Laurel Park

Mayor O'Cain reported:

- Paul Hansen passed away on April 25, and the town is seeking a replacement.
- The tax rate remains the same at 39.5 cents, which includes fire protection.
- Laurel Park was incorporated in 1925 and 2025 marks the town's centennial year with special events including a history program, dinner, and picnic for residents at no cost due to sponsors.
- The town faces approximately \$15 million in Hurricane Helene repairs with a \$4 million budget and are reaching out to whatever avenues they can to try and get aid.
- They have received \$2.5 million in low-interest or zero-interest loans. We do not know if these will be forgivable or not but are hopeful.
- Mayor O'Cain expressed frustration that the town has received no FEMA funds despite being the first community in Western NC to apply.

County Manager Mitchell acknowledged the challenges with FEMA reimbursement, noting that front-loaded payments would be beneficial in future disasters. He explained that debris removal costs for the county could exceed \$50 million, and getting the reimbursement pipeline moving was a priority.

Town of Fletcher

Mayor Blakely reported:

- The town adopted a budget of just under \$10 million while maintaining the tax rate at 0.28 cents.
- They increased allocation for fire and rescue to 10.5 cents.
- The fire department maintained a rating of three in their fire suppression rating survey.
- Updates to their flood ordinance raised elevation requirements to four feet above base flood elevation and prohibited certain uses in the floodplain including multi-family housing, schools, daycare facilities and housing for the aging population.
- Storm-related repairs at Bill Moore Community Park are progressing, with the first phase completed which includes ball fields, multi-use courts and dog parks, The next phase starting next week will include the bridge of Cane Creek Greenway.
- McGill Associates presented development scenarios for their town center project and hope to share those with developers.
- Their farmers market opened in May and moved from town hall to Bill Moore Community Park.

Reminder of Next Meeting - October 21, 2025 - Hosted by Town of Mills River

Mayor O'Cain stated the next meeting is scheduled for October 21, 2025, at 3 PM hosted by the Town of Mills River.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Lapsley at 4:09 PM. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Approved:

Date

Carey O'Cain, Mayor
Town of Laurel Park