

January 5, 2026

The Washington County Board of Commissioners met in a regular meeting on Monday, January 5, at 6:00 PM in the Commissioners' Room, 116 Adams Street, Plymouth, NC. Commissioners Ann C. Keyes, Tracey A. Johnson, Carol V. Phelps, John C. Spruill and Julius Walker, Jr. were in attendance. Also, present were County Manager/ County Attorney Curtis S. Potter, Assistant County Manager, Jason Squires, Clerk to the Board Julie J. Bennett and County Finance Officer Missy Dixon.

Chair Spruill called the meeting to order. Commissioner Walker gave the invocation. Commissioner Phelps led the Pledge of Allegiance.

ADDITIONS/DELETIONS: Chair Spruill noted that the Board will take a 15-minute recess to attend the swearing in of the new Sheriff, Arlo Norman after Item 3.

Commissioner Keyes made a motion to approve tonight's agenda with the additions/deletions. Commissioner Walker seconded; motion carried unanimously.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Items listed under Consent are generally of a routine nature. The Board may take action to approve/disapprove all items in a single vote. Any item may be withheld from a general action, to be discussed and voted upon separately at the discretion of the Board.

- a) Recessed Meeting Minutes December 17, 2025
- b) Tax Refunds & Releases & Insolvent Account

Commissioner Johnson made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Commissioner Phelps seconded; motion carried unanimously.

PUBLIC FORUM: Mr. John Shelton, Golf Road, Plymouth, NC Chamber of Commerce has been "rebooted". Washington County has not had one since 2019. Mr. Shelton is President, and Mr. Bradley Yates is Executive Director. They held their first successful event—the Bear Drop on New Year's Eve. The Chamber Office will be in Welcome Center. Mr. Shelton said he would come back to another meeting and give more information to the Board.

RESO 2026-001 APPOINTMENT OF NEW SHERIFF: Mr. Potter spoke to the Board regarding the following resolution.



RESOLUTION 2026-001

RESOLUTION APPOINTING ARLO NORMAN AS SHERIFF

WHEREAS, the Office of Sheriff of Washington County, North Carolina, has become vacant due to the retirement of Sheriff John Barnes; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to NCGS § 162-5.1, when a vacancy occurs in the office of sheriff, the Board of County Commissioners shall appoint a qualified person to fill the vacancy for the remainder of the unexpired term; and

WHEREAS, NCGS § 162-5.1 further provides that when the vacating sheriff was elected as the nominee of a political party, the appointee shall be selected from a list of persons recommended by the county executive committee of the same political party; and

WHEREAS, Sheriff John Barnes was elected as the nominee of the Democratic Party; and

WHEREAS, the Washington County Democratic Party Executive Committee, at a duly called meeting on December 29, 2025, recommended Arlo Norman to fill the unexpired term of Sheriff John Barnes; and

WHEREAS, the Board of County Commissioners has determined that Arlo Norman meets all constitutional and statutory qualifications for the Office of Sheriff of Washington County and is suitable to serve the citizens of the County in this capacity.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Commissioners of Washington County, North Carolina, that:

1. **Appointment.** Pursuant to NCGS § 162-5.1, Arlo Norman is hereby appointed Sheriff of Washington County to fill the unexpired term of Sheriff John Barnes.
2. **Term of Office.** The appointment shall be effective upon the taking and filing of the oath of office and the posting of any bond required by law and shall continue until the expiration of the unexpired term, or until a successor is elected and qualified as provided by law.
3. **Administration.** The Clerk to the Board is directed to record this Resolution in the official minutes of the Board and to provide certified copies as necessary.

4. Bond. Based on examination of bonds and the opinion of the Washington County Finance Officer, the Washington County Board of Commissioners hereby assigns the bond of Arlo Norman, Sheriff, \$25,000 with Liberty Mutual Surety.
5. Oath and Bond. The appointed Sheriff shall take the oath of office and provide the required bond in accordance with North Carolina law prior to assuming the duties of the office.

ADOPTED this ____ day of _____ 2026.

