

## MINUTES

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
COUNTY OF HENDERSON**

**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2025**

The Henderson County Board of Commissioners met for a Special Called Community Meeting at 5:30 p.m. at the Bat Cave Baptist Church, 5095 Chimney Rock Road, Hendersonville, NC 28792.

Those present were: Chairman William Lapsley, Vice-Chair J. Michael Edney, Commissioner Rebecca McCall, Commissioner Sheila Franklin, Commissioner Jay Egolf, County Manager John Mitchell, Assistant County Manager Chris Todd, Financial Services Director Samantha Reynolds, Emergency Services Director Jimmy Brissie, County Attorney Russ Burrell, and Clerk to the Board Denisa Lauffer.

Also present were: Engineer Marcus Jones, Chief Communications Officer Mike Morgan, A/V Technician Oscar Guerrero, Planning Director Autumn Radcliff, Building Services Director Crystal Lyda, Public Health Director David Jenkins, Environmental Health Supervisor Seth Swift, Circulation Assistant Sarah Kowalak, Code Enforcement Director Matt Champion, Sheriff Lowell Griffin, and Deputies Brad Woodson and Brandon Corn provided security.

### **Call to Order/Welcome**

Chairman Lapsley called the meeting to order and welcomed all in attendance.

### **Invocation**

Pastor Nathan Sundt with Bat Cave Baptist Church provided the invocation.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

Chairman Lapsley led the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

### **Gerton/Bat Cave Community Discussion**

Chairman Lapsley started the meeting by asking County Manager John Mitchell to share a few opening remarks. Mr. Mitchell said this special meeting was to give the Board of Commissioners a chance to hear directly from the citizens in the Gerton and Bat Cave communities. He said that County Engineer Marcus Jones, the Planning Director, Code Enforcement Director, and head of Building Services were all present. Mr. Mitchell committed that by the end of the presentation or after the meeting, anyone who still has unanswered questions will be connected with someone who can help provide the information they need. He said he was happy to speak with anyone. He asked Assistant County Manager Chris Todd to introduce key staff in attendance and walk through a brief slide presentation.

APPROVED:

## COUNTY UPDATE

Henderson County Board of  
Commissioners Special Called Meeting

February 24, 2025

## HELENE DEBRIS REMOVAL UPDATE

### Debris Collected as of today

- Averaging approximately 100,000 cubic yards per month
- Roadway debris removal in the ROW: 445,900 Cubic Yards removed (about 30% total)
- Truck loads: 13,500 trucks

Mr. Todd emphasized that the county had activated the debris collection contract just three days after the storm. He noted the county moved with the state of North Carolina to get the contract in place and quickly begin debris cleanup. Initially, it was estimated that debris in the right-of-way alone would total about 1.5 million cubic yards. That estimate did not account for debris on private property or in waterways. The totals represented in the slide above are for Henderson County alone.

## PRIVATE ROADS AND BRIDGES

- FEMA has expanded their programs to assist property owners
- A new program is under development by the State of North Carolina
- Henderson County will be distributing a new survey in the next couple of weeks to collect information concerning private roads and bridges

Mr. Todd said county officials continue to advocate for assistance with private roads and bridges. FEMA has expanded its support for these areas, but individuals must have an Individual Assistance (IA) case to qualify for the program. He stressed that if an IA case is not submitted by the March deadline, individuals would not be eligible for assistance. The property owner must initiate this by signing up with Debris Tech.

## PRIVATE PROPERTY DEBRIS REMOVAL

- Owners who cannot take their debris to the right-of-way (ROW) for pickup and who do not have adequate debris removal insurance may apply to have the debris removed from their property for FREE through the Private Property Debris Removal (PPDR) Program. The program also covers the demolition of eligible unsafe structures.
- **What types of debris and demolition are eligible under the PPDR program?**
  - Removal of hazardous limbs, trees, or other mixed debris caused by Hurricane Helene may be eligible.
  - Removal of debris impacting a waterway.
  - Demolition and removal of a structure that is a health hazard, deemed unfit/unsafe, and may not be recoverable, or is in threat of collapse. This may include concrete slabs.
- **Sign Up at the Henderson County DRC with Debris Tech**

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Todd explained that the Private Property Debris Removal Program is intended for those unable to move debris to the public right-of-way. Debris Tech is assisting eligible property owners by coordinating debris collection directly from their properties.



