

GRANVILLE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
May 5, 2025
GRANVILLE EXPO AND CONVENTION CENTER
4185 US Highway 15 South, Oxford, North Carolina

PRESENT:

Chair Jimmy Gooch
Vice-Chair Zelodis Jay
Commissioner Robert Williford
Commissioner Mark Griffin
Commissioner Tony W. Cozart
Commissioner Russ May
Commissioner Timothy Karan

County Manager Drew Cummings
County Attorney James C. Wrenn, Jr.

CALL TO ORDER

At 7:00 p.m., Chair Jimmy Gooch called the meeting to order. Commissioner Tony W. Cozart had the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motioned by Commissioner Zelodis Jay, seconded by Commissioner Mark Griffin, and unanimously carried, Board approved the May 5, 2025 regular meeting agenda.

CONSENT AGENDA

Motioned by Commissioner Tony W. Cozart, seconded by Commissioner Robert Williford, and unanimously carried, Board approved the consent agenda as follows:

A. Approved Budget Amendment 16 for Fiscal Year 2024-2025.

BUDGET AMENDMENT 16
May 5, 2025
Legal Document

Be it ordained, the FY 2024-2025 Annual Budget Ordinance is hereby amended as follows:

GENERAL FUND			
Expenditures	Increase	Decrease	Total
Community Services			\$984
Cooperative Extension Service	\$ 984	\$ -	
Human Services			\$35,000
Social Services	\$ 35,000	\$ -	
	Total Expenditures		\$35,984
Revenues			
Restricted and Intergovernmental	\$984	\$ -	
Appropriated Fund Balance	\$35,000	\$ -	
	Total Revenues		\$35,984

B. Approved Annual Audit Contract for Fiscal Year 2024-2025.

C. Approved Adoption of Internal Audit Charter.

D. Approved the following tax refunds, releases, and write-offs:

- Refunds April 9, 2025 – April 23, 2025: \$ 5,996.01
- Releases April 9, 2025 – April 23, 2025: \$ 573.40
- Write-offs April 9, 2025 – April 23, 2025: \$ 2.80

INTRODUCTIONS, RECOGNITIONS, AND PRESENTATIONS

Board Recognized Karen Evans, Clerk to the Board of Commissioners

Board recognized Karen Evans, Clerk to the Board of Commissioners, for becoming a North Carolina Certified County Clerk. The Board presented a formal recognition and proclaimed May 4-10, 2025 as "Clerks to the Board of County Commissioners Week" in Granville County. Chair Gooch presented the recognition, noting that Evans had completed all course requirements of the International Institute of Municipal Clerks Certification Institute at UNC School of Government, including passing the required examination. Evans attended the 2024 Clerk Certification Institute in February, May, August, and October 2024, covering essential topics such as open meetings law, public records law, ordinance authority, meeting procedures, agenda preparation, and other core clerk responsibilities.

Multiple commissioners expressed their appreciation for Evans' dedication, professionalism, and vital role in supporting the Board's operations. Evans thanked the Board and administration staff for their support as she transitioned into her role, noting that it was her honor and privilege to serve at the pleasure of the Board.

**PROCLAMATION RECOGNIZING MAY 4 THROUGH MAY 10, 2025
AS CLERKS TO THE BOARDS OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS WEEK**

WHEREAS, the role of the clerk to the board of county commissioners (clerk) is crucial for maintaining an informed community and facilitating effective local governance through communication among citizens, governing bodies, and administrative departments; and

WHEREAS, the position of clerk, one of the oldest in local government, continues to be essential as the official recordkeepers of their counties, with responsibilities that are deeply rooted in history; and

WHEREAS, North Carolina General Statute 153A-111 requires every board of county commissioners to appoint or designate a clerk to the board to perform any duties that may be required by law or the board of commissioners including, but not limited to, the preparation, filing, and protection of local government records, which are vital for accountability and transparency; and

WHEREAS, clerks enhance their professional skills through active participation in the North Carolina Association of County Clerks to Boards of Commissioners, which, in partnership with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Government and the International Institute of Municipal Clerks, offers nationally recognized certification programs and continuous professional education; and

WHEREAS, clerks, through their dedication to professional development, not only improve the efficacy of their offices but also bring positive recognition to their counties by participating in advanced education and obtaining profession-related certifications.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT PROCLAIMED by the Granville County Board of Commissioners that May 4 through May 10, 2025, will be recognized as "Clerks to the Boards of County Commissioners Week" in Granville County and extends its appreciation to Clerk to the Board Karen Evans, and to all county clerks for the vital services they perform and their exemplary dedication to the county they represent.

