

**Wake County Health and Human Services Board  
Meeting Minutes  
February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

**Board Members Present:**

Lily Chen  
Maty Ferrer Hoppmann  
Wanda Hunter  
Christine Kushner  
Dr. Tonya Minggia  
Dr. Jim Peterson  
Ann Rollins  
Dr. Anita Sawhney  
Commissioner Cheryl Stallings  
Tanyetta Sutton  
Dr. Kelcy Walker Pope  
Tamara Wilson

**Guests Present:**

Deidre McCullers

**Staff Members Present:**

Jennifer Brown  
Sheila Donaldson  
Odile Fredericks  
Ann Godwin  
Petra Hager  
Kevin Harrell  
Duane Holder  
Evan Kane  
Rebecca Kaufman  
Lee Little  
Crystal Lormejuste  
Dr. Joel Lutterman  
Justin Milstein  
Ken Murphy  
Shanta Nowell  
Tina Payton  
Mike Ranck  
Yolanda Thacker  
Kathryn Thompson  
Lechelle Wardell  
Dana Webb-Randall  
Rochelle Whitaker  
Stantavia Wright

**Call to Order**

Chair Ms. Ann Rollins called the meeting to order at 7:32 a.m.

**Next Board Meeting** – February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025

**Approval of Minutes**

Ms. Ann Rollins asked for a motion to approve the December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024 Board meeting minutes. There was a motion by Ms. Christine Kushner and Ms. Tanyetta Sutton seconded. The minutes were unanimously approved.

**Treasurer's Report**

In the absence of Mr. Terry McTernan, Treasurer, Ms. Brittany Hunt (Executive Assistant to the Wake County Health and Human Services Board) provided the Treasurer's Report. In December, the fund was reported as \$9,567.95. Since that report, there had not been any changes. Thus, the Board fund remained at \$9,567.95.

## **Abraha Appeal Full Board Decision**

(Presented by Mr. Ken Murphy)

Mr. Ken Murphy (Senior Deputy County Attorney) guided Wake County Health and Human Services Board members through an appeal panel's decision made back in October of 2024. The Health and Human Services department's Onsite Wastewater division received an appeal for their denial for a septic permit for a single-family property located in Wendell. The appeal was made by the owner of the property and led to a three-member appeal panel composed of Board members (Dr. Tonya Minggia, Ms. Tanyetta Sutton, and Dr. Kelcy Walker Pope) hearing from both the appellant and Onsite Wastewater staff, looking at evidence, and coming to a unanimous decision to uphold the staff's denial of the septic permit. The appeal panel's decision was reduced to writing which was made available for Board members to review. This includes findings of fact and conclusions of law, which were made available to Board members alongside the record of exhibits.

Originally, the appellant had indicated a desire to pursue the right to be heard by the full Board to present why the appeal panel's decision was wrong. The appellant has since withdrawn that request and was not present at the meeting. This meant, per appeal rules, that no further presentation would be made to the Board. If the appellant was present, an oral argument could be made both by the appellant and Wake County Onsite Wastewater staff. Because this route had not been pursued, the Board was instead welcomed to ask questions of their review of the exhibits and the appeal panel's decision.

Ms. Christine Kushner noted that the appellant stated the existing home had well water (more currently on city water) and that the toilet could be flushed. What would happen to that waste if someone were to use the system? Mr. Justin Milstein (Environmental Health Program Manager – Onsite Wastewater) stated that, to the best of staff's knowledge, the home is still connected to the original septic system on the property. The issue is that the lot for the home and the lot for the septic system are on two separate lots once owned under the same property owner. However, with the lot with the house sold to the appellant, this means the homeowner is no longer in ownership or control of the lot with the septic system connected to the home. Ms. Kushner asked how this passed inspection as the home would not have the septic system on its property and Mr. Milstein admitted that it likely did not come up in due diligence with the property owner. Because it was the property owner responsibility to disclose both the separate lots and the full extent of ownership of the home, it unfortunately was missed. Ms. Kushner expressed empathy for the homeowner left unable to exist in a home previously occupied and asked if anyone was currently residing on the property. As far as staff were aware, no one currently lived at the home.

