



**MINUTES
WASHINGTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
BOARD WORKSHOP**

**Thursday, July 9, 2026, 9:00 AM, Commission Board Room
1331 South Blvd., Chipley, FL 32428**

DISTRICT 1	DISTRICT 2	DISTRICT 3	DISTRICT 4	DISTRICT 5
Ashlynn Marquez Vice-Chairwoman	David Pettis Jr. Chairman	Joey Brock	Wesley Griffin	David Corbin

1. PROCLAMATION

- 1.1 Call to Order - Chairman Pettis
- 1.2 Invocation - Chairman Pettis
- 1.3 Pledge

2. AGENDA ITEMS

- 2.1 Recognition of Kenneth Raymond for Passing Code Administrators and Inspector Exam-Charles Vannatter, Building/Fire Official
- 2.2 Request to Purchase Vehicles for Building Department-Charles Vannatter, Building/Fire Official
The request to purchase vehicles from the Building Department funds will be listed on the consent agenda.
- 2.3 TDT Increase Ordinance-Heather Lopez, TDC Director
The board previously approved of placing the referendum on the August 2025 ballot. The ordinance must be approved before the vote and will be contingent upon receiving at least 60% voter support. The referendum proposes increasing the tax rate from 3% to 5%, applied only to transit lodging.

Visitor spending in Washington County grew by 5 percent from 2023 to 2024 and continues to increase annually, supporting approximately 505 local jobs and contributing to the success of retail businesses, restaurants, attractions, lodging, and other tourism-related services. The Tourist Development Council (TDC) operates similarly to other county departments, with invoices reviewed at the annex and processed by the Clerk of Court, and with county commissioners approving the annual budget and appointing council members. The administration budget of \$217,018 covers a required 24-month cycle, with the next cycle beginning in January 2027 if proposed tax increases are approved. It covers wages, rent, utilities, printing, internet, and general operations, while marketing expenses support promotional activities and

materials. Washington County remains a popular destination for outdoor recreation, including paddling, horseback riding, hiking, and visits to state parks and forests. As of July 8, 2026, office hours will be shared between Chipley and Vernon. Overall, tourism continues to strengthen the local economy through increased spending at restaurants, retail stores, gas stations, and expanding vacation rental offerings.

This item will be listed on the regular agenda.

2.4 Designated Receiving System and Behavioral Transportation Plans for 2026-2029-David Pettis, Jr., Chairman

This is from the Northwest Florida Health Network to update the designated receiving system plan and behavioral health transportation plan. This is primarily related to Marchman Act cases through the Sheriff's Office and Baker Act cases.

This item will be listed on the consent agenda.

2.5 Scheduling Discussion for Budget Hearing Date-David Pettis, Jr., Chairman

- Tentative Budget Hearing for September 15, at 5:05
- Final Hearing for September 28, at 5:05
- Special Budget Workshop for July 28, at 9:00

This will be listed on the consent agenda.

3. FEMA COORDINATOR

3.1 - Amendment #5 for Hazard Mitigation Grant Subrecipient Agreement - Anthony Gratz, Wheeler EMC - This is for buyouts, which is for changing the period performance end date to September 30, 2027, and adding in some of the single audits. The remaining \$67,477.66 for Buyout, which is for management costs, will be paid at closeout.

This will be added to the consent agenda.

Mason Garrett, Wheeler EMC informed the board that he received notification that Williams Road has obligated for \$470,000.00.

4. BUILDING OFFICIAL

5. MSBU ADVISORY COMMITTEE UPDATE

6. FIRE CHIEF

7. PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR

Trey Barbee informed the board that the Bridge on Hard Labor Road will be closed next Tuesday and pm until significant repairs can be completed. The closure is on the recommendation of the state inspectors. Grant funds will be used for repairs. Replacement by grant funds is scheduled for replacement in 2031.

8. PARKS UPDATE

9. ENGINEERING PROJECTS UPDATE

10. COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

10.1 Generator Discussion

County Administrator Fleener addressed the board. Generator maintenance and testing bids for Mudhill, the admin office, jail, sheriff's office, emergency management, Holmes Valley Road Communication Tower, health department, and public works. The committee that was composed of Trey Barbee, Justin Barron, Billy Brock, and Randy Truette made a recommendation where response time was taken into consideration. The recommendation is less than the state contract.

Approve the recommendation and enter into a contract with IPS for \$12,100.00. This item will be listed on the consent agenda.

11. CLERK

12. COUNTY ATTORNEY

- 12.1 Ready Mix USA, LLC Agreement - Matt Fuqua informed the board this is related to the lawsuit regarding the concrete that Ready Mix USA, LLC spilled in Sunny Hills. The contract is a release for when they make the payment to the county. This item will be listed on the consent agenda.

13. OTHER BUSINESS

Commissioner Griffin initiated discussion on the data centers.

County Attorney Fuqua informed the board that he has two ordinances drafted. One is the moratorium, and the other is a framework if the board decides they are okay, how they will be planned for, placed, and regulated for the comprehensive plan. It would be a new section in the comprehensive plan on those types of industries. There is currently no location large enough for a data center in Washington County. If there were one, a land-use change would be needed to request a commercial classification, and then there would be a special exception request. A ban can't be passed to say that they will never be allowed. A future board can't be bound.

If the board decides to proceed, they should be careful to protect the citizens as much as possible. Also, if it does go ahead, the utility companies would need to be contacted. One county utility company has enacted a tariff/rate that would be attached to data centers.

County Administrator Fleener explained that recent silence on the matter was due to developments at the state level, specifically Senate Bill 404, which the Governor signed this week. They were taking precautions; if a technology center were permitted, they would have to do certain things. It is different today than it was a month ago.

There is concern about water usage; a dairy uses more water than the new data centers are using. The goal isn't to hurt agriculture. The wording of the ordinance must be watched. Does the ordinance accomplish what it is meant to?

Discussion continued with the board's direction to have the ordinance ready for August.

Commissioner Griffin requested that County Administrator Fleener check on the two-year cost-share agreement the county made for the lighting in the City of Wausau.

Commissioner Marquez added that she has information from the clerk's office on this and will forward it to County Administrator Fleener to review.

Discussion continued on this item.

Commissioner Brock brought up a discussion about the grader operators leaving graders. Commissioner Griffin observed one leaving a grader at 2:45/2:48, and when he went back by and checked on him, he was still in his truck at 3:30. The citizens have been watching, and the commissioners are being pounded about the roads. The process doesn't work as it used to years ago. It has been worse the last three weeks.

County Administrator Fleener confirmed that it has been worse in the last three weeks, taking into account the holidays and rain. They are catching up, and they are working on things to make it better. Some of the graders are being switched up, adding a second one and going behind some to allow one to learn from another.

Commissioner Marquez added that before that, they were off their routes for weeks hauling dirt. The roads that have fabric/the roads that were about to be paved. There are no ditches on the roads, silt where the ditches should be, and it can't be graded properly.

Commissioner Griffin added that they were told they couldn't mess with those roads.

County Administrator Fleener added that the current direction is that they cannot add base to those roads. They can't fix the road the way that it needs to be fixed because of the outstanding FEMA money. The board needs to begin a plan for the money.

Commissioner Griffin noted that several roads were already under construction at the time the work was halted, and those projects were intended to be addressed first.

Mason Garrett, Wheeler Emergency, updated the board on the BCA's. The four that have been submitted are at 9,7,3, and 4; with 1 being the goal for approval. Three more will be submitted this week. \$2-2.5M for the paving portion hasn't been released. They should push the projects to where they were as long as the BCA's pass, which would give access to around \$80M.

County Attorney Fuqua added that the projects would have to be rebid. The original contractors requested their contracts be rescinded so they could have their bonds released.

Commissioner Brock addressed the board regarding moving forward on the houseboat issue and boat launching fees. Adding fees for this could add funds for park and recreation.

County Attorney Milton added that depending on the ramp and where the funds came from, there may be some restrictions from the state grant side that prevent a launch fee from being charged. It may be boat ramp by boat ramp. County staff would have to look into this.

After discussion regarding the boat ramps, County Attorney Milton requested the board members provide their top 3 to 4 boat ramps and start there with how they were constructed and what types of grants were used. Along with that, options can be looked at.

County Attorney Fuqua added that if the tax abatement passes, ad valorem taxes can't be used for business, golf courses, data centers, recreation, and libraries.

There was additional discussion with the consensus for houseboats to be picked back up September - October. Regarding the boat ramps, the commissioners will provide a list of their top 3 or 4, and staff can begin to pull the information and provide it to them.

County Administrator Fleener added that the grant for Strickland Landing has been awarded to redo the landing.

14. ADJOURN