

Haywood County Board of Commissioners Candidates – Vote for 3 out of 7

Candidate	David Burnette	✓ Blake Hart	✓ Vicki Hyatt	Thomas Long	✓ Carly Pugh	Michael Sorrells	Jeffrey Stines
General information	Republican. Native of Haywood County. Current CEO at Telco Community Credit Union and serving 8th year on Haywood County Board of Education (Branch.Vote). Facebook website: /david.burnette.75/	Non-affiliated. Native of WNC. Current Executive Director of Haywood Christian Ministry (HCM). Blake has a BA in Spanish and Religious Studies, a Master of Divinity, and a PhD in Intercultural Studies. He was ordained into ministry. Website: hartforhaywood.com/	Non-affiliated. Journalist and former editor of <i>The Mountaineer</i> . Hyatt moved to the area in the 1990s, having served as county commissioner and state representative in Montana. She and her husband own a 115-year-old farm in Bethel which her sons' families will take over. Website: hyatt4haywood.com	Republican. Incumbent, finishing second term. Haywood County native. Long spent decades in manufacturing; he lost his job when the Canton mill closed in 2023. Director of seven westernmost counties in NC Association of County Commissioners. Website: None.	Democrat. Public school librarian, social studies teacher, and Appalachian Studies scholar. Her platform: 1. Bringing government to the people, 2. Affordability, 3. Sustainable growth, and 4. Advocacy for every generation. Website: carlyforcommissioner.com	Democrat. Haywood County native. Small business operator for 40 years. Served 6 years school board and 4 as county commissioner. Sorrells is "Very accessible to the public because of the nature of my business (service station, convenience store/cafe)..." (<i>Mountain Xpress</i>). Website: None.	Republican. Haywood County native. 30 years in local government. Currently works for an engineering firm. Stines previously served as the public works director for the Town of Waynesville. This election is his first run for public office. Website: None.
An economy for all?	Burnette's stance centers on sustainable economic growth, workforce investment, and fiscal stability (<i>Mountaineer</i>), advocating economic development at the forefront of his platform to expand and diversify Haywood County's economic base, to supplant the lost industrial base (Branch.Vote).	Hart states that commissioners are vital to collaborate with towns and businesses to revitalize industrial areas. Tourism revenues ought to improve residents' lives. Pledges to lure good paying jobs, ensure affordable housing, preserve farmland, reinforce farming as economically viable, and grow the food economy (candidate website).	Hyatt wants to help existing small businesses grow; supports employer recruitment and the use of existing buildings and infrastructure; and opportunities for young people to learn skills, explore careers, start businesses, and find local jobs. Supports affordable housing options for working families, young adults, and first-time homebuyers (candidate website).	"Economic development is not in the hands of the commissioners," Long says. "We live in a capitalistic society; this is not socialism" (<i>Mountaineer</i>). Long emphasizes continuity over experimentation; economic development annual budget process is an exercise in balance. (<i>Smoky Mountain News</i>).	Pugh's economic priorities are opportunities to revitalize vacant businesses and support sustainable economic growth (<i>Mountain Xpress</i>); pursuing more grant funding; also addressing affordability: public transit, property tax relief, energy savings, local agriculture, workforce development, and childcare (candidate website).	Sorrells cites affordable housing, economic development as his priorities. Employee retention will be a priority, ... providing the best possible services for our citizens with the least tax burden (<i>Mountain Xpress</i>).	Committed to funding public safety and schools, focusing on the "county's necessities over its wants." Budget priorities are to be as frugal as possible with taxpayers' dollars and to make sure employees are taken care of...I'm all about cutting taxes if you can, but understand sometimes you can't". (<i>Smoky Mountain News</i>).