Dr. Jim Peterson inquired about how frequently soil could change as the appellant claimed the soil testing had found soil unsuitable that had previously had no issue. Mr. Milstein provided additional context. The soil did not necessarily change significantly between the two denials for a septic permit. The conditions of the lot changed when the switch was made from a private well to public water to allow for additional access. When the well was officially abandoned, it allowed staff to evaluate the property again. There was a small area to be utilized that then was re-evaluated once the well was abandoned and subsequently found to be unsuitable. A property must have not only suitable soil but enough area of suitable soil to put in a septic system.

Ms. Kushner pointed out the frustrating result of this shift from soil being deemed suitable to unsuitable which understandably confused the appellant. Mr. Evan Kane (Onsite Water Protection Director) explained that evaluations must be based on the conditions available when staff evaluate. If the conditions of a lot change, it can potentially create new reasons for an approval or a denial. However, staff understand the potential to feel like goalposts have shifted and have resolved to use the experience to improve communications in the future to better outline what could potentially occur during the application process. Homeowners always had the option to pursue and hire a consultant to evaluate what

could occur based on any given action to the property. However, this option admittedly goes beyond the scope of the evaluation received from County staff. Ms. Kushner thanked staff noting the significance of the appellant moving to city water in a show of wanting to resolve the issues present on the property.

Ms. Tamara Wilson asked what would happen to the home and homeowner in the wake of everything that had occurred. Mr. Kane explained that there were still options available to the appellant. Negotiations with the neighboring property owner to establish an easement or rejoining the properties under joint ownership were likely the most feasible options. Mr. Milstein added that the appellant could also wait for sewer to be extended to the area. Sewer was available not far from the property but it would still be a financial burden at this time. Finally, there was an option to hire a private engineer, professional engineer, or authorized onsite wastewater evaluator to review additional options for resolution.

When asked about how much the property was valued, Mr. Murphy noted that the value had been recorded at \$164,000.

Ms. Tanyetta Sutton explained that the final decision of the appeal panel was conscious of the homeowner's predicament. The appellant was a landlord of multiple properties causing some concern that the consideration for the septic system not coming up when purchasing the property. There was also an indication that the appellant was choosing not to stay in the home in part because of the school system, preferring their children be sent to another school system based on property address. While it was an extremely unfortunate roadblock, the full context of the permit denial and use of the property was considered.

When asked about options for voting, Mr. Murphy clarified that the appeal panel's decision could be adopted, reversed, or modified (though, given the straightforward nature of the decision, there was little to modify).

**Ms. Christine Kushner made a motion to adopt the appeal panel's written decision. Dr. Anita Sawhney seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously passed.**

Mr. Kane thanked the three-member appeal panel sharing that Dr. Minggia, Ms. Sutton, and Dr. Walker Pope had all learned onsite wastewater terminology incredibly quickly with explanations of septic systems and permitting. Ms. Rebecca Kaufman (Health Director) added a desire in the coming months to present general overviews of Onsite Water Protection and Environmental Health and Safety (with Ms. Jennifer Brown (Environmental Health and Safety Director)) to Board members so that they had a more thorough understanding of the minute details and duties of the areas likely to come up in appeals.

### **Health and Human Services Director's Update**

(Presented by Ms. Rebecca Kaufman)

Ms. Rebecca Kaufman (Health Director) provided the following updates.

- Staff are looking at legislation and watching the news daily to keep updated on the different executive orders. The fate of the relationship with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is of particular concern. However, nothing is clear at this time and staff are awaiting further clarification.
- February is Heart Health Month and Wake County is actively educating the community on heart disease. Ms. Kaufman recognized Ms. Elizabeth Spender Smith (Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention - Public Health Educator) who had been leading the Heart Health Month activities and initiatives.