Board Recognized Tyeisha Hewett, Recipient of the 2024 Dorothy R. Crawford Award

DSS Director Latoya Toussant introduced the presentation of the Dorothy R. Crawford Award to Tyeisha Hewett. Representatives from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services' Division of Aging, Misty Piekaar-McWilliams and April Black, presented the award.

About the Award

The Dorothy R. Crawford Award was established in 2018 to recognize individuals who develop innovative strategies that significantly impact the lives of older adults through adult protective services and guardianship. The award was named after Dorothy "Dot" Crawford, a former DSS Director of Macon County who advocated for vulnerable adults for 75 years.

Hewett's Accomplishments

April Black highlighted Hewett's innovative work in adult protective services, specifically noting a case where Hewett:

- Coordinated a multidisciplinary team to support a 69-year-old undocumented individual with no connections
- Collaborated with Medicaid, Social Security, Social Services for the Blind, and pro bono counsel from the Department of Justice
- Secured visual impairment assistance and safe placement for the client after a brief hospital stay

Black also mentioned that Granville County DSS consistently demonstrated excellence in adult protective services under Hewett's leadership, as evidenced by their data reports and programmatic monitoring. Additionally, Hewett partnered with the Area Council on Aging to host an annual World Elder Abuse Awareness event and regularly shared her expertise with supervisors across North Carolina.

In her acceptance remarks, Hewett expressed that it was a privilege to serve her hometown community, saying she "wouldn't dare think about serving anywhere else."

Sheriff's Office Presented Recognition Received for Assistance with Relief Efforts in Buncombe County Following Hurricane Helene

Sheriff Robert Fountain presented a recognition that the Granville County Sheriff's Office received at the recent Sheriff's Association conference in Wilmington, NC. The recognition was for the County's assistance to Buncombe County following Hurricane Helene.

Specifically:

- The Granville County Sheriff's Office was recognized for sending deputies to the western part of North Carolina for an extended period to provide law enforcement services after Hurricane Helene struck Asheville and surrounding areas.
- Sheriff Fountain shared a letter from Buncombe County Sheriff Quentin Miller expressing deep gratitude for the assistance provided.
- The Sheriff emphasized that this recognition was for the entire Granville County community, not just the Sheriff's Office.
- Sheriff Fountain noted that his office made approximately four trips to deliver donations from the Granville community to affected areas from Chimney Rock to Asheville.
- A plaque was received that will be displayed in the Sheriff's Office lobby, and the Granville County logo will be affixed to a torn and battered U.S. flag that flew over the Buncombe County Sheriff's Office during the hurricane.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Patrick Moore, 792 Condon Drive, Charleston, SC, representing energyRe, a renewable energy company, addressed the Board to introduce himself and share information about a future solar project in Granville County. He noted that energyRe has agreements with five county landowners totaling 730 acres, which will support an 80-megawatt solar energy project. While not on the current agenda, he stated they anticipate seeking zoning approval within the next year. Moore emphasized a commitment to transparency and public engagement,

acknowledging that past projects in the area lacked sufficient outreach. He invited commissioners and the public to engage with the project and offered to meet individually or collectively. He also provided contact information and materials for those interested.

BUDGET MATTERS

County Manager Drew Cummings presented the recommended FY26 budget, marking his third budget cycle with Granville County. He noted that the proposed budget included no tax rate increase and was developed through significant effort to optimize existing revenue streams while meeting key organizational and community needs. Cummings thanked staff who contributed to the budget preparation, including Deputy County Manager Korena Weichel, Management Analyst David Schexnayder, Finance Director Jennifer Baird, Assistant Finance Director Lindsey Davidson, department heads, and other supporting staff.

FY24-25 Budget Recap

- totaled approximately \$87.25 million.
- Property tax rate reduced to \$0.63 per \$100 valuation following revaluation.
- Fire tax remained at \$0.06 per \$100 valuation, generating over \$3.3 million.
- Nearly \$2 million in additional funding provided to Granville County Public Schools (primarily for capital maintenance).
- First year of a new \$400,000 annual capital commitment to Vance-Granville Community College.
- Continued phased increase in 401(k) match for employees; currently the second year of increases.
- No COLA provided in FY24-25; typical 3% merit increase barely outpaced inflation.

FY24-25 Year in Review

- Economic outlook remained uncertain; interest rates remained high but slightly declining.
- Stable revenue projections confirmed; increased interest income supported the budget.
- Continuation of broadband expansion efforts increased total new or planned high-speed connections to over 8,400:
 - o Included a recent \$3 million grant award to serve an additional 2,164 homes and businesses.
- Finance Department improvements included:
 - o Strengthened staffing and leadership.
 - o Implementation of electronic payments to vendors.
 - o Consolidation of credit card system.
 - o Consolidation of all County bank accounts into one financial institution.
 - o Nearly all deposits now made remotely.

