

City of Graham
City Council Special Meeting Minutes
May 20, 2026
1:00 PM



The City of Graham City Council held a special meeting at 1:00 pm on May 20, 2026, in the Council Chamber, City Hall, located at 201 South Main Street, Graham, NC.

Council Members Present:

Mayor Chelsea Dickey
Mayor Pro Tem Ricky Hall
Council Member Bobby Chin
Council Member Bonnie Whitaker
Council Member Jim Young

Staff Present:

Megan Garner, City Manager
Aaron Holland, Assistant City Manager
Bryan Coleman, City Attorney - *absent*
Bob Ward, City Attorney - *absent*
Renee Ward, City Clerk

CALL TO ORDER: Mayor Chelsea Dickey called the meeting to order and presided.

PRESENTATIONS:

- **Alamance Arts** – Kim Williard, Interim Executive Director

Ms. Willard shared the Alamance Arts had been serving all of Alamance County since 1956 and would be 70 years old this year, which made it the third-oldest Arts Council in North Carolina. They moved the Captain White House in Graham in 1988. Impacts on the community: 30% of funding comes from grants, county and municipal support, and 70% from donors. She shared they have supported the community at Musical Chairs, Slice of Summer, Pumpkin Bash, and Graham tree lighting. The mascot, Artie the Mouse, includes a scavenger hunt that brings people throughout downtown Graham, is hosted nationally by other arts councils. She asked the Council to continue supporting the arts so they could continue the work they do in Alamance County.

- **VITA Tax Program** – United Way – President Shereá Burnett

Ms. Burnett shared that the United Way of Alamance County's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program provides essential, no-cost tax preparation for low-to-moderate-income residents. By offering high-quality alternatives to predatory tax services, they empower vulnerable community members to maximize their refunds and invest in their long-term financial stability.

Despite a delayed start in early February due to inclement weather, the program has demonstrated significant efficiency and high demand within its first six weeks:

- Over 400 appointments scheduled and processed.
- More than 330 returns completed.
- Secured over \$320,500 in total federal and state refunds for local residents.

As the demand for VITA services continues to climb, the operational costs have exceeded their current independent capacity. To ensure the program remains a fixture for financial literacy and poverty

alleviation in Alamance County, they are seeking municipal support of \$10,000 to \$15,000 from municipal partners – the Cities of Burlington, Graham, and Mebane - to sustain and expand operations for the upcoming fiscal year.

Investing in VITA is an investment in the local economy. Every dollar returned to a resident is a dollar that often goes immediately back into the community for essential needs, debt reduction, and local commerce.

Ms. Burnette asked if Graham would consider funding \$12,000 to hire staff who would be IRS-compliant to open a tax assistance place in Graham.

Mayor Dickey asked if the Council would want to fund the whole \$12,000.

Council Member Chin asked to wait until the middle of the year to review revenues and come discuss an amendment after the 1st quarter.

Consensus was to review the request from United Way and Alamance Arts after the first quarter.

- LINK Transit – John Andoh, Link Transit Manager

Mr. Andoh shared the following LINK Transit stats:

Link Transit Status

LINK•TRANSIT

- 10 years in service - over 1 million passenger trips carried since 2016.
- 5 stops in Graham - Courthouse, ACC, Jimmie Kerr/I-40 and PART Park & Ride, presently.
 - 2026 Passenger trips in Graham (3 months): 1,887
 - 2025 Passenger trips in Graham (12 months): 7,724
 - 2024 Passenger trips in Graham (12 months): 8,980
 - 2023 Passenger trips in Graham (12 months): 7,548
- Service has been extended to Elon, Mebane, Haw River and Green Level with local match contributions provided by those jurisdictions since 2023. Gibsonville, Alamance County and ACC has contributed since 2016.
- Elon University and ACC students, employees and faculty can ride Link Transit for free - their are paid for by Elon University and Alamance Community College.
- New bus fleet of entire low-floor vehicles with four vehicles powered by electric.
- Link Paratransit scheduling app implemented and available on App Store and Google Play.
- Seniors 60 years old and older can now ride Link Paratransit.
- Same-day reservations allowed on Link Paratransit.

