

**THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA**

Monday, December 2, 2024

9:00 A.M. Work Session

MINUTES

Place: Commissioners' Chambers, Second floor, Durham County Government
Administrative Complex, 200 E. Main Street, Durham, NC

Present: Commissioners Nida Allam, Michelle Burton, Wendy Jacobs, Dr. Mike Lee and
Stephen Valentine

Presiders: County Attorney Larissa Williamson and Chair Nida Allam

Ceremonial Items

24-0760 Board of Elections Acknowledgment of Certificates

County Attorney Larissa Williamson was informed by Derek Bowens, Director of Elections, that the election was certified, and the certificates were mailed directly to the candidates who officially won the November 4, 2024, election.

24-0764 Installation of Register of Deeds

The Honorable Clayton Jones, Chief District Court Judge, administered the Oath of Office to Sharon A. Davis, Register of Deeds.

24-0749 Installation of County Commissioners

The Honorable Allison Riggs, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, administered the Oath of Office to Commissioner-Elect:

Nida Allam

The Honorable Shamielka Rhinehart, Superior Court Judge, administered the Oath of Office to Commissioner-Elects:

Michelle Burton
Wendy Jacobs
Dr. Mike Lee

The Honorable Clayton Jones, Chief District Court Judge, administered the Oath of Office to Commissioner-Elect:

Stephen J. Valentine

24-0750 Election of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Board of County Commissioners

Attorney Williamson opened the floor for nominations for the Chair of the Board of County Commissioners.

Commissioner Jacobs nominated Nida Allam for the position of Chair.

The motion carried unanimously.

Chair Allam opened the floor for nominations for the Vice Chair of the Board of County Commissioners.

Commissioner Burton nominated Commissioner Dr. Lee for the position of Vice Chair.

The motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Valentine shared the following statement:

“First, I would like to acknowledge my spouse of 26 years Valerie Valentine, my youngest son William Valentine, my parents – Mr. and Mrs. James R. Valentine and my sister Hope Gray and her husband Irving Gray, members of St. Joseph A.M.C Church, and members of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Doric Lodge #28, who had been my support from the beginning of this journey.

Second, I would like to thank the Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People, the Friends of Durham, INDY Magazine, the North Carolina Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, Vote Vets, the People’s Alliance and the New Politics for their endorsements during the election season.

Third, I would like to say thank you to all my supporters and the voters here in Durham County. It is because of you that democracy works, and I could not have done it without you!

Lastly, I treasure this awesome responsibility and the trust you have reposed to me. I still believe that government was a vehicle for positive change in our community when you put people first.

Thank you for the privilege and the honor to serve as one of your County Commissioners.

Durham County we are stronger together – let’s get to work!”

Commissioner Jacobs shared the following statement:

“I first want to thank the people of Durham for giving me the honor and privilege of representing You as your county commissioner. I believe fiercely in the power of local government to make a difference in the lives of people in our community. I will continue to do my best to use the power you have invested in me for the collective good of the people of Durham.

I am also deeply grateful to so many people who have supported me in so many ways over the past 12 years as I have served in this role. This work is hard. Thank you to my family- My husband, Zach, Caleb and Eliza and their partners, Mateus, Catherine and Sarah, not all who can be there today, and to those who I also consider family -Cassandra, Embry and Dwight. To

my dear friends, many who are here today. And to members of my past and current campaign team, Cassandra, Embry, Jane -I literally would not be here today without you.

12 years ago, I took the oath of office as a new county commissioner. At that time, Ellen Reckhow was the senior member of our board who provided tremendous institutional knowledge and was also a personal mentor to me. Today, here I sit, embarking on my fourth term, as the senior member of our board. I hope that I too can be a source of institutional knowledge and experience and to be a source of strong support for the new leaders on our board.

I have learned a lot over the past 12 years. I have changed and I like to think I have grown. Hopefully I am a better listener than I was 12 years ago. I have learned that leadership means many things and that you can lead in many different ways. I will continue to strive to be the best leader I can be for the people of Durham and for this community I love so deeply.

