



Agenda Abstract

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Meeting Date:	March 9, 2026
Department:	Community Services
Agenda Section:	Regular Agenda
Public hearing:	No
Date of public hearing:	N/A

PRESENTER/INFORMATION CONTACT

Matt Efird, Assistant Town Manager

ITEM TO BE CONSIDERED

Subject: Update on America 250 (4th of July) Event Planning Efforts

Attachments:

1. Banner Concepts
2. Operating Agreement Framework

Summary:

July 4, 2026 will commemorate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Per America250.org – “the journey toward this historic milestone is an opportunity to pause and reflect on our nation’s past, honor the contributions of all Americans, and look ahead toward the future we want to create for the next generation and beyond.” As a historic town with treasured Revolutionary-era significance, this creates an opportunity for a local event to celebrate and remember the past 250 years.

The Town of Hillsborough Board of Commissioners provided funding in the FY2026 budget for planning and executing a special event in July 2026 to commemorate America 250 (“A250”). The town does not have a regular July 4th event, and summer is a historically slow time for local businesses. Special events are not unknown in Hillsborough, and the town regularly hosts thousands of visitors for such experiences as the Last Fridays, Handmade Parade, Christmas Parade, River Park Concert, Hog Day, and Solstice Lantern Walk. All of the current slate of special events are managed by non-profit agencies with some support or sponsorship from the Town. In planning for the July 4th event, the town has not found an outside agency willing to produce the event.

The planning framework for our A250 event is keeping with the scale of Downtown Hillsborough. The event will be free to attend (non-ticketed), provide family-friendly entertainment and inclusive historical educational programming, and showcase some of the region’s visual, performing, and literary artists.

In keeping with the values of the community, the event will be inclusive and acknowledge the historical experiences of the native people of Hillsborough as well as the enslaved or otherwise underrepresented populations of the town during the revolutionary era through present day. This would be a celebration of all people, with emphasis on native people, customs, and culture. Possible partnerships include Occaneechi Tribal Council, Triangle Native American Society, and UNC American Indian Center.

Current ideas include:

- “Headlining” features such as a laser light show paired with local orchestra
- Pedestrian Parade with handmade flags

- Activities and attractions in partnership with Hillsborough historic agencies (OC Historic Museum, Burwell School, Alliance for Historic Hillsborough) and the Hillsborough Arts Council
- Performances, customs, and culinary offerings through partnership with our local Tribal Councils
- Music performances
- Kids’ costume contest, “Your favorite hero from American history”
- Visual artists, dancers, spoken word artists and poets, roaming actors as historic Hillsborough figures (focus on local and regional artists and performers), historical readings and comments from local dignitaries

The event will begin during the day either in River Park (if possible, without disturbing the Farmer’s Market, or at satellite locations in Downtown), and as late afternoon/evening approaches, headlining performances (such as the laser/orchestra show) and larger-scale activities will be featured at River Park.

To deliver on a well-organized and culturally rich event, the town is partnering with the Orange County Arts Commission/Arts Alliance and their contractor Greg Bell/Belltone Productions (for sake of simplicity, this group will hereafter be referred to as the “Arts Commission”). Leveraging their relationships in the arts community as well as a long history of delivering a very successful summer festival allows for the development of a signature event that weaves together Hillsborough’s unique blend of history, arts and family-friendly small-town traditions.

In order to effectively market the event, it is suggested to have a unique name/title. The working suggestion is “Together, We Are America”.

Near-term next steps include the following:

- Permitting and ordering of banners (see attached examples)
- Finalization of operating agreement/memorandum of understanding with Arts Commission
- Special Event Permitting
- Marketing!!!

Financial impacts:

The town included \$25,000 in the FY26 budget for planning and execution of the event. The Tourism Board has committed to an additional \$12,500, and a request for an additional \$12,500 will be considered by the Tourism Development Authority after this agenda deadline – but will be known by the date of the town board meeting. This would give the event a total budget of \$50,000. Staff is proposing covering the cost of the A250 banners from existing General Fund resources rather than as an event expense in order to maximize the funding available to support the event.

Additional funding via sponsorships, sales, etc. will be managed by the Arts Commission.

Staff recommendation and comments:

N/A

Action requested:

Review the planning update, banner concepts, event title and operating agreement framework and provide feedback to staff.