## HAZARD MITIGATION GRANT PROGRAM (HMGP)

- Application period open for Homeowner Hazard Mitigation Grants
- Grants will allow eligible property owners to request FEMA funding to prevent future storm losses. Both residential and commercial properties are eligible. (residential is 1st priority)
- Potential projects include: home aquistions, structural elevations and land stabilization
- Local Government Boards will have final approval of applications for eligible properties

Mr. Todd stated that the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) offers voluntary property buyouts or elevation based on the damage and owner preference. The program has no set end date and applications are reviewed on a rolling basis.



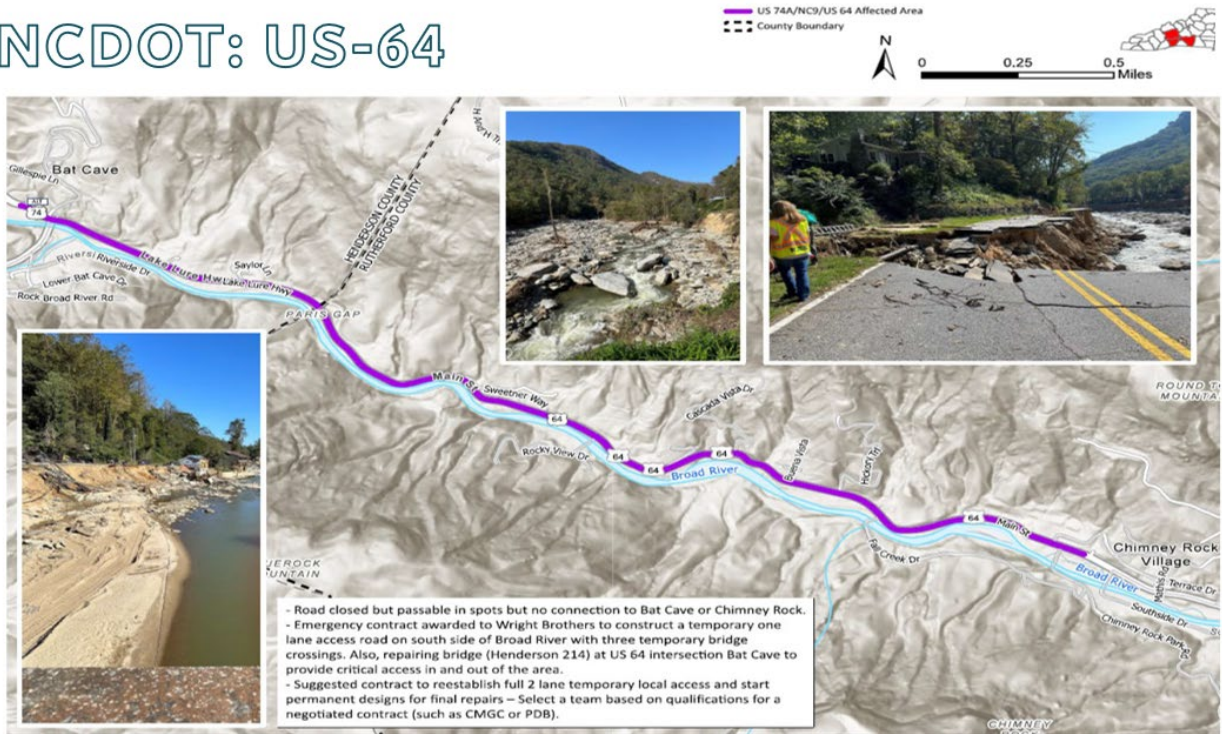
### NCDOT: US-74A

 US 74A Affected Area  
 County Boundary



APPROVED:

# NCDOT: US-64



Mr. Todd said there would be a meeting tomorrow at the same location from 5 to 7 p.m. to discuss NCDOT projects for US-64 and US-74A. This would be followed by an additional meeting on Wednesday at the Lake Lure Classical Academy from 5 to 7 p.m.