My promise to the people of our community, to our staff, and my fellow board members and fellow elected officials, is that I will keep seeking to work collaboratively and effectively for solutions across systems for social, racial and economic justice. I will keep doing my homework to do my best to make thoughtful and well informed decisions. I will keep working hard to ensure Durham is a welcoming, inclusive place for all. Where every child can live in a healthy and safe home and neighborhood and have access to a great education, healthcare, and job and in turn have a future where they can support themselves and their family.

This fight may be harder in the days ahead. I pledge that I will do I all I can to protect our immigrant and refugee community members. To keep our safety net strong. To care for the most vulnerable in our community who are unhoused and/or live with mental illness, substance use disorder. Those who may be justice involved. To care for our aging adults on fixed or low incomes. The growing numbers of people who struggle with food insecurity and rising housing costs. And most importantly, to ensure all of our children can thrive.

I look forward to working with my fellow commissioners in the days ahead, but I know we cannot do this work alone. The challenges in the coming days will take the collaboration and collective efforts of all of us- the business community, community and religious organizations, and fellow governing bodies.

I believe here in Durham we are up to this challenge. I know I still have the fire in my belly for this fight. To my new colleagues- Let's get to work!"

Commissioner Burton shared the following statement:

"Chair Allam, Vice Chair Lee, Commissioner Valentine and Commissioner Jacobs, I am very honored to serve on this board with you. I know we won't agree on everything but one thing I know for sure is that we all love Durham County and that the decision that we make is to ensure that Durham County thrives.

There are so many wonderful people in this space that helped me get elected as County Commissioner. So many that I am not going to name anyone because I know I would leave someone out. It took a large team of people to help me get elected, from working on the actual campaign team, to people putting out yard signs, helping pass out campaign literature at the polls and people donating money to fund my campaign, it numbers in the hundreds. I am very grateful for your support, and I could not have done it without you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

But I do want to acknowledge my daddy, Lewis Burton, my brother, Michael Burton and my sister-in-law Dr. Kimberly Smith-Burton. When we were celebrating Daddy's 80th birthday in 2023, I talked with you all about running for Durham County Commissioner and did you all think I should run. All three of you said yes, I should do it, and Michael, my big brother, said I would probably win. Well, Michael, you were right. I did win. Thank you for always having my back and being here to celebrate this moment with me today. It means a lot and I love you all tremendously.

I also want to give a shout out to my cousin Dr. Ronald Williams for being here today and supporting me.

And to my family watching on YouTube, my Aunt Faye Williams and Uncle Ron Williams in Wilson, NC and my uncle Russell Ponder in Homewood, Illinois. Thank you for all your love and support.

And finally, I want to acknowledge my late mother Doris Ponder Burton. My mother raised me and my brothers on the South Side of Chicago. She taught me to be the loving, kind and friendly person I am today, but most importantly she instilled in me the love of reading at a young age. I know she is smiling right now, knowing her boochie did good.

To the 120,055 Durham County citizens who voted for me, thank you for putting your trust in me to serve you. I do not take your vote lightly. When I returned to teaching in Durham in 2015 from teaching in Wake County Public Schools, I made a commitment to Durham. I made the decision that I would be a community servant and commit to making Durham a better place to live for everyone. I started with volunteering with the Durham Literacy Center helping adults learn how to read. I then served on the Friends of Durham County Library Board of Directors because I love libraries and how libraries are true democratic institutions. I got involved with the Durham Association of Educators to fight for public education in Durham and in North Carolina. I became a founding board member of the Durham Public Schools Foundation to showcase all of the wonderful things happening in Durham Public Schools. I became president of the Durham Association of Educators to have a bigger impact on education policy and to develop union leaders. And now I am a Durham County Commissioner to solve bigger issues and to help improve the lives of all Durham County residents. All of this is because I made a commitment in 2015 to be a community servant and to help make Durham a place where all can thrive.