Departmental Updates and Capital Planning

- New directors hired in Cooperative Extension, Economic Development, and Animal Control.
- Long-term capital planning milestones:
 - o Creation of Capital Reserve Fund.
 - o Establishment of Hawley Recreation Site capital project with initial \$2 million in funding.
 - o Issuance of RFQ for a space needs analysis and master plan.
- Construction of the North Granville Senior Center nearly complete.

Budget Development Timeline

- Budget development began in January with departmental meetings through February and March.
 - Commissioner engagement occurred during and after the February board retreat.
 - Additional lead time built into this year's process to ensure stronger preparation.
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Upcoming Budget Process

- Three full-day budget work sessions scheduled for the week of May 12, 2025
 - Public hearing scheduled for May 19, 2025.
 - Target adoption date for the FY26 budget set for June 2, 2025.
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FY25-26 Budget Backdrop

- No tax rate increase was requested by Commissioners.
 - Departments were asked to cut 5% from operational budgets—most achieved this.
 - Economic conditions are stable but uncertain.
 - Fund balance grew to 33.6% of General Fund expenditures, nearing the 35% target.
 - Continued cautious spending expected to grow the fund balance again.
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Revenue Trends – By Type

- Property tax is the largest and most stable revenue source.
 - Sales tax follows as the second largest.
 - Fund balance is often used as a balancing mechanism, budgeted but not typically spent.
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Revenue Trends – Sales Tax Growth Slowing

- Sales tax revenue is still growing, but at a slower rate.
 - Conservative approach: flat budget for sales tax in FY25-26 due to economic uncertainties.
 - Budgeting strategy favors caution over optimism.
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Overall Revenue Picture

- \$2.6 million available for new General Fund expenditures due to:
 - o Departmental cuts,
 - o Construction admin savings,
 - o No EMS increase requests,
 - o Natural revenue growth,
 - o \$500K in fund balance usage.
 - Capital projects funded by reductions in debt service and prior 2-cent capital allocation.
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FY25-26 Budget Drivers

- Priorities include:
 - o Maintaining stable County operations and staffing,
 - o Recruiting and retaining employees,
 - o Ensuring adequate public safety across the county,
 - o Providing state-required funding for education,
 - o Maintaining school and VGCC facilities,
 - o Addressing long-term capital needs.
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Employee Benefits Enhancement – 401(k)

- Proposed increase of 401(k) match from 3% to 5%, completing a multi-year goal.
 - Enhances retirement competitiveness for recruitment and retention.
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Employee Pay and Benefit Enhancements

- Proposed 4% merit pool and 2% Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA).
 - Addresses inflation and aligns with Commissioner priorities to support employees.
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General Pay Plan Compared to Inflation

- 2019 pay study helped "catch up" to pre-2019 inflation.
 - Since 2019, inflation = ~26%; COLAs covered only ~⅓.
 - Many employees not receiving targeted raises are lagging in real pay.
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Health Plan Costs

- Minimal increase in health plan costs this year (compared to 17% last year).
 - Programs aimed at improving health and reducing claims are working.
 - Family coverage remains expensive (~\$9K/year) and is a long-term concern.
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FY25-26 Fire Protection District (Fire Tax)

- Fire tax remains at \$0.06 per \$100 valuation.
 - Volunteer fire departments now receive 2–4x more funding than three years ago.
 - Funding allocations vary based on need and service levels.
 - Fund balance in the Fire Tax Fund is growing in preparation for future needs.
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FY24-25 Fire Protection Achievements

- Weekday paid coverage improved response times.
 - Financial reviews and budgeting assistance provided to all volunteer departments.
 - Fire Tax Fund balance growing to support future equipment and station needs.
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FY25-26 EMS Funding (Operated by GHS)

- GHS continues to operate the EMS system effectively and with financial support.
 - County’s investment in EMS has grown (personnel + ambulances).
 - No new EMS funding requests for next fiscal year.
 - County is fortunate to still have a local hospital system.
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Educational Funding – Granville County Public Schools (GCPS) and Charters

- The chart shows total student enrollment across GCPS and charter schools.
 - Student count in charter schools continues to increase, influencing the way funds are distributed.
 - The County is legally obligated to fund charter students at the same per-pupil level as GCPS students.
 - As more students enroll in charter schools, this funding responsibility shifts dollars away from GCPS.
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GCPS – FY25-26 Local Funding