## RECOVERY PLANNING

- Hickory Nut Gorge Recovery Plan – brings together the Gerton and Bat Cave communities
- A consultant will be acquired through an RFP process
- There’s a need to do this plan and finish it quickly
  - Residents are seeking direction for the future
  - The Board can apply for grant money to implement plan elements
- This is an opportunity to plan ahead for rebuilding and rehabilitating the area
- This is a grassroots plan that began organically, and we will continue to get input from those directly affected in this area
- Disaster Recovery Advisors:
  - Emergency Services
  - FEMA
  - Land of Sky
  - NCDOT
  - Local Fire Departments
- Residents can sign up for the Distribution List

APPROVED:

# HICKORY NUT GORGE RECOVERY PLAN

## Questions and Comments

Mr. Todd mentioned that there were forms outside the meeting room for attendees to provide their email addresses to receive notification about future meetings on this topic.

Mr. Mitchell emphasized that the county is governed by its citizens. The Board members make difficult decisions and represent the people, ensuring actions reflect the citizens' will. He advised property owners to verify anyone claiming to be with the government by calling the county manager's office at 828-697-4809.

Mr. Mitchell thanked the Bat Cave and Gerton fire departments for their partnership before and after the storm. He appreciates their support in allowing county staff to operate, including Marcus Jones, who holds office hours in the community on Tuesdays and Thursdays to answer any questions or concerns citizens may have. He also thanked the fire departments for providing space for a 24-hour ambulance and deputies to ensure continuous service to the community. He acknowledged that the county does not have control over FEMA or state agencies, nor does it distribute funds from the state or local government. However, he emphasized that it was the county's responsibility to advocate for the community and ensure they receive the necessary resources from those agencies. Congressman Edwards and Senator Bud successfully secured billions of dollars in funding. However, he pointed out that those funds were yet to make it to the region. He mentioned that he wanted to address two topics he anticipated would be raised, the first being the Bat Cave Post Office. He stated that the county staff had been working with community members to reopen the post office. He said it was unacceptable for the community to be without a post office or even a mobile unit. He assured everyone that the issue would eventually be resolved. Mitchell then addressed the potential danger of wildfires as the season approaches. He mentioned that he and the emergency management director have been in contact with the NC Forest Service to find solutions for removing fallen timber from the backcountry. He acknowledged that it would be a difficult task, he reassured the community that the issue was on the county's radar, and they are working to address it, though he recognized that these were challenging problems to solve.

Commissioner McCall thanked all the community members in attendance and assured them that the Board has been closely monitoring the area and the situation in the community. She emphasized that they have been careful not to interfere with safety concerns, particularly regarding road conditions.

APPROVED:

Commissioner Egolf clarified that the Board was not in charge of debris removal but acknowledged the ongoing efforts to clear debris. He mentioned that contractors were working hard, but the volume of debris is significant.

Chairman Lapsley emphasized the Henderson County Board of Commissioners had never had to deal with a natural disaster of this scale before. He explained the reimbursement process, stating that the county must first spend the money and then submit claims for reimbursement. He said the county had been careful to tuck money away over the years to use in case there was ever a need. Fortunately, this foresight provided a “rainy day” fund to help manage the lengthy reimbursement process. He assured the community that the county would eventually be reimbursed for the recovery costs. In closing, Chairman Lapsley emphasized the importance of the Hickory Nut Gorge Recovery Plan, assuring the community that recovery would happen. He called for active participation in the recovery process, urging residents to speak up if something needs to be done differently. He encouraged them to apply for available resources, stressing that the county cannot address needs unless they are communicated.

### **Public Comment**

1. Tom Appleby praised Pastor Nathan Sundt and the church’s generosity following the storm. He proposed that the county create a railway from Lake Lure to Biltmore to aid in debris removal and emphasized the need for free gravel in the Bat Cave community.
2. David Roland mentioned that the road is currently clear and passable down to Slick Rock. He stated that the “Road Closed” sign was no longer necessary, and as a business owner, he wants to resume operations. He praised the HCSO for their efforts and requested that the road be reopened to Slick Rock Road.
3. Helen Pace shared that she was part of a 501©(3) organization helping with debris removal, rebuilding driveways, and installing culvert pipes. She highlighted the community’s need for gravel and explained that her agency had been spending \$4,000 weekly on gravel, but this funding was unsustainable. She mentioned volunteer fatigue and the depletion of financial resources.
4. Harvey Nix discussed taxes and inquired about the current tax rate. He mentioned that aerial scans of the area were conducted just days after the storm, and noted that property values changed drastically between September 26 and September 28.