John C. Spruill, Chair
Washington County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST: _____
Julie J. Bennett, MMC, NCMCC
Clerk to the Board

Commissioner Keyes made a motion to approve RESO 2026-001 Appointment of New Sheriff. Commissioner Walker seconded; motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Potter gave the Clerk the following Disclosure Statement for Sheriff Norman to be added to the minutes.



NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
SHERIFFS' STANDARDS DIVISION

JEFF JACKSON
ATTORNEY GENERAL

PO DRAWER 629
RALEIGH, N. C. 27602-0629
PHONE: 919-779-8213 FAX: 919-662-4515

WILLIAM MITCHELL
DIRECTOR

Arlo Norman
15672 NC Hwy 94 North
Roper, NC 27970

Disclosure Statement

Name of Candidate: Arlo Norman
County: Washington
Date Prepared and Issued: October 24, 2025

Our inquiry revealed no felony convictions or expunged felony convictions on your criminal record. This search was based on:

1. a review of your criminal history in state and national databases,
2. the results of fingerprints processed by the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and
3. confirmation from the North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) that no expunged felony convictions exist on your record.

This document has been prepared in accordance with G.S. 17E-20 as contained in North Carolina Session Law 2021 – 107. It must be submitted to the county board of elections at the time of the filing of your notice of candidacy for election to the Office of Sheriff.

This disclosure statement is valid for 90 days from the date issued which is noted above.

Sincerely,

Sirena Jones
Deputy Director

ADMINISTERING PROGRAMS OF THE
NORTH CAROLINA SHERIFFS' EDUCATION AND TRAINING STANDARDS COMMISSION

Chair Spruill called for a 15-minute recess. **Commissioner Keyes made a motion to recess now and reconvene back in the Commissioners' Room @ 6:30 PM. Commissioner Walker seconded; motion carried unanimously.**

Chair Spruill called the meeting back to order @ 6:36 PM.

EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR: Chair Spruill spoke about the Employee of the Year for 2025. The Employee of the Year is selected by a committee consisting of four Department Heads and the Chair of the Commissioners. Throughout the year, the committee reviews nominations submitted for each candidate.

Ms. Christal Watkins, Delinquent Tax Coordinator, was named Employee of the Quarter in March 2025. She began her career with the County as a Tax Clerk in 2020 and was promoted to Delinquent Tax Coordinator in 2024, while continuing to perform the duties of a Tax Clerk. In December 2025, Ms. Watkins was appointed by the Commissioners as Deputy Tax Administrator.

Ms. Watkins consistently goes above and beyond to ensure the office operates as smoothly and efficiently as possible. Her dedication, professionalism, and strong work ethic are greatly appreciated.

Chair Spruill asked everyone to join him in congratulating Ms. Christal Watkins as the 2025 Employee of the Year.

DEPARTMENTAL INFORMATION UPDATE— SOIL & WATER: Mr. Chris Respass, Soil & Water Technician gave presentation to the Board regarding keeping the waterways from backing up (clearing beaver dams) and keeping algae under control. He said to please contact him if you have soil & water (drainage) issues.

CENTER FOR ENERGY EDUCATION: Ms. Shana Brown, the Administrative Director at the Center for Energy Education (C4EE) spoke to the Board. She also noted that she is a retired educator with 31 years of service, so she understands firsthand the importance of meeting people where they are and providing resources that truly make a difference.

She noted she is here tonight to share information about the North Carolina Energy Saver Program, a statewide initiative designed to help low- and moderate-income households reduce energy costs, improve home comfort, and increase energy efficiency.

There are two rebate programs under the Energy Saver umbrella. The Homeowners Managing Efficiency Savings (HOMES) and the Home Electrification Appliance Rebates (HEARS). Through these programs, eligible residents may receive no-cost energy efficiency upgrades for their homes. The HOMES rebates are for improvements that increase the overall efficiency of the home and includes insulation, air sealing, heating and cooling system repairs or replacements, and other measures that help lower monthly utility bills while making homes safer and more comfortable. The HEARS rebates supports the purchase of energy efficient appliances and the electrification of the home systems like cooking, laundry, hot water and heating and cooling. For many families, especially seniors, individuals with disabilities, and households on fixed incomes—these upgrades can be life-changing.

