

CASWELL COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Special Meeting

March 24, 2025

MEMBERS PRESENT

OTHERS PRESENT

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Tim Yarbrough, Chair
Frank Rose, Vice Chair
Greg Ingram
Tony Smith
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Renee Paschal, County Manager
Melissa Williamson, Deputy County Mgr.
Russell Johnston, County Attorney

The Board of Commissioners for the County of Caswell, North Carolina met in a Special Session meeting scheduled on Monday, March 24, 2025 at 5:00 pm at the Historic Courthouse, Courthouse Square, Yanceyville NC.

Welcome:

Chairman Yarbrough called the meeting to order. All were invited to pause for a moment of Silent Prayer and to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comments:

Elin Claggett, Providence NC

“North Carolina General Statute 153A-27.1 clearly states that the Board of Commissioners shall consult the County Executive Committee of the appropriate party before filling a vacancy. On February 28th, Commissioner Gwynn resigned, and you followed this procedure last week with the resulting approval of the Democratic Party’s choice of candidate for District 4 seat. He won’t be sworn in until April 7th, so there’s no urgency. On March 3rd, Commissioner Wrenn unexpectedly passed away. The Republican Executive Committee is working diligently to provide you with their choice of candidate to fill the seat. You all in your first terms should be asking which commissioner is pushing a special meeting and what are his motives. Are you truly afraid of someone sitting next to you who will ask questions publicly.

There is a Bill in the State Legislature that may affect the process for 42 counties including Caswell. The consideration of a political party before filling a vacancy will remain the law. One name that has circulated outside the Republican party belongs to a retired commissioner. This commissioner was chairperson in 2020 and 2022. I recall the Fiscal Year 2021 annual budget audit from June 30, 2021 wasn’t submitted to the LGC for 2 ½ years, on January 22, 2024. It took a letter from the School of Government to get a response to a public inquiry about the status of audits. Even as a sitting commissioner, he lost 73 percent of the Republican votes in the 2024 primary. Voters don’t want him anymore. The day after the election, the same commissioner put up a 4x8 sign publicly

expressing hate about those who won. You should already have a picture, but if not, one can be provided to you. The commissioner went to a Democratic meeting in 2024 but never went to a Republican meeting and now wants to sit in that seat. If someone else is being considered tonight, to thine own self be true. This reflects on you. Bad behavior and losing a recent election is not a qualifier to be appointed by this Board. In contrast, respecting the wishes of David Wrenn's widow and son is traditional and honorable. Where is your moral compass that keeps you from waiting for the Republican's Executive Committee's nominee who is heartily endorsed by Commissioner Wrenn's family. Remember the Golden Rule. Your choices tonight will speak volumes about you and your character and will remain on public record as your legacy. Stand up for what is ethically, and legally correct."

Lorrie Wrenn, Caswell County

"3 weeks ago TODAY, our lives were forever changed. I never dreamed that I would have to stand before the bd of commissioners today but within a few days of March 3rd, I was contacted by a very well known and liked county wide leader who told me that two county commissioners, sitting in front of me now, told this person that "they" had decided that Brian Totten and Rick McVey would be replacing Mrs. Gwynn and my husband. Can you just imagine that punch in the stomach feeling that came over me? I immediately asked someone to contact Senator Berger's Office as the Senator endorsed my husband during the primary. It was suggested that they would work on a change in the wording in the existing legislation which would prevent what you are trying to do today.

While at church yesterday, my mind wandered to the 10 Commandments – members of the board of commissioners, you profess to be Christian so I'm sure you know the word – "Shall" – you are not told MAYBE or DO WHATEVER YOU WANT - you are told "Shall". The same holds true for the General Statute that instructs boards of commissioners that they "Shall" take the recommendation of executive boards of political parties when appointing someone to take the place of a deceased or resigned board member. The executive committee of the Caswell Co. Republican Party meets this week to give you the name of the person that my family and I feel is best to take David's place on the board – someone with integrity and the knowledge to continue my husband's legacy – Retired Senior Chief, John Claggett. To nominate anyone other than John would be insulting to me and my family and to the people who elected my husband, David Wrenn, to a seat on the Caswell County Board of Commissioners.

In closing I would like to quote a friend of mine "Remember: whatever you allow them to do to others will eventually be done to you too. Be mindful of what you allow."

John Wrenn, Caswell County/Winston Salem resident

"I own land on Shady Grove Road. Tonight, you called a meeting to discuss an appointment to replace my dad. I've got to admit I think you have some big shoes to fill. Whether you liked him or not, I saw him spending numerous hours of public service so hopefully his replacement has done numerous hours and numerous things for the County—public service, volunteering, running the pony baseball league, standing up for the environment to keep a polluting landfill out of the County. When he was a

commissioner, when he said line-item budget review, that wasn't a joke. As a kid, the dining room table was covered with was covered with the County budget. No joke, line by line, he went thru it. Hopefully whoever you appoint has either done that or is willing to do it. That's what it's going to take to fill his shoes. So he didn't vote for property tax increases. The rumor of the person you may appoint has gone along with numerous tax increases—he pretty much ran the County budget into the ground, if the rumor is true of who you may appoint. Just keep that in mind. He never voted for tax increases, he cut waste from the County budget without neglecting services. Under today's leadership, taxes went up, solid waste taxes went up, budget went pretty bad, County is in pretty difficult audit situation right now in terms of money wasted on audits because of bad management when he was on the Board. The voters fired McVey when they selected my dad and Mr. Smith to be the at large Republican candidates. There is a difference between not being selected for the job, like Mr. Totten versus someone who was fired from the job. Mr. Totten wanted to do the job, but he didn't get picked. It is good now that you have given him the chance. There is a difference between that versus someone who had the chance and got ran out by the voters. Please keep that in mind too. You businessmen here if you had an employee that mismanaged your company and got your company in big financial problems, would you hire them back? I doubt it. A lot of you I know are concerned about the financial situation in the county, Mr. Rose, I've heard him say it in meetings he wants the county departments to run correctly. Please pick someone who has a history and a record of doing that.”

Tommy Goddard, Caswell County resident

A business owner who has lived here for three years. “I am not going to repeat what others have said and what I know is coming, just two easy things. The voters voted for him. Just because you got an R or D beside your name don't mean you are the same people and we all agree with that. You can be on one side or the other side and still have the same letter next to your name when you run so I think somebody who is more like Wrenn needs to be on the Board. Since I've been here, I'm not going to go by what I hear or what I haven't seen or what was done before I was here, but I did see what the sign that he put up, and that's going to put a mark here in the County if y'all put him back in here because that's what he's going to be known for right now. Now 10 years from now, it's a mistake he might have grew from, but this is very recent and I think that needs to be considered about the sign that people saw and I saw not on a picture, but I rode by and saw. Thank you.”

Shannon Moretz, Cherry Grove

“I am actually not coming here to ask for anything tonight. I'm not coming in here with any special request and I'm not coming in here to fuss at anything which is kind of weird for me. Usually, I'm fussing at you guys when I'm standing up here. Today I'm actually here to offer a little bit of encouragement to you. You guys are currently sitting in seats that are extremely difficult to hold, they take a tremendous amount of effort, they take a tremendous amount of toll on you and your families, and it means a lot to run for office. It means a lot to be willing to serve and I feel confident that the men on that Board will do

the right thing for this community and by the people of this community, and I support your decision whatever that ends up being, and so I want to thank you for your willingness to serve and I want to thank you for your willingness to stand when you are so frequently being attacked. This job is hard enough as it is. There are plenty of people in this community who know a lot of really good stuff. There are a lot of really smart people here that could probably help you make decisions, but I'm sorry that so much of those conversations get drug out thru social media in such a way that doesn't actually resolve anything. Good luck to you as you make another difficult decision and thank you for your service."