- There is a video on the Wake County website (<https://www.wake.gov/departments-government/health-human-services/public-health-and-medical-services/chronic-diseases-and-conditions/heart-health>) with County Manager David Ellis, Ms. Kaufman, Ms. Spender Smith, Ms. Toni Pedroza (Interim Health and Human Services Director, Senior Deputy Director of Health and Human Services), and other County leadership promoting Heart Health Month. As seen in the video, the County luminated the Wake County Office Building (WCOB) red for the observance.
- Health and Human Services had partnered with the Parks department to designate trails for Heart Health Month. These trails have heart disease facts and healthy tips. There are also exercise videos available to watch alongside the walking trails. This includes showing what to do if someone is in a heart-related health crisis.
- The Wake County Board of Commissioners (BOC) made a proclamation for Heart Health Month that week.
- Live Well Wake (LWW) had a prioritization survey out the prior month. Staff were now looking through the data from this survey as a new Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) cycle had begun. More details on both the data and the CHNA cycle were forthcoming.
- The Health and Human Services Board could anticipate a presentation on joint user fees from Onsite Water Protection later in February 2025.
- There was sponsored well training for all Environmental Health staff in February with North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS) representatives in attendance. This was a great opportunity to bring all staff together as well as to provide outreach materials on wells.
- Communicable Disease has been particularly busy. When Ms. Kaufman last reported out to the Public Health Committee on January 17<sup>th</sup>, the influenza-like illnesses (ILI or the flu) rate had went down. The following week, however, the rate jumped by 13%. There had been a high peak in rates in December right before Christmas. Staff had been hopeful that this was the highest the rate would go, but the latest increase had been significantly more than anticipated. While the situation is being monitored, some hospitals are finding patients with ILIs showing up to emergency departments which is not recommended (an urgent clinic or general physician is much more apt in the case of ILIs). County staff are working with local long-term care facilities and emergency departments and offering assistance in community outreach.
- The Norovirus is also on the rise. Staff have had a few long-term care facilities and nursing homes with multiple confirmed cases. Resources have been shared with the community including a checklist and when to involve the local health department. Unless a person is tested for the Norovirus, they do not have to report that they have it. Because of this, staff are usually not notified unless there is a large spread. Those who believe they have the Norovirus are encouraged to test earlier with test kits available from the County through the State lab. If a facility believes there is an outbreak, contact with County staff is highly recommended. Communicable Disease is currently working with facilities with confirmed cases. Notably, Norovirus cannot be warded off by mere hand sanitizer. Proper handwashing techniques using soap and water are needed to combat it.
- Finally, staff were still moving forward with the Workforce and Infrastructure Grant. The first round of conversational Spanish language course for Wake County employees is finished. Some staff joined online while other staff joined in-person at the Wake Technical Community College (WTCC) nearby. While staff not fluent in Spanish will not be expected to do work or promote health advice in Spanish, these conversational pieces will help them assist clients in the hallways and buildings (helping know what room or person they are meeting with/looking for or ensure their comfort in the sometimes clinical Health and Human Services buildings). Staff are also exploring ways to ensure better data with exit interviews and stay interviews, the latter capturing feedback from employees who have no plans to leave the county in order to identify what

supports are working. The grant, ultimately, evaluates how to best support the workforce of Wake County employees. This work seems even more vital moving forward as the landscape of staff's work begins to shift. Ms. Kaufman voiced hopes that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) would continue the grant moving forward.

Deputy County Manager Duane Holder added that staff are monitoring the impact of some of the federal directives being announced. The County Manager's Office is putting together internal teams to be proactive and look at funding and operational implications. Health and Human Services – as a department – received a large amount of federal funding. Housing and Workforce Development would also be heavily impacted in the event that federal funding was withheld or ceased. Internal teams are currently looking at what the directives have said in order to keep staff informed. This includes the County Attorney's Office as the County works to ensure that the least services are impacted as possible.

Ms. Christine Kushner asked what the amount of federal funding was for the County and Mr. Holder stated that out of the \$2 billion budget, roughly \$140 million, came from the federal government. Ms. Kaufman added context that additional dollars come from the State while technically being distributed by the federal government meaning that there were implications for even more money to be in limbo. This will, unquestionably, impact the most vulnerable members of the community.

Ms. Kaufman clarified that, for Public Health, the main funding that would anticipate impacts would be the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). The Ryan White HIV clinic will also be impacted as most staff are funded through Ryan White funds. Finally, the Workforce Infrastructure grant by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) would be impacted which currently houses HealthLit4Wake as well as Community Health Workers (CHWs). Mr. Holder stated that veteran funding was received as well as housing services to the unhoused population that both received a great deal of federal funding.

No changes, as of yet, have occurred. According to Ms. Kaufman, the only official change has been removed language around “diversity, equity, and inclusion or DEI.” Even then, many, including the State of Rhode Island, are putting restraining orders and other roadblocks in the way of the historically unprecedented tactics. It is vitally important, however, to remember what the law does and does not state.

When asked if the County has funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Mr. Holder stated that he was not aware of the County having FEMA dollars. When asked about funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), Mr. Holder stated that the implications, currently, would not have anything to do with monies already distributed. When Medicaid Expansion was brought up, it was stated that there were not currently known plans to impact Medicaid.

Ms. Maty Ferrer Hoppmann inquired about Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) as she had begun to hear cases of clients being asked for their immigration status from a Social Worker when this had not been asked previously. Ms. Yolanda Thacker (Economic Services Division Director) stated that SNAP and Medicaid have always required proof of citizenship. When asked if this was by affirmation, it was explained that FNS required details to determine the amount of benefits. If the person applying was not a citizen, they could not be counted in the household. If it is Medicaid and parents are not applying, they would not be asked for their citizenship. If the parents are applying, they will be asked. WIC, notably, does not currently ask about citizenship.

Ms. Tanyetta Sutton inquired about experiences from 2012 and how resources services being limited during mass deportation cause those seeking services to struggle, it was acknowledged that while anyone could apply for benefits for a child, it was obviously far simpler for the children's parents to apply as they were assumed to have the proper paperwork and datapoints needed. When asked for more guidance, staff

indicated that they would follow up with requests for documentation recommendations and requirements. When asked if Meals on Wheels had been cut, it was reiterated that no cuts had been made as of yet. It was this – the confusion and the disarray caused by the mandates – that had been truly causing concern when no direct action (outside the removal of DEI language) had been demanded.

It seemed the confusion ran, too, into the federal government as the one doing the press conference seemed confused about how funds were distributed. Staff shared their insights with others noting how widespread the panic and chaos seemed to be. Ms. Hoppmann recalled the need to consider repercussions and ramifications for if a child were to lose their parent.

Ms. Hoppmann asked if free COVID-19 vaccinations were still being provided. Ms. Kaufman clarified that the cost of the vaccine was now being charged to insurance. Most insurance companies cover the cost with the cost out of pocket being \$65. About a year prior, the COVID-19 vaccine went into the same supply stock as other vaccinations and had to be treated and billed as such.

### **Public Comments**

- Ms. Deidre McCullers cautioned that placement for those already in the Health and Human Services Building should be equally considered to any children entering foster care due to their parents being deported.
- Ms. McCullers also shared that some food stamp recipients were having to wait upwards of three months for their benefits card to arrive despite being assured that it would only take 7 to 10 business days. These benefits cards are also arriving with no benefits loaded onto them despite benefits being available on the old, defunct card. This was frustrating, preventing access to benefits, and leaving recipients with questions.
- Finally, Ms. McCullers asked for an update on how many children were currently living in the Swinburne Health and Human Services building awaiting placement.

### **Closed Session**

Ms. Ann Rollins made a motion for the Board to go into closed session pursuant to North Carolina General Statute 143-318.11(a)(1) to prevent the disclosure of information that is privileged or confidential pursuant to the law of this State, or not considered a public record within the meaning of Chapter 32 of the General Statutes. The motion was seconded by Ms. Wanda Hunter and approved by unanimous vote. The meeting was then moved into a closed session.

### **Adjournment**

The Board, upon a motion made, properly seconded, and unanimously approved, moved back into open session at approximately 10:02 a.m. and promptly adjourned.

**Board Chair's Signature:**

*Ann Rollins*

**Date:** 03/27/2025

Respectfully submitted by Brittany Hunt