I know being a Commissioner will be hard work and tough decisions will have to be made. We are dealing with a legislature that is bent on destroying public education. We know that housing costs are unaffordable and out of reach for many of our residents. And many of our residents' mental health is suffering due to these economic pressures. But I remain hopeful. I remain hopeful because as Durhamites we have always come together to figure out how to solve these complex problems, to continue to make Durham one of the best places to live in our state and our country. We are in this together.

I am looking forward to working with my colleagues on the commission as well as the staff of Durham County Government with all of your knowledge and expertise. Again, thank you to all of you who helped me to get here today. Now let's get to work."

Vice-Chair Dr. Mike Lee shared the following statement:

"Good morning, everyone, I am deeply honored and truly grateful to sit here today as your Durham County Commissioner. To all of you here in this room, those watching online, those who supported me, friends, family, Devine 9, especially Kappa Alpha Psi, People's Alliance, Durham

Association of Educators, Durham Committee, and other endorsements, I thank you. This moment isn't just about me; it's about us, and I look forward to working with you all to make Durham the community we all dream of.

First, I want to take a moment to thank my family—my incredible wife, Erin, and my amazing children, Nicholas, Peyton, and Cameron—for their unwavering love and support. They are my inspiration, my foundation, and my motivation. I strive every day to live in a way that sets an example of love, resilience, and integrity, and I hope today, as I sit here, I am making them proud. To my friends who constantly provided guidance, support, and encouragement, words cannot adequately convey my appreciation for you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Today, I'm wearing the lapel pin of my alma mater, the illustrious Alabama Agricultural & Mechanical University in Normal, Alabama, 35762. A&M's motto is "Start Here, Go Anywhere." That phrase means so much to me: Start Here, Go Anywhere.

During my time at Alabama A&M, I learned lessons that shaped the person I am today—lessons of leadership, belonging, self-worth, and pride in my history. As head drum major of the marching band for three of my years there, I learned how to bring people together, how to lead with purpose, and how to envision a brighter future. And because of that foundation, I've been able to go anywhere.

That motto resonates deeply with me today because it perfectly captures what we want for Durham. Start Here, Go Anywhere.

But what does that really mean for us as a community? It means creating opportunities for every resident — especially our youth. If we want to tell our young people, "You can start here," then we need to make the right investments to give them the strongest possible foundation for life and careers. That included: Prioritizing education from pre-k through high school graduation, supporting entrepreneurship, expanding whole-child services, and creating policies that help keep our children safe, healthy, and thriving in their homes.

And when we say, "Go Anywhere," we must ensure our residents have the tools to dream beyond their current circumstances. That means connecting them to jobs, vocational training, certifications, and other opportunities that allow them to turn that foundation into real-world success. It also means encouraging businesses to hire locally, investing in workforce development, and ensuring Durham residents are first in line for the opportunities we create here.

My "why"—the driving force behind everything I do—is to build a Durham where my children, Nicholas, Peyton, and Cameron, and the children of all our families, can thrive. I want Durham to be a place they are proud to call home—a place they can return to, raise their families, and prosper. That's my vision for Durham: a place where you can Start Here and Go Anywhere.

Together, by working collaboratively and holding ourselves accountable to monitor, measure, and manage the outcomes of the programs we fund, we can make this vision a reality. Together, we can tell the world and the state that Durham County is a place of opportunity, growth, and community.

Thank you all for being here. I am ready to get to work."

Chair Allam shared the following statement:

“Good morning, everyone, it is truly overwhelming to stand here today and see this room filled with so much love and support. When I began my first term as Commissioner, it was in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. That swearing-in ceremony happened in an empty room with only a camera to mark the moment. But today, seeing all of you here, I am reminded of how far we’ve come as a community and how grateful I am to serve you again.

In 2020 I was the first Muslim woman elected in North Carolina and now I’m proud to say I’m the first Muslim woman RE-elected to office. My faith has always grounded me in my values of compassion, justice, and service. These are the principles I strive to uphold every day in this role, and they continue to guide me as I move forward.

I also want to take a moment to remember Deah, Yusor, and Razan, who were taken from us far too soon. Their legacy is a constant reminder of what it means to be proud Muslim Americans. Their lives embodied love, service, and community, and I carry their memory with me in everything I do. They inspire me to lead with purpose, and I dedicate my service to honoring their light.