Chairman Yarbrough asked if anyone wanted to speak and failed to sign up. There were no additional speakers and the Chair announced that Public Comments was closed.

Agenda:

A motion was made by Commissioner Smith and seconded by Vice Chair Rose to approve the Special Session agenda. The motion carried unanimously.

Discussion Item:

Chairman Yarbrough announced that there was one item on the Special Meeting agenda-to fill the vacant seat of deceased Commissioner David Wrenn.

He provided a brief history regarding the special meeting. Prior to going into Closed Session at the last meeting, the Chair spoke with the Mr. Cody Tatum, Chair of the Republican Party regarding a recommendation for the vacant seat of former Commissioner Wrenn. Mr. Tatum responded that the Republican Party was scheduled to meet on Wednesday to discuss a nomination. Chair Yarbrough commented that at that time, he was willing to let the process play out. On March 20, the Chair was made aware of an amendment to House Bill 58 which had already been passed by the NC House and was being considered in the Senate on that day. The amendment changed the way vacancies would be filled on the Caswell Board of County Commissioners. He recapped the current statute that states whatever party the vacant position belonged to would make a recommendation to the Board. It is a nonbinding recommendation. If HB58 passed, the Board would no longer have any say so in the selection—it would be whoever the affected party recommended would be seated on the Board. The effective date of the amendment is March 3rd. He announced that he called the Special Meeting after consultation with the other Board members and the County Manager. He stated that he did not feel it was right for someone to come in and say "we know what's best more so than the citizens of Caswell County." He emphasized that the citizens of Caswell County elected officials should make the decision, not an unelected board. He called the meeting to try to get in front of the legislation which was scheduled to go back to the House on March 25th and would likely be passed. If the Executive Committee of the Republican Party met the following Wednesday, whatever name they recommended would have to

be accepted by the Board. He stated that he did not feel that was fair to the citizens of the County. The Chair indicated that he felt like he was “backed into a corner” with the amendment since there was no prior knowledge of it.

Chairman Yarbrough asked if anyone from the Executive Committee of the Republican Party was present to make a recommendation to the Board to fill the vacant seat. Keith Tatum, who was in the audience, stated that he was a member of the Executive Committee and that the committee was meeting on Wednesday to discuss the nomination. He further stated that the meeting could not be held until Wednesday because of state statutes that require political parties give notice.

Commissioner Smith acknowledged that he had respect for former Commissioner Wrenn and was sorry to hear of his passing. He stated that he and Commissioner Wrenn were elected in November for at-large seats on the Board. He noted that commissioners were charged with making good decisions, and the decisions he made would not be based on his re-election in four years. He shared the qualities of a good commissioner including the ability to plan, direct, coordinate, and get along with other commissioners. He commented that he did not feel it was in the best interest of citizens to have a small group of individuals dictate who filled the seat on the Board.

Vice Chair Rose agreed with the Chair’s statements. He reiterated that no one from Raleigh consulted with any member of the Board regarding the new legislation. If the legislation passed, the Board would have no opportunity to vet potential members of the Board. He expressed the concern that the proposed bill would eliminate the opportunity to vet individuals to represent the citizens—and the Board would have to accept the choice of the party.

Commissioner Ingram asked “how did we get to this point?” He commented that two weeks prior, the Democratic Party went through the process, nominated a couple of people, met with precinct chairs and submitted a nomination to the Board of County Commissioners. He felt the Board was blindsided by the actions of the legislature. He added that he would never have a problem with the recommendation of the Republican party if the process was done the right way.

Chairman Yarbrough called for a nomination to fill the vacant seat of former Commissioner Wrenn. Commissioner Smith nominated former Commissioner Rick McVey. There were no other nominations. The nominations were closed. Vice Chair Rose seconded the motion. All Board members raised their right hand in support of the nominee. The motion carried unanimously.

Adjournment:

Vice Chair Rose moved, seconded by Commissioner Smith to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 6:28 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Renee Paschal
Interim Clerk to the Board

Tim Yarbrough
Board Chair