Healthcare for all?	No information found for Burnette.	HCM participated in NC Healthy Opportunities Program (HCI Innovation Group). (Facebook). Sees hunger and lack of healthcare as “evil” (Candidate website).	Hyatt’s journalism has spotlighted how healthcare subsidy changes affect up to 9,000 Haywood County residents (Candidate site), how the HCA Healthcare acquisition of Mission Health led to community grievances and systemic operational issues (<i>Asheville Watchdog</i>), and how Medicaid cuts or adjustments squeeze local medical institutions. Healthcare infrastructure must remain stable to support rural communities (<i>Mountaineer</i>).	Long was noted as one of the conservative commissioners expressing hesitation regarding early local resolutions supporting statewide Medicaid expansion in 2021 (<i>Mountain Xpress</i>). A top priority for Long is preparing Haywood County for an aging population by strengthening health care, EMS, and workforce planning (<i>Smoky Mountain News</i>).	Pugh wants to protect and expand county support for healthcare including mental health, Senior Centers, Meals on Wheels, and rural EMS coverage to foster safety and dignity for older adults; expand opportunities for young people to stay in Haywood County and invest in public spaces (Candidate website).	No information found for Sorrells.	Stines supports Sheriff’s ongoing efforts to handle drug problems in the community. Plans to pursue “more options” to deal with homelessness, housing affordability, and mental health (Branch.Vote).
Childcare and Quality K-12 education?	Burnette advocates for educational funding including higher teacher pay, while supporting sustainable economic growth, maintaining core services and protecting schools that are already working. He sees himself a stabilizing presence. (<i>Smoky Mountain News</i>).	Haywood County has an “extreme lack of childcare”. Commissioners should nurture school to career pipelines, improve early childhood care and education, and create policies to support local families (Candidate website).	Hyatt: “We need more things for kids to do in our county” (Branch.Vote); Hyatt supports public education (Ballotpedia). Serious budget cuts put many school programs in danger. Board members must address this fiscal emergency (Candidate website).	Long says commissioners must weigh competing needs — public safety, schools, infrastructure and human services — without allowing any one priority to destabilize the whole (<i>Smoky Mountain News</i>).	Partner with local early childhood coalitions and public library system to expand early literacy and support childcare capacity for working families (Candidate website). Encourages union participation for teachers and support staff (Facebook).	Pledges continued support of our public schools and community college (<i>Mountain Xpress</i>).	No information found for Stines.

Fair and accessible Elections?	No information found for Burnette.	As an independent candidate, Hart avoids national political rhetoric or partisan talking points. He advocates people over party, ensuring all local residents have a voice, rather than focusing on national debates over voting laws or election security (<i>Mountaineer</i>).	While not issuing a formal platform point on “fair elections,” Hyatt supports elections as a means to check power, hold officials accountable, and listening to the people. She has criticized political abuse and advocated for strong citizen involvement in local politics (haywoodtp.net).	Long publicly praised the system: "I love the process... Fair and free elections. You put candidates up before the people and the people decide. It's that simple." Long has frequently emphasized his support for the electoral system during his campaigns (<i>Smoky Mountain News</i>).	“More voices make for a stronger democracy” (Facebook). Supports more women (<i>Mountaineer</i>) and young people in office (Ballotpedia).	No information found for Sorrells.	No information found for Stines.
A healthy planet?	Burnette supports assisting flood-impacted areas with housing and other options (Branch.Vote). His school board experience confirms that postponing improvements can be more expensive “down the road” (<i>Smoky Mountain News</i>).	Hart has seen the economic toll extreme weather takes on vulnerable communities. Under his leadership, HCM began Smoky Mountain Harvest Hub. He supports planned local development to guard open spaces and thwart over-development, agricultural sustainability, supporting small-scale farmers, preserving the regional farming network to avert supply chain disruptions (candidate website).	Opposes Duke Energy's requested rate increase; supports preserving farmland (Branch.Vote). Hyatt’s environmental focus is to preserve rural character, support local agriculture, foster sustainable economic growth...and engage residents in shaping solutions...contributing to environmental stewardship (candidate website).	A cattle producer and farmer, Long focuses on land conservation through local agricultural ordinances and farmland preservation efforts, overlapping with climate resilience to keep natural land from overdevelopment (<i>Smoky Mountain News</i>). Long defends property tax breaks for farmland (<i>Mountaineer</i>).	Pugh supports expanding work of the Soil & Water Conservation District and the Voluntary Agricultural Districts; securing funds to strengthen farmland preservation; prioritizing stream bank restoration and natural flood mitigation along the Pigeon River basin to protect homes, businesses and farmland; and protecting our land’s character from data centers (Candidate website).	No information found for Sorrells.	Stines supports assisting flood impacted areas with housing and other options (Branch.Vote). Stines completed multiple state-certified programs in water, sewer and utility operations (<i>Smoky Mountain News</i>).