- Proposed local current expense funding for GCPS is \$20.1 million—an increase of 2.0% over the current year.
 - Capital outlay funding remains flat at \$3.25 million.
 - Overall, GCPS would receive \$26.4 million from Granville County if the budget is adopted as proposed.
 - This funding supports salaries, utilities, maintenance, supplies, and more.
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VGCC – FY25-26 Local Funding

- Proposed VGCC operational funding increases to \$1 million.
 - Capital support proposed at \$650,000: \$550,000 for the South Campus and Main Campus (which Granville shares with other counties).
 - VGCC remains the top higher education destination for local high school graduates.
 - Continued investment is critical to workforce development and student success.
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Staffing and Position Changes

- Reviewed County staffing for redundancies and optimization; changes resulted in only a fractional increase in overall FTE count.
 - Added part-time staffing to support Fire Commission work and administration of the Fire District Tax Fund.
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Fee Increases (FY25-26)

- Approved incremental increases to solid waste and stormwater fees, continuing a multi-year

solvency plan for both enterprise funds.

- Adjusted rental fees at the GAP and Expo Center to reflect rising maintenance and cleaning costs.

Key Department Operating Expansions

- Elections Department: Increased personnel budget by over \$100,000 and operating budget by over \$70,000 due to expanded demands.
- Social Services (DSS): Added funding for staffing and state-mandated foster care costs due to increased demand and limited provider availability. Reallocated \$92,360 from other budgets to maximize state reimbursement.
- Emergency Services: Allocated nearly \$20,000 for a replacement generator at the 911 backup center after a fire incident.
- HR/Administration: Proposed \$40,000 for a comprehensive pay and classification study.
- Cleaning Services: Implemented results of a competitive RFP to improve cleaning consistency across County buildings, with only a slight increase in cost.

Budget Reductions and Operational Efficiencies

- Requested and received 5% operational cuts from most departments to create funding capacity without raising taxes.

Sheriff’s Office Budget

- Addressed prior-year unplanned cost spikes by allocating a nearly \$200,000 reserve in the County’s contingency fund.
- Reserved an additional 5% of the Sheriff’s Office budget in contingency for unanticipated needs, while maintaining current staffing and operations.

Outside Agency Funding Adjustments

- Increased Granville Vance Public Health funding by \$50,000: \$25,000 recurring and \$25,000 one-time for EMR system upgrades.
- Provided additional funding for courthouse improvements ahead of planned renovations.
- Increased funding for the Oxford-Henderson Airport Authority to support economic development.
- Approved a modest increase for the Tar River Land Conservancy in support of open space and natural area preservation.

KARTS (Kerr Area Regional Transit System)

- Maintained County funding at historical levels; recognized Director Randy Cantor’s ongoing efficiency and service expansion efforts.
- Noted that state passthrough funding may go directly to KARTS in the future instead of through the County.

Unfunded Budget Requests

- Acknowledged receipt of over \$7 million in new funding requests that could not be accommodated under a no-tax-increase budget.
- Presented a partial list of worthwhile but unfunded proposals due to revenue constraints.

Recommended Budget Summary

- Presented a strategic and streamlined FY25-26 budget proposal that balanced core priorities without raising the County or fire tax rates.
 - Encouraged public participation through upcoming budget work sessions and the May 19th public hearing.
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APPOINTMENTS

Board Held Appointments for Granville County Board of Adjustment

Board Approved Appointments to the Granville County Citizens Advisory Committee for Environmental Affairs

Motioned by Commissioner Tony W. Cozart, seconded by Commissioner Robert Williford, and unanimously carried, Board appointed Harvey Spurr to the Citizens Advisory Committee for Environmental Affairs District 4 seat.

Motioned by Commissioner Jimmy Gooch, seconded by Commissioner Timothy Karan, and unanimously carried, Board appointed Chris Macke to the Citizens Advisory Committee for Environmental Affairs District 7 seat.

Board Approved Appointments to the Tourism Development Authority

Motioned by Commissioner Robert Williford, seconded by Commissioner Russ May, and unanimously carried, Board approved the appointment of Brianne Elliott to serve on the Tourism Development Authority as the City of Oxford’s representative seat to fill a vacant term set to expire October 2027.

Elliott, who serves as the City of Oxford's events coordinator, was previously appointed unanimously by the Oxford Board of Commissioners on April 15 to serve as their representative.

Motioned by Commissioner Zelodis Jay, seconded by Commissioner Timothy Karan, and unanimously carried, Board appointed Charlotte Duncan, the County's new Economic Development Director, to fill the vacant Economic Development Director seat on the Tourism Development Authority.

