



## Wake Forest Board of Commissioners Work Session Meeting Minutes

The Wake Forest Board of Commissioners met on **Tuesday, May 5, 2026**, at **6:00 p.m.** in the Board Room at Wake Forest Town Hall, 301 S Brooks Street.

Mayor Clapsaddle called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**Commissioners Present:** Commissioner Haseeb Fatmi, Commissioner Keith Shackelford, Commissioner Sliwinski, and Commissioner Faith Cross.

**Commissioners Absent:** Mayor Ben C. Clapsaddle and Commissioner Adam Wright

**Staff Members Present:**

Town Manager Kip Padgett  
Assistant Town Manager Candace Davis  
Assistant Town Manager Aileen Staples  
Town Attorney Nathan McKinney  
Police Chief Julius Jefferson  
Fire Chief Ron Early  
Budget and Performance Director  
Michelle Daniels

Budget and Performance Analyst  
Benjamin Blevins  
Grants Program Manager Jack Cassidy  
Police Captain Brandon High  
Police Captain Christopher Minor  
Town Clerk Evelyn Wright

### Presentations

#### 1.1 Presentation of Proposed FY 2026-2027 Annual Operating Budget

Town Manager Kip Padgett presented the recommended Fiscal Year 2026–2027 operating budget, explaining that the proposal was developed around the Board’s adopted strategic goals and priorities while maintaining the Town’s commitment to responsible financial management. Mr. Padgett noted that the budget document would look different this year due to the Town’s transition to new budgeting software, which provides improved readability and performance measures. Mr. Padgett emphasized that the budget remains balanced and continues Wake Forest’s tradition of seeking excellence in government budgeting practices.

Padgett highlighted that the proposed budget includes no property tax increase for residents. The only fee adjustment recommended is a \$1 per month increase in the Solid Waste and recycling fee, raising the monthly charge from \$24 to \$25 due to increasing landfill, recycling, fuel, and operational costs. Mr. Padgett recommended reducing the Downtown Municipal Service District (MSD) tax rate by one cent, from \$0.14 to \$0.13 per \$100 of assessed value. No increases were proposed for electric, stormwater, or vehicle registration fees. Mr. Padgett explained that the overall budget totals approximately \$145 million across all funds, compared to approximately \$138 million in the current fiscal year.

Mr. Padgett reviewed the Town's revenue and expenditure structure, noting that property taxes account for approximately 36 percent of total revenues, with additional funding coming from sales taxes, intergovernmental revenues, service charges, and other sources. Personnel costs remain the Town's largest expenditure category at approximately 43 percent of the budget, followed by operating expenses, power costs, and capital investments. Mr. Padgett stressed that Wake Forest's personnel expenditures remain relatively low compared to many municipalities, where staffing costs often exceed 50 percent of total expenditures.

The proposed budget includes the addition of 25 new positions, including 23 positions in the General Fund and two positions in the Electric Fund. Fourteen of the new General Fund positions are firefighters needed to staff Fire Station No. 6 when it opens in 2027. Mr. Padgett explained that recruitment efforts will begin immediately so personnel can be hired, trained, and prepared before the station becomes operational. Mr. Padgett also noted that the budget continues funding for career ladders, classification adjustments, and employee compensation initiatives. Despite a six percent increase in health insurance costs, the Town will absorb those expenses rather than passing them on to employees.

Mr. Padgett reviewed historical trends showing steady increases in employer retirement contributions over recent years, particularly for public safety employees. Although employee contribution rates remain fixed by the state, employer obligations continue to

grow. Mr. Padgett expressed optimism that changes in investment strategies at the state level could help moderate future increases but emphasized that retirement expenses remain a significant budget challenge.

Mr. Padgett discussed the Town's debt service obligations, including financing associated with Fire Station No. 6 and other capital projects. The proposed debt service fund totals approximately \$11.45 million. Mr. Padgett noted that the Town received approval from the Local Government Commission for financing related to the station project and expects the facility to open in summer 2027. He advised that the capital improvement program totals approximately \$8.9 million and is funded through a combination of fund balance appropriations, debt financing, and other revenue sources. Mr. Padgett reiterated that fund balance is used only for one-time capital expenses and not for recurring operational costs, consistent with Town policy.

Mr. Padgett reviewed General Fund forecasts through 2030. While the Town remains financially stable, Mr. Padgett noted that projections indicate potential deficits beginning around Fiscal Years 2029 and 2030 if current trends continue. He cautioned that these forecasts are subject to change based on economic conditions, legislative actions, property revaluations, and growth patterns. Mr. Padgett stressed the importance of monitoring financial conditions and adjusting as needed over time.

Mr. Padgett addressed broader economic and development trends affecting the Town's long-term financial outlook. He noted that Wake Forest is beginning to experience a slowdown in available developable land, which will gradually shift growth from new development to redevelopment projects. While growth continues to generate revenues, Mr. Padgett cautioned that growth also drives demand for additional services and infrastructure. He emphasized the need for careful planning to ensure that future development remains financially sustainable.

Mr. Padgett also discussed uncertainty surrounding potential actions by the North Carolina General Assembly, including proposals affecting property tax limitations and revaluation processes. He explained that any significant legislative changes could

impact future revenue projections and may require adjustments to the Town's long-range financial planning. Mr. Padgett noted that Wake Forest is preparing for its next property revaluation cycle and future bond issuances associated with voter-approved transportation and infrastructure projects.

Mr. Padgett identified the transportation infrastructure as a major future priority, specifically, referencing South Main Street improvements and anticipated impacts from planned railroad bridge projects that will increase traffic volumes in the area. He stated that addressing those transportation needs will likely require future bond financing and continued long-term planning.

Mr. Padgett introduced a new budget highlights video that summarizes key elements of the proposal in a concise, accessible format. The video outlines major budget figures, service investments, capital projects, and financial policies. Among the highlighted projects are restoration of the Ailey Young House, a downtown transportation study, S-Line rail corridor design work, housing initiatives, transportation improvements, stormwater investments in the Richland Creek and Toms Creek watersheds, and continued public safety investments.

Mr. Padgett acknowledged that developing this year's budget was particularly challenging due to rising costs, staffing needs, and economic uncertainty. He praised department directors, finance staff, and the budget team for working collaboratively to develop a budget that maintains service levels, adds critical personnel, absorbs increasing employee benefit costs, and avoids property tax increase. Mr. Padgett emphasized the need to remain vigilant regarding future economic and legislative developments but expressed confidence that the proposed budget positions Wake Forest to continue delivering high-quality services while responsibly managing taxpayer resources. Mr. Padgett noted that additional budget details would be presented during upcoming work sessions and public hearings before formal adoption.

## **2. Discussion of Monthly Financial Report**

### 2.1 Discussion of March Financial Summaries

Monthly Financial Report Received.

**3. Review of Draft Agenda for Upcoming Regular Meeting**

3.1 Draft Agenda for BOC Regular Meeting May 19, 2026

**4. Other Business**

None.

**5. Commissioner Reports**

Commissioner Cross advised of recent community events, including Meet in the Street, and expressed appreciation for strong public participation despite weather concerns. Commissioner Cross promoted upcoming community activities such as the National Day of Prayer on May 7<sup>th</sup>, the commencement of Six Sundays in Spring, Friday Night on White, and Mother's Day celebrations. Commissioner Cross also discussed follow-up conversations regarding a recent sustainability presentation, clarifying that several environmental issues identified in the presentation were not ranked priorities but rather interconnected concerns such as habitat loss, drought, flooding, and heat. Commissioner Cross thanked residents for raising questions that helped improve public understanding of the presentation.

Mayor Pro Tem/Commissioner Shackleford connected the discussion of mental wellness to the importance of physical fitness and recreation. Commissioner Shackleford also highlighted the opening of additional segments of the Dunn Creek Greenway and promoted National Fitness Month activities taking place at Joyner Park, including self-defense classes on Mondays, synergy fit on Tuesdays, yoga on Wednesdays, and Zumba on Thursdays. Commissioner Shackleford encouraged residents to participate in these activities and enjoy the spring season while supporting their physical and mental well-being.

Commissioner Fatmi thanked Commissioner Sliwinski for sharing his personal story and acknowledged the positive impact of the Town's mental wellness efforts. Commissioner Fatmi recognized Town guest services staff and volunteers during Guest Services Appreciation activities and thanked the Wake Forest Christian Church for hosting a community dialogue event focused on respectful conversations. He also

highlighted upcoming Parks and Recreation milestones, including ribbon-cutting ceremonies for the Dunn Creek Greenway expansion and the opening of Miller Park, noting the contributions of staff and volunteers who support community programming.

Commissioner Sliwinski shared personal remarks recognizing Mental Health Awareness Month and discussed his own experiences with mental health. Commissioner Sliwinski emphasized the importance of year-round conversations about mental wellness and highlighted the Town's efforts over the past several years, including mental wellness fairs, partnerships with community organizations, mental health training programs, and participation in statewide initiatives. Commissioner Sliwinski expressed gratitude to Town staff, public safety leaders, and community members who have supported both him personally and the broader mental health mission. He encouraged residents to check on loved ones, engage in meaningful conversations, and seek help when needed, including utilizing the 988 crisis hotline.

Town Clerk Evelyn Wright had no updates.


Town Manager Kip Padgett reminded the Board and public about several upcoming events, including ribbon-cutting ceremonies, a Fire Department promotional ceremony on Saturday at 6 p.m. at the Renaissance Centre, Employee Appreciation activities next week, and the opening of Fire Station 6 recruitment efforts. He encouraged participation in these events and thanked everyone involved in supporting Town operations and community engagement.

## 6. Adjournment

The Board of Commissioners adjourned the meeting at 6:34 p.m.

Duly approved in open session this 10<sup>th</sup> day of June 2026.

(ATTEST)

  
Evelyn Wright, Town Clerk



  
R. Keith Shackleford, Mayor Pro Tem