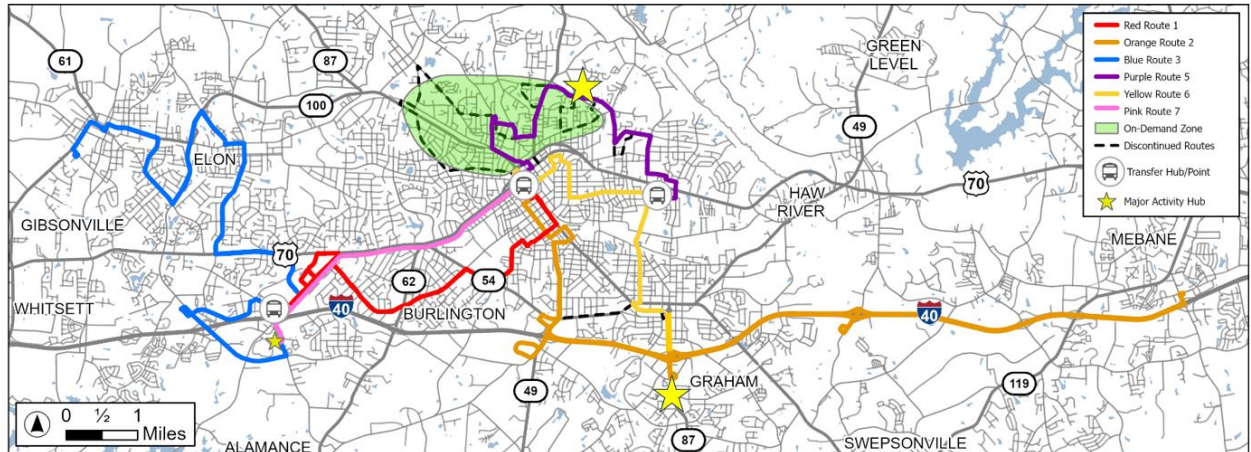
Graham Transit Service Summary

- Request is \$20,000 to \$22,000 to provide local match to Federal funding.
- **Service Hours:** 5:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m., Monday-Friday, 9:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., Saturday, excluding holidays. Presently, every 90 minutes.
- **Fares:** \$1.00 for general, 50 cents for discount, \$1.00 for paratransit. 10-Ride, 1-Day & 31-Day passes available.
- Fixed routes - with bus stops on a reliable schedule - every 60 minutes in late 2026:
 - Additional stops to be added along Elm Street, Washington Street, Main Street and Graham-Hopedale Road in coordination with City/NCDOT for placement
 - Connections to Mebane, Amazon, ACC, Burlington, Walmart, Food Lion, Alamance Elections.
- Door to door paratransit for seniors and persons with disabilities within ¼ mile radius of Link Transit routes. Reservations can be made same day to 14 days in advance via phone or app.
- Appointment to Link Transit Public Transit Advisory Commission to provide advisory recommendations on Link Transit service to Burlington City Council.
- Establishment of performance measures with reporting on statistics, monthly, by stop and service.

Transit Development Plan

- 5-Year Transit Development Plan adoption to begin incremental changes to Link service in late 2026.
- All routes would operate at 60-minute frequency.
- New on demand service providing expanded mobility with temporary pilot service (Link+) in the Green Route area in Burlington City Limits.
- Expand rider options for travel (direct connections & reduced travel time)
- Improvements within current service hours and operating funding.

Proposed Future Link System Map



** Purple Route 5 could include an alternative option with service to Haw River and Green Level, depending on available funding.*

The City of Burlington is requesting a local match contribution of \$22,000 for a one-year pilot transit service. Performance measures can be established to determine whether the service is successful for continued involvement. As part of the City of Graham's participation in Link Transit, the City of Graham can make an appointment to the Link Transit Public Advisory Commission, which guides the oversight of the public transit system.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall shared that he is a member of the ACTA Board and that Haw River and Green Level had pulled out of LINK Transit. He stated by funding ACTA, we were giving our citizens door-to-door service.

Council Member Whitaker suggested continuing ACTA funding.

Mayor Dickey stated she needed more information on LINK transit and its impact before discussing further.

STREET CLOSURE – WEST ELM STREET - ALAMANCE COUNTY VETERANS

City Council will consider closing West Elm Street on May 25, 2026, from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm for the Alamance County War Memorial event.

Motion by Mayor Pro Tem Hall to approve the street closure, seconded by Council Member Young. The motion passed unanimously.

REVIEW – FY 2026-2027 PROPOSED BUDGET:

City Council reviewed and discussed the proposed Fiscal Year 2026-2027 budget.

City Council:

Mayor Dickey inquired about the Council's travel budget.

Council Member Whitaker shared that she was not seeking any pay increase for the Council.

Mayor Dickey asked if Council would put something in place to hold Council accountable to choose their top two events, such as NCLM CityVision, Chamber Leaders Retreat, Town and State Dinner, and asked to keep the amount the same as last year at \$9,000.

Council discussed reducing the Council's travel to \$7,000.

Council consensus was to reduce the Council's travel to \$7,000.

Council discussed the Mayor having a city-issued phone and whether she should keep it. It was decided that she would keep it.

Mayor Dickey asked for updated telephone and postage numbers.

Mayor Dickey asked to add FY 2024/2025 budget and 2025/2026 budget numbers for comparison.

Mayor Dickey asked if some sort of funding source or stipend for employees needing to add their family to health insurance, at a cost of less than \$1,500 a month, which some were paying.

Mayor Dickey asked for Federal and State drug fund monies received for the past year.

Information Technology:

The City Manager has proposed an extra tech person.

Finance:

Not many changes. An increase in contracted services for audit services.

Mayor Dickey asked for a list of all contracted services.

Public Building and Grounds:

Building Maintenance used to be under this department, but is now under Property Maintenance.

Mayor Dickey asked what was spent for utilities year to date.

City Manager Garner stated it was \$50,000.

Police:

The largest budgeted department and the largest number of employees.

Mayor Dickey noted the NC Local Government Retirement System had a contribution amount of 17.1% for law enforcement and asked what it would cost to bring everyone up to 17.1%.

City Manager Garner said she would have to calculate that cost.

Mayor Dickey asked about the cost to add families to the City's insurance plan and was interested to see if a stipend could be offered or any type of assistance.

City Manager Garner stated staff worked on it, and as of right now, there was no funding source, and agreed the cost to add a family was costly, but the kids were more reasonable. The older you are the more expensive it costs.

Fire:

City Manager Garner shared the largest increase would be the addition of new employees. She shared there would be an increase in the communication fees contracted with the City of Burlington.

City Manager Garner noted the \$6 million for Capital Outlay and Buildings was requested but not recommended, and the \$1 million for Capital Outlay Equipment was not requested but not recommended. She shared if Council approved the proposed tax increase and the budget line transfer capital \$3.1 was the beginning of the pay as you go fund.

Inspections/Planning:

Vehicle replacement was the largest increase.

Mayor Dickey asked for the age of the car and the number of miles.

Mayor Dickey asked about contracted services.

Streets and Highways:

Proposed decrease and no capital.

Council Member Young inquired about the rapid flashing beacon lights, and City Manager Garner said it was in a grant project fund and has been earmarked as such.

Mayor Dickey asked what the current year's sidewalk repair fund was allocated.

City Manager Garner stated it was budgeted at \$25,000 at the beginning of this fiscal year.

Street Lights:

Stayed the same for the upcoming fiscal year.

City Garage:

One capital item – heavy-duty truck/equipment scanning tool. The largest expenditures are inventory parts and fuel purchases.

Sanitation:

Mayor Dickey inquired about passing on the fees for additional pick-up for downtown businesses to the businesses.

City Manager Garner shared this was discussed with the City Council last year, and potentially restructuring and have a separate fee schedule for the downtown area. The Downtown gets two pick-ups per week compared to residents and other businesses that receive one pick-up per week. The downtown cans generally weigh twice as much as a residential can, but the fee is the same.

Council discussed increasing sanitation fees for the City and the downtown area to meet the increasing tipping fees and cart rates.

Council asked Staff to review the downtown B1 district for sanitation costs and bring it back to Council.

City Manager Garner asked if Council consensus was looking at doubling the downtown fees or a percentage rate.

Council Member Young stated doubling would make sense for twice the service.

City Manager Garner noted that whatever rate increase the Council set, it would be per can.

Contract Services – Republic Recycling contract ends this calendar year, and proposals would go out at the end of this calendar year.

Recreation:

The majority of the increase was the addition of the after-school program approved in August 2025.

The playground on Marshall Street was discussed, and consensus was to survey the community on whether a park was the best option for the area.

Council Member Young questioned the cost of the Tree Lighting event.

City Manager Garner stated the fireworks and sound system were a good portion of the cost.