To my parents, Iffat and Abdul Allam, who came to this country to give their daughters the chance to pursue the American dream. To our ancestors who survived colonization and partition all to lead up to this moment for me to be able to serve. You poured your love into us, made countless sacrifices, and gave us the strength to believe in ourselves. I wouldn’t be standing here today if it weren’t for you.

To my sisters, Afreen and Arsheen Allam, and their husbands, Mohamed Uduman and Zain Shauk, thank you for being my rocks through all the ups and downs.

And to my husband, Towqir Aziz: we started this journey when you were still in school, and I’ll never forget how, after class, you stood at the polls for me every day, then went home and worked late into the night. I will forever be grateful for your unwavering love, support, and the shoulder that has held my tears, both of sadness and joy.

Since we started, our family has grown by two little hearts, Abdul and Aaliyah, who—along with my nieces and nephews, Rania, Zakee, and Deen—are my constant ‘why.’ They are the reason I keep fighting, so they can grow up in a world filled with love, acceptance, and opportunity.”

“To the residents of Durham: thank you for placing your trust in me. I promise to continue working tirelessly to serve you and to never take this responsibility for granted.

To my colleagues—Commissioners Dr. Mike Lee, Stephen Valentine, and Michelle Burton — I promise to support you the way I was supported in my first term. And I appreciate your trust in me to serve as chair. Together, we will continue building a stronger, more united Durham. And all of you took a moment to recognize the families that you were born into, but I want to take a moment to recognize the family that you have grown into. If you are a Durham County employee, please stand up... every individual who stood up and over 1900 more make the work we do every single day possible. And they have become like my family over the past 4 years, and I know they will love and welcome you like their own family. Lean on them, support them and show them the love and gratitude that they so rightfully deserve.

Commissioner Jacob’s I am excited to serve another 4 years with you with your mentorship and support.

I want to also take a moment to recognize my team that supported me in getting to this moment, my campaign manager Maya Handa who was not here today because she is in NYC now managing a mayoral campaign, and my treasurer Phil Seib who has been with me for 4 years. And I lovingly joke that he has kept me out of campaign finance jail.

I want to end again with my thanks and gratitude to the residents of Durham for being a part of my journey. I look forward to continuing this work towards a brighter future together.”

County Manager Hager shared kind remarks:

“Esteemed County Commissioners, I offer a heartfelt congratulations to each of you. Your selection represents far more than a personal achievement. Each of you has answered a noble call – to serve, as stewards of our community's present and architects of its future.

As County Manager and an extension of staff, we stand ready “to get to work” to support your efforts, to engage constructively, and to work alongside you in building an even brighter future for Durham.”

County Attorney Larissa Williamson congratulated the County Commissioners and stated that she looked forward to working with each one of them as they handled the challenges and needs of Durham residents. She continued to say the work that was done was hard; however, it was also satisfying to be able to make positive impacts in the lives of everyday citizens.

Clerk to the Board Monica Wallace, congratulated the County Commissioners and expressed she was available for support as their Clerk and was happy to get the work done.

Items to be Approved

24-0758 Approval of Public Official Bonds

Commissioner Jacobs moved, seconded by Vice Chair Dr. Lee, to suspend the rules.

The motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Jacobs moved, seconded by Commissioner Burton, to approve the public official bonds.

The motion carried unanimously.

24-0751 Approval of 2025 Board of County Commissioners’ Meeting Schedule

Vice Chair Dr. Lee moved, seconded by Commissioner Burton, to suspend the rules.

The motion carried unanimously.

Vice Chair Dr. Lee moved, seconded by Commissioner Valentine, to approve the 2025 Board of County Commissioners’ Meeting Schedule.

The motion carried unanimously

Adjournment

Vice Chair Dr. Lee moved, seconded by Commissioner Jacobs, to adjourn the meeting.

The motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:07 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shaunecie Wardrick', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Shaunecie Wardrick
Administrative Assistant