What makes the Energy Saver Program especially important is that it does more than reduce energy bills. It helps address energy burden, which occurs when households spend a disproportionate amount of their income on utilities. By lowering energy usage, families can redirect those savings toward food, medication, and other basic needs.

At C4EE, they work closely with residents to help them understand the program and navigate the application process.

Many people who qualify are unaware that these resources even exist, so outreach and education are critical. C4EE's goal is to ensure that residents are treated fairly, receive accurate assessments, and fully benefit from the services they qualify for.

C4EE sees this program as a strong opportunity for partnership with counties like Washington County. By working together—county leaders, community organizations, and program administrators—they can help ensure that more residents are informed, applications are completed correctly, and homes receive the upgrades they need.

C4EE is also looking to help local contractors become a part of the Energy Saver program by encouraging them to apply with DEQ to become a certified DEQ contractor. Once the homeowners have applied and become eligible to receive these upgrades, they would like to have local contractors to complete the work in eastern North Carolina. So, if there are contractors here tonight or if anyone knows of any local contractors, please encourage them to visit the Energy Saver website to become a part of the process.

In closing, Ms. Brown said the North Carolina Energy Saver Program is not just about energy efficiency—it's about equity, stability, and quality of life. It helps residents remain safely in their homes, reduces financial strain, and supports a more sustainable future for our communities.

Ms. Brown thanked the Board for their time, leadership, and continued commitment to serving the residents of this county. She said she welcomes any questions and looks forward to working together to expand awareness and access to this important program.

Ms. Brown said she would like to set up somewhere, such as the library and/or community center for residents to come meet with her and her staff to fill out applications. They will need to bring certain documents with them such as 12 months of utility bills and current income. She also mentioned that these programs do not cover windows, flooring, or roofs.

Ms. Brown noted that C4EE is in partnership with DEQ out of Raleigh and that the program for Washington County opened up on December 15, 2025.

PUBLIC HEARING: SURPLUS REAL PROPERTY (CRESWELL SCHOOLS):

Commissioner Johnson made a motion to go into the Public Hearing.
Commissioner Phelps seconded; motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Kelly Chesson, Economic Development Director spoke to the Board regarding surplus real property of Creswell Schools. This public hearing is for information only. (put in presentation.)

Commissioner Phelps asked that some specific information be put in these minutes. He said he was told that the Creswell property had been sold. Mr. Chesson said that the property **has not been sold.**

Mr. Shivon Spear, Creswell, said he is part of the group BWM (Brothers with Motion). This group consists of 19 men all raised in Creswell. Mr. Spear said BWM is not financially able to purchase the school at this time but would like access to the fields and would like to present a 5-year plan for what they would do if/when they could purchase the school. He spoke of many activities/services they would provide. He said their vision is rooted in community.

Ms. Mavis Hill is the Director of Tyrrell County Community Development Cooperation. She spoke of wanting to reuse Creswell High School for agriculture opportunities for youth, a climate resiliency center, STEM education, and renovation, etc. She stated her proposal is about more than a building – she is trying to better the community.

Mr. Potter mentioned that Mr. Scott McLaughlin (who is an interested party) called him before tonight's meeting. Mr. McLaughlin will be sending in some sort of proposal dealing with youth activities and public housing.

Commissioner Phelps made a motion to come out of the Public Hearing. Commissioner Keyes seconded; motion carried unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARING: COUNTY STRATEGIC PLAN:

Commissioner Johnson made a motion to go into the Public Hearing. Commissioner Keyes seconded; motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Potter spoke to the Board. The last Strategic Plan was adopted in April of 2024. He went over the current plan on the webpage shown on the monodpad (and can be found on the County's website).

Mr. Potter noted what we are behind on is our own performance evaluations, along with organizational training and onboarding. Both of these need HR input and we only have 1 HR person for 174 employees. He did note that good progress has been made on integrating the ACM into the organization.

Mr. Potter said there is the potential to add a 5th goal of trying to work with other municipalities to consolidate resources to save funds.

Mr. Potter noted competition among departments for ways to save money or time. An incentive would be given to the winning department.

Mr. Potter mentioned restructuring the Planning Dept. since the departure of Mr. Pittman. The County is working with the Mid-East Commission on this.

Timeline: Mr. Potter said we will be addressing an element of this plan at each regular meeting and he hopes to finish with revisions and approve by Mar/April.

Mr. Potter presented the following handout on Summary of Community Development Meetings.

Washington County Community Development Recap – Fall 25 – Spring 26

Meeting Title: Community Conversations

Date: Roper/Creswell 8.14.25; 10.23.25 | Plymouth 8.7.25; 11.6.25

Location: Washington County Community Center | Maritime Museum

Hosted By: Washington County ED & United Way Inner Banks

Facilitator(s): Kelly Chesson & Sue Tidd

Participants: (Residents, business owners, nonprofits, staff, and county leadership)

1. Purpose

This meeting was held to gather input on community challenges, while establishing priorities and opportunities for a better quality of life for residents in Washington County.

2. Themes Generated from Community Input

Economic Revitalization
Youth Engagement & Recreation
Inclusive Governance & Collaboration
Education & School Partnerships
Community Pride & Beautification

4. What These Themes Tell Us

Collectively, these themes highlight a need for coordinated investment, improved governance, stronger collaboration between local governments and community partners, and more opportunities for the youth.

5. How We Plan to Use These Themes

- Inform future planning, policy discussions, or funding priorities
 - Shape project identification or feasibility analysis
 - Guide collaboration with municipalities
 - Support grant applications, RFPs, or strategic initiatives
 - Report back to decision-makers and the community
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6. Next Steps

- Incorporate specific municipal partnership projects into countywide strategic plan
- Consider community input themes during adoption of larger countywide goals/plan

Commissioner Walker said we are getting towards budget time, we might need to do what we can to help with HR. Commissioner Keyes said she agrees with Commissioner Walker. Commissioner Keyes said the Town of Plymouth also uses Mid-East Commission to help with their planning so hopefully that will help with everyone following the same rules.

Commissioner Phelps made a motion to come out of the Public Hearing. Commissioner Keyes seconded; motion carried unanimously.

BOARDS & COMMITTEES: Ms. Julie J. Bennett, Clerk to the Board went over the following requests:

COMMISSIONER SEATS ON BOARDS & COMMITTEES: Ms. Julie J. Bennett, Clerk to the Board spoke to the Board. This is the time of year to indicate whether each Commissioner would like to remain on their current committee or board, or if they wish to request a change (if permitted). She mentioned additions from Chair Spruill to a few committees. No other changes were noted. Ms. Bennett will distribute a new list for 2026.

FINANCE OFFICER'S REPORT: Ms. Dixon went over the budget transfers and budget amendments that were in the Commissioners' package.

Ms. Dixon stated that the auditors may come and make a presentation at the March 2, 2026 Board meeting.

Commissioner Phelps made a motion to approve the budget transfers/ amendments BT/BA #2026-045 – 046 as presented. Commissioner Keyes seconded; motion carried unanimously.

OTHER ITEMS BY COMMISSIONERS OR STAFF:

Capital Projects Update, Mr. Jason Squires: EMTOC started on May 19, 2025 and scheduled to be finished May 25, 2026. He is keeping the Board up to date on several projects.

Commissioner Phelps mentioned the upcoming Fin, Fur & Feather Banquet upcoming the end of January 2026.

Mr. Potter said the first FY27 Budget Workshop Discussion will be January 21, 2026. We don't have numbers from auditor yet and we usually cover this on the first day of the workshop. We may have to flip flop that discussion. We may only need to meet for two (2) days. We may have to go to the Courtroom on Wednesday. We will need to recess tonight's meeting until January 21, 2026 @ 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM in the Commissioners' Room.

Commissioner Phelps made a motion to go into Closed Session pursuant to NCGS 143-318.11(a)(3) (attorney/client privilege) and NCGS 143-318.11 (a)(6) (personnel). Commissioner Walker seconded; motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Phelps made a motion to recess to Wednesday, January 21, 2026 @ 9:00 AM for a Budget Workshop in the Commissioner's Room. Commissioner Keyes seconded; motion carried unanimously.

Julie J. Bennett, NCMCC, MMC
Clerk to the Board

John Spruill
Chair