Graham/Mebane Lake:

Council discussed increasing jon boat rentals.

City Manager will research what other neighboring cities are charging and bring it back to the Council.

Property Maintenance:

The largest increase was the \$180,000 police department roof replacement.

Mayor Dickey asked to fund the library roof and if there were any grants for facilities.

Council Member Whitaker agreed it needed to be replaced and inquired if the County would pay a portion.

Council took a five-minute recess.

Non-Departmental – General Fund:

Significant increase of \$3.1 million, which is earmarked for the second fire station, fire apparatus, and design work at Graham Regional Park.

Mayor Dickey asked how much the new park design would cost for only one quadrant of the park.

City Manager Garner would get an estimated design quote and bring it back to Council.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall suggested putting the park design money towards the fire department.

Mayor Dickey asked to get the cost of the design before the park money is redirected.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall asked to better use the beautification grants. He shared that they have trouble finding businesses to apply.

City Manager Garner said she would suggest that the City Council consider giving staff time to vet guidelines and produce a more feasible process. She suggested zeroing out those funds for the upcoming fiscal year until new guidelines have been approved, then you could approve a budget amendment to allocate grant funding.

Consensus was to leave the money there and freeze it until new guidelines are in place for both businesses grants and façade grants.

Council Member Young suggested using façade grants in other areas for the interior of the buildings and letting the advisory board make a decision.

City Manager Garner noted a mistake in the reclassification on the pay plan for the Utilities Director and Police Chief, but were correct in the budget message. The pay plan showed going from a 34 to a 35, and it should have been 34 to a 36 pay grade.

Mayor Dickey asked what the financial impact was.

City Manager Garner stated it would be approximately a 5% increase.

Mayor Dickey asked for that number.

Fund 31 – Utilities

Water and Sewer Billing

\$5,000 proposed difference relating to personnel-related expenses.

Water Sewer Distribution

Maintenance Lift Station

\$56,000 increase for a mower and personnel-related expenses.

Water Treatment Plant

Chemicals were the highest increase.

Non-Departmental – Utilities Fund

The first debt payment for the wastewater treatment plant would be in the upcoming fiscal year.

Fees:

Council Member Whitaker asked why development fees did not increase.

City Manager Garner shared that staff and Council worked on this for the 2025/2026 fiscal year and would go in any direction as indicated by the City Council.

Council Member Whitaker stated the fees were still very low compared to other neighboring cities, and they should be increased.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall suggested a 20% increase across the board.

The consensus was to have staff come back with proposed increases.

Engineering Construction Plan Review/Inspection Fees

Mayor Dickey asked if these fees cover our cost.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall asked for a 20% increase.

The consensus was to have staff bring back fees that cover our costs.

Staff will look at neighboring sign permit fees.

Miscellaneous Fees:

Staff will look at the Return Check Penalty of \$25. Council proposed an increase that did not exceed the statutory limits.

Downtown Residential Parking Permit – leave at \$20, and when the software is up and running, then revisit a repeat offender fee.

Graham-Mebane Lake:

Jon Boat Rental – suggested increasing the cost.

User Fees:

City Manager Garner stated the increase for sanitation would get us closer to the actual cost, but there was still a taxpayer subsidy.

Mayor Dickey asked for the actual cost.

Council discussed the sanitation cost and asked that staff bring back the actual cost for consideration.

Mayor Dickey asked if the water and system development fees could be reduced.

Assistant City Manager Holland will get what other Municipalities are charging.

Revenue Fund 10

Mayor Pro Tem Hall proposed a 3-cent tax increase that was the consensus of the Council.

Mayor Dickey asked if staff would ask the Chamber for a hotel study for Graham.

Fund Balance:

City Manager Garner stated it was worth noting the City's fund balance appropriation was significantly higher than at the start of the current fiscal year at \$1.5 million, and what was proposed for next year was \$4.3 million and was consistent with what Davenport presented.

Mayor Dickey inquired about the proposed COLA rate and stated she found it to be closer to 2%.

City Manager Garner stated the index the City used historically was higher than 2%. She stated the NCLM also produces a COLA study. Mayor Dickey asked for a copy.

The Council consensus was to continue the special meeting to June 1, 2026, at 12:30 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Council Member Young to adjourn, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Hall. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:17 p.m.

Renee M. Ward, CMC
City Clerk