COUNTY MANAGER’S REPORT

County Manager’s Report

County Manager Cummings said that he did not have any items to report.

COUNTY ATTORNEY’S REPORT

County Attorney Wrenn said that he did not have any items to report.

PRESENTATIONS BY COUNTY BOARD MEMBERS

Commissioner Cozart

- Expressed pride in Clerk Karen Evans, noting he had watched her grow up in Oxford and was proud of her accomplishments.
- Commended Tyeisha Hewett, Social Work Supervisor III, for her excellent work at Social Services.
- Attended the Installation Service for the new pastor at Oak Grove Baptist Church; invited the pastor to deliver an invocation at a future meeting.

Commissioner May

- Attended the Granville County Public Schools Career and Technical Education (CTE) signing event; emphasized its significance as students committed to local employment.
- Praised the leadership program at Wilton Elementary; strongly recommended it be implemented countywide.

- Urged focus on local priorities rather than state or federal issues; appreciated the County Manager's prudence in navigating impacts.
- Voiced support for funding two additional School Resource Officers (SROs); acknowledged the recommendation was not included in the proposed budget but believed full school coverage was essential.

Commissioner Karan

- Echoed praise for the CTE Signing event; highlighted its uniqueness in celebrating student career development rather than athletics.
- Emphasized the advantage traditional public schools have over charter schools in career-path development.
- Commended the Town of Butner for launching the Butner Performance Stage at Gazebo Park; expressed hope for continued summer events that benefit the community.
- Thanked the County Manager for the budget presentation and looked forward to upcoming workshops.

Commissioner Jay

- Congratulated Clerk Karen Evans and all County Clerks for managing complex scheduling and logistics for Commissioners.
- Congratulated Tyeisha Hewett, Social Work Supervisor III, for her accomplishments.
- Thanked the County Manager for the budget presentation.
- Recognized Military Appreciation Month; expressed gratitude to all military service members on behalf of Granville County.

Commissioner Williford

- Thanked Clerk Karen Evans for her support, especially with technology; also appreciated Deputy Clerk Jessica Todd's assistance.
- Attended the Wilton Elementary leadership program; praised its quality and endorsed countywide implementation.
- Attended the Butner Gazebo Park event; described it as a successful and well-attended community addition.
- Highlighted upcoming public forums hosted by the Opioid Advisory Committee (OAC); noted prior forum in Butner and upcoming ones in Oxford and Stovall.
- Thanked County staff for their efforts in developing the \$90 million budget; stressed the Board's commitment to fiscal responsibility and invited public input.

Commissioner Griffin

- Echoed appreciation for Clerk Karen Evans for her behind-the-scenes work.
- Thanked County Manager, staff, and department heads for their work on the budget; emphasized his responsibility as a steward of public funds.
- Attended the Wilton Elementary leadership program; praised students for their confidence and public speaking skills and advocated for wider adoption of the program.
- Encouraged community participation in local events like the Butner Performance Stage launch.
- Thanked all Granville County employees during Spirit Week, April 21-25, 2025; expressed pride in their contributions and appreciated the opportunity to serve them lunch.

Chair Gooch

- Acknowledged the staff's hard work and stated the project had passed the halfway point, with hopes to finish by the first meeting in June.
- Said he supported Commissioner Griffin's point that the budget involves taxpayer money, not county funds.
- Emphasized that the 5% departmental cut request was intended to save taxpayer dollars.
- Stated that additional budget requests (e.g., \$2 million) would require more taxpayer funding and could result in a tax increase, which he did not believe the public was ready for.

- Urged department heads to treat funds as taxpayer money and spend cautiously and responsibly.
- Reiterated the Board's commitment to supporting employees, acknowledging that while they wish they could offer more competitive pay and benefits, current funds were limited.
- Described County employees as the County's greatest asset and expressed appreciation for their service.
- Highlighted Spirit Week, particularly the cookout where commissioners serve staff, as a meaningful way to show gratitude.

ANY OTHER MATTERS

There were no other matters for open session.

CLOSED SESSION

Motioned by Commissioner Mark Griffin, seconded by Commissioner Zelodis Jay, and unanimously carried, the Board entered into closed session at 8:31 p.m. for attorney-client matters as allowed by G.S. 143-318.11(a)(3).

RETURN TO OPEN SESSION

Motioned by Commissioner Russ May, seconded by Commissioner Tony W. Cozart, and unanimously carried, Board returned to open session at 9:57 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

Motioned by Commissioner Robert Williford, seconded by Commissioner Zelodis Jay, and unanimously carried, Board adjourned at 9:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Evans
Clerk to the Board