Commissioner McCall clarified that the tax value, not the tax rate, will impact the taxes citizens are billed for. John Mitchell added that North Carolina laws require the county to have a snapshot of property values as of January 1st.

5. Molly Aiken, a resident of Blue Rock Valley, mentioned that the county had provided water testing for individual wells. However, she expressed concern after seeing comments that E. coli was still being found in Ray Patch, where her home is located. She was concerned about the water quality. She also expressed concern that all the sand moved since the storm could wash away with even a moderate flood, and wondered if the county had a plan to ensure that the materials, such as sand, that were moved after the storm, will not continue to wash away.

APPROVED:

6. Kat Carlton highlighted the heroic response of EMS after the hurricane and praised the services provided by the county during the recovery efforts.
7. April Bolete, a resident of Middle Fork near High Falls, shared that her property is primarily in Buncombe County, but a small portion is in Henderson County. She asked if the two counties were collaborating in cases like hers.

Chairman Lapsley highlighted the community's proximity to Rutherford County, while Bat Cave is in Henderson County. He asserted that the Henderson County Board of Commissioners will not allow Rutherford or Buncombe County commissioners to influence decisions within Henderson County.

8. Bruce Stender (Batman) expressed gratitude for the community's support and volunteers from across the country. He emphasized the importance of stoplights on the damaged one-lane roadways. Additionally, he requested that the restoration of postal service availability to the area, noting the inconvenience of a 1.5 hour drive to Dana for mail pickup.
9. Emma Churchman questioned why there were no longer security guards in Gerton at the intersection of highway 74 and Bearwallow Mountain Road.

Sheriff Lowell Griffin discussed the security contract that NC Emergency Management had with the security firm manning community checkpoints. State Emergency Management ended some security contracts without notice, believing the NC Department of Transportation should handle them since they relate to highway safety. The sheriff's office has been negotiating with the state to have NCDOT fund a security contract since they lack the personnel to provide security. In closing, he said they try to keep at least one officer in the area at all times.

10. Herb Flan sought clarity on debris removal. He mentioned safety and security concerns with individuals attempting to strip copper and scrap metal from debris piles.
11. Leo Luna thanked first responders and volunteers and asked if the poor condition of Grant Mountain Road would be addressed, calling it a tragedy waiting to happen.
12. Kenneth Potter, who lives on the other side of Reedy Patch Creek, stated that only seven of the 22 houses remain habitable, with one still in the roadway. He noted a track hoe in the river at 10 p.m. last night beeping, making it difficult for residents to sleep. He questioned whether there was a way to regulate work hours.
13. Yulia Royal asked who was responsible for all the hanging communication lines on her property next to the Bat Cave Post Office. Her husband expressed frustration that the lines remain, delaying repairs to their retaining wall.
14. Tommy Garrett discussed fire danger and the Natural Resources conservation forest management plan, noting a commitment to cost-sharing. He asked when the frozen funds might become available.

APPROVED:

Manager Mitchell stated that was another agency outside of immediate county control, but staff would do what they can to get an answer to his question.

15. Gerton Fire Chief Jay Allen requested the county to do, and that was to pave Bearwallow Road and fix and pave Grant Mountain Road

16. Marian Baker, owner of Bat Cave River Cottages lost three homes in the flood. She had questions about rezoning land that had never been flooded like this before.

Chairman Lapsley thanked attendees and assured them the county would continue supporting recovery efforts.

*Chairman Lapsley made the motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:08 p.m. All voted in favor and the motion carried.*

**ADJOURN**

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Denisa A. Lauffer, Clerk to the Board

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William G. Lapsley, Chairman

APPROVED: