

County Quarterly

The story of North Carolina counties



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Agriculture in
North Carolina**

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Johnnie Carswell
NCACC's 107th President

I couldn't be prouder of the work we've been doing through the One More Thing Planning Committee – the team I've assembled to work on my presidential initiative to help counties be strategic and effective with their opioid settlement funds. Over the past several months, we have met with experts, program administrators, peer support specialists, and many other stakeholders to identify what we should do to make sure counties have all the resources they need to use their settlement dollars to save as many lives as possible.

The One More Thing Planning Committee has dedicated its past couple of meetings to better understanding strategies that have proven positive outcomes for stemming the opioid overdose crisis. In February, we learned about medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD) and its use in jail programs. We convened discussions with several sheriffs from across the state to share lessons learned about establishing jail programs and identifying common barriers to program implementation. There is broad agreement that strong relationships between commissioners and sheriffs are going to be essential to prevent our jails from becoming behavioral health facilities. We also discussed diversion programs aimed at redirecting individuals unsuitable for incarceration away from the justice system and toward alternative care services.

In April, we explored the intersection between faith communities, faith-based organizations, efforts to address opioid issues, and the importance of engaging with faith leaders when creating a community response. We also discussed the importance of peer support specialists integration within a county's response. The committee has been intently focused on understanding the wide breadth of ways counties can invest their settlement dollars and is excited to bring what we've learned to the membership in August for a unique event alongside our NCACC 117th Annual Conference in Forsyth County.

We are bringing together county officials, research experts, community leaders, and program administrators to equip counties with information, best practices, and guides for how they can implement strategies and programs that make sense for their communities. Our goal is to teach every county official across the state something new they can consider when creating an effective and robust response to the opioid overdose crisis and save lives.

It has been my honor to work with an incredible group of county officials to bring the One More Thing initiative to our membership, and I hope you all join me in early August to learn more about how we turn the tide against this crisis once and for all.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnnie Carswell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.



Join us preconference for special programming dedicated to NCACC President Johnnie Carswell's initiative, One More Thing, which focuses on combating the opioid overdose crisis. Hear from experts, practitioners, individuals with lived experience, and county officials as they share insights on strategic utilization of opioid settlement funds to save lives. Register today at www.ncacc.org/register117.

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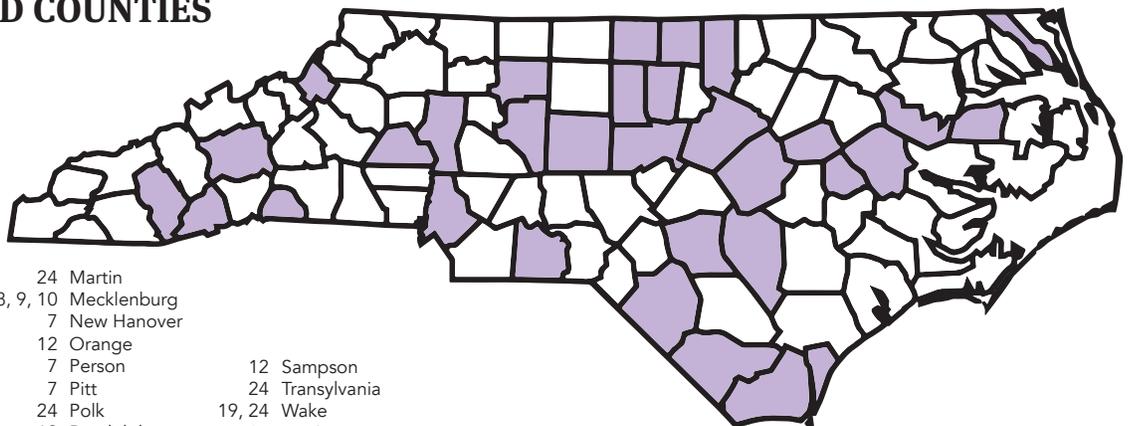
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County Quarterly

The story of North Carolina counties

CountyQuarterly is distributed Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall to county commissioners, managers and clerks, and legislators, as well as others interested in the county story. The magazine seeks to bring the county story to life with a focus on the leaders who make county government tick, innovative programs that improve services to citizens, and county history.

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Q&A WITH A COORDINATOR



In this edition, Jamie Andrews spoke with CQ about their experiences as a Strategic Project Coordinator with North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) Strategic Member Services (SMS). Jamie has provided direct assistance to Caswell and Person counties during their time as a coordinator and recently accepted a position with Chatham County as their Community Development Officer. Congratulations, Jamie!

What motivated you to pursue this opportunity to work with counties as an SMS Strategic Project Coordinator?

I pursued this position because I wanted opportunities to gain experience working on the ground in local government and to build relationships with the people who make our communities work. The kind of work that I've been able to do at the Association, especially with my close relationship with counties as a project coordinator, has given me practical and transferable knowledge so I can be a stronger public servant throughout my career.

What is the most impactful thing you have learned about counties from your time as a coordinator?

It's been enlightening to see just how different counties are from one another and how important it is to maintain a broad perspective. Every county has a unique set of resources, opportunities, values, and challenges; and I've enjoyed learning about how those differences translate to different day-to-day working environments, policy outcomes, and impacts on the community.

How has your time spent in this role shaped your perspective on county government?

My work in this role has really highlighted the flexibility required to work in county government. As I've worked

in counties of different sizes, it's become evident that each county needs a different depth or breadth of experience and expertise, and I think it's important that I use this opportunity to develop those strengths. It's also clear to me now that skill in building and maintaining relationships is invaluable in local government work. I think I've grown a lot through my experiences at the Association in building these kinds of skills, but I know that continuing to grow in this area will be a career-long and life-long endeavor.

Can you describe an experience you have had in your role that really defines for you what working in county government is like?

I've had the privilege of facilitating Opioid Settlement Advisory committees in both of my placement counties, where we convene a group of county government leaders and community stakeholders to try to abate the opioid crisis in these counties. Working in these meetings has shown me that for every person trying to make the county a better place, there's a different idea of how to make the county a better place. We share some common, general ideas, but collaboration and progress in any county will require work to identify shared goals and priorities and frequent reflections on how the work we're doing advances those goals and priorities.

NCACC Strategic Member Services provides counties with a heightened level of in-person assistance and county-specific services. This includes assistance from Strategic Project Coordinators; support from subject matter experts for technical guidance on eligible use, reporting, and compliance for ARPA and national opioid settlement funds; professional consultation and county board retreat services through former county managers; and assistance to counties in finance and budget operations through coaching and hands-on help. For more information on SMS, visit www.ncacc.org/sms.



WHERE IS ALBERT COATES?

WINTER 2024 WINNER

K. Jordan Smith

County Attorney,
New Hanover County



Congratulations to Jordan Smith who (finally) found Albert Coates' bust in the winter issue of CountyQuarterly! Jordan says finally as he shares: "The Deputy Clerk to the Board Melissa Long delivered me my copy of CountyQuarterly. I was in the middle of working on something but needed a break and said to her 'I can never find Albert Coates!' which is a true statement. Literally minutes later, I spotted him on page 24."

Smith is the county attorney for New Hanover County where he provides legal advice to the county commissioners, county management, and staff. "Local government is the closest to the people and impacts people's lives in a direct and real way," says Smith. "New Hanover County through the Board of Commissioners' leadership is strategic, proactive, and innovative in addressing the needs of the community." Previously, he worked for Pitt County as both county attorney and assistant county attorney from 2014 until starting with New Hanover County in July 2023.

Smith has lived in North Carolina his entire life earning degrees from Campbell University School of Law (J.D.), NC State University (M.P.A.), and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (B.A.). He describes himself as an ardent Tar Heel fan currently instilling that same allegiance into his two children the same as his father did to him many years ago. Smith says he's also a fan of Rice University Women's Basketball because his sister is the head coach.

When not working through a variety of legal issues, you can usually find Smith grilling, spending time with his wife and kids, and casting a fishing rod out on his brother-in-law's boat.

NCACC is committed to good government and strives to keep alive the spirit of Albert Coates, the visionary founder of the Institute of Government at the University of North Carolina, now known as the School of Government. Can you find the bust of Albert Coates in this issue of CountyQuarterly? Email us at communications@ncacc.org with your discovery and you could be highlighted in the next issue.

Profile In Service: Heart Work = Hard Work; Recognizing Mecklenburg County Commissioner George Dunlap

By Sara Mogilski, NCACC Chief Operations Officer

For Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners Chairman George Dunlap, a lifelong devotion to being of service kicked off in high school and has accelerated speed ever since. “I believe that everyone has a calling in their life. I believe that if you follow what it is that you’re called to do, life is so smooth. I mean, it’s not like work.” But what Commissioner Dunlap calls “heart work” turns out to be quite hard work. Veteran, retired police officer, school board member of 14 years, and county commissioner since 2008, Dunlap works tirelessly to serve his community and does it with boundless energy ... and signature bowtie.

A lifelong Mecklenburg County resident, Dunlap grew up in Pineville, taking on leadership roles in high school serving on the student council, the Interact Club, and as president of the Bus Drivers Club. He went on to enlist in the United States Marine Corps (USMC), being promoted to lance corporal, private first class, and later to sergeant on the basis of merit. Dunlap’s experience in the military was formative: “There’s one thing the military instilled in me, if nothing else, and it’s discipline. You do what you’re supposed to do, you do it when you’re supposed to do it, [and] you do it the best you can. It’s that philosophy that propelled me into a leadership role even within the military.” Never one to shortchange a commitment, Dunlap went on to enlist in the North Carolina Air National Guard and the Marine Reserves for another 11 years following his discharge from USMC in 1976.

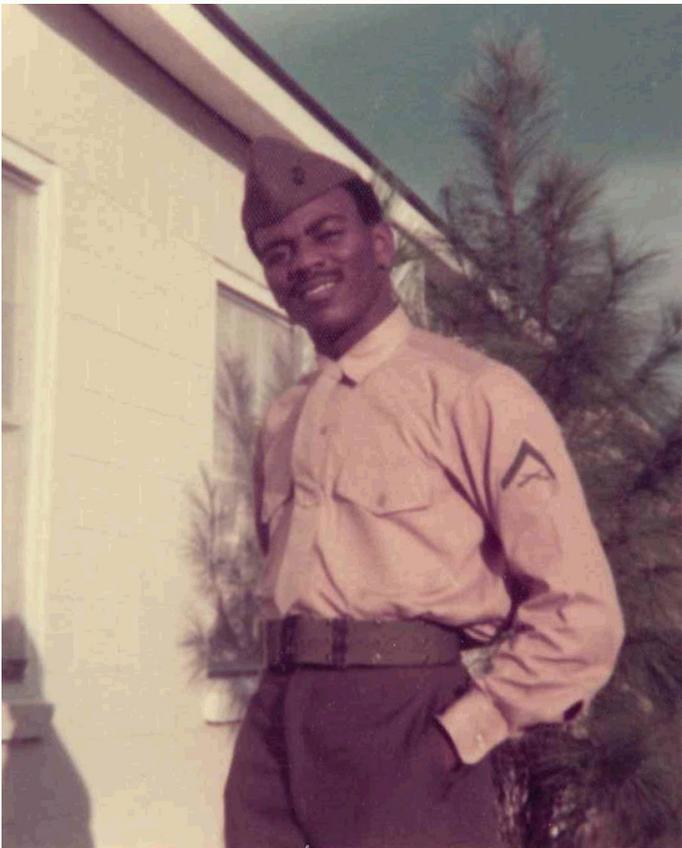
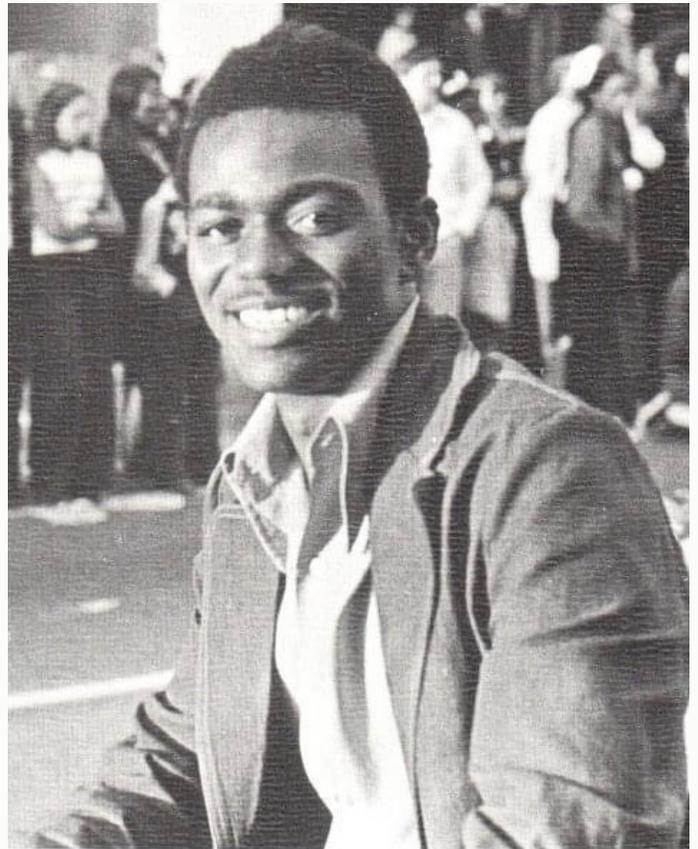
While working as a Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E) officer for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, Dunlap was drawn to working with young people, “When I became a police officer, it was one of the most rewarding experiences I ever had. For many of those years, I got to do exactly what I wanted: to work with young people.” He spent 17 of 27 years as a police officer

working with young people and also took on a volunteer role for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Athletic League (PAL) as the director and interim executive director for the PAL-Summer Enrichment Program, designed to support underprivileged children in Mecklenburg County.

The spark that ignited his pursuit for public office came from a little closer to home. Dunlap shared, “I started my career in public office as a school board member. What got me involved in the school board was that I was a single parent raising a son who came home one day and said I needed to take him to the public library to get a book. And I asked why can’t you get a book from the school library. He said because they don’t have it. So, I had to take him to the public library to do his book report. And I began to wonder how many other kids were in that situation.”

As fate would have it, there was an opening on the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board that year and Dunlap ran to represent District 3. He had served in every role on his son’s school Parent Teacher Association and felt prepared for the school board role. Over the course of 14 years in that capacity, Dunlap interacted with the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners regularly. He experienced frustration with the board of commissioners in financing the school system so when his representative on the board of commissioners passed away, Dunlap embraced being selected by the Democratic Party to replace her.

Since that appointment in 2008, Dunlap has been reelected for six consecutive terms, currently serving as the chairman of the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners, the first district-elected representative to serve as Chairman of the Board. “When I got on the county commissioner board, I began to realize all the things the county commission dealt with. Now, I am in a position to have a say in the way libraries are funded,



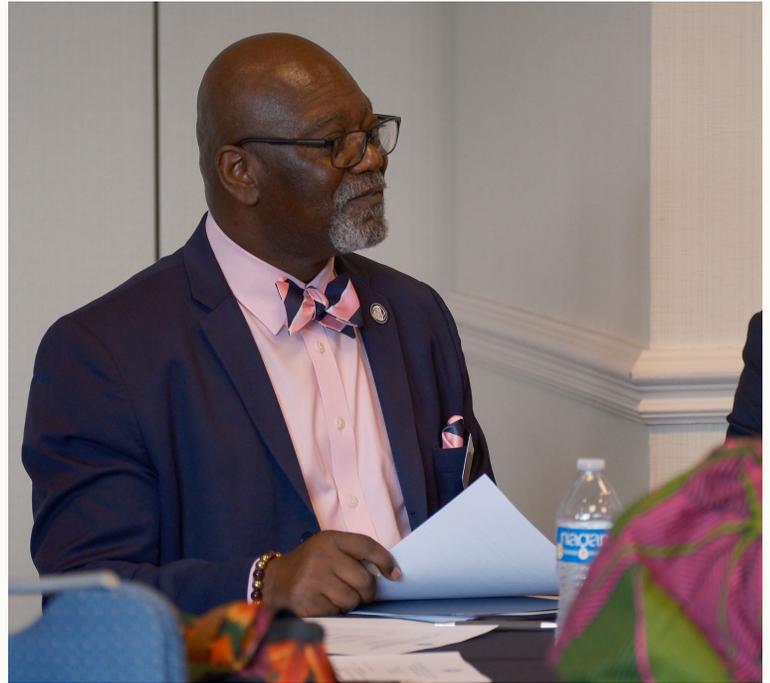
Photography courtesy of Mecklenburg County

how parks and recreation are funded, how health and human services are funded, it's an awesome responsibility."

The North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) had the pleasure of hosting Dunlap for a "Dish with a Commish" segment of the NCACC's podcast, CountyCast, March 2021. Podcast host and NCACC Director of Advocacy and Policy Amber Harris asked Dunlap about his public service journey and they talked about his experiences on the school and county commission boards, and what inspired him to run for public office. And then came Harris' final question, "Commissioner Dunlap, what's one fact about yourself that would surprise listeners?" Here's what he shared:

"I grew up Presbyterian, quiet, you know you don't hear a lot about them, don't make a lot of waves. But my next-door neighbor was a Baptist. In the Presbyterian community, there weren't a lot of preachers, so we only had church every other Sunday. On the odd Sunday, I would go to church with my neighbor who was Baptist. When the choir got up and sang, they sang a style of music that I didn't understand. I didn't understand the words they were singing. The words were being sung differently. I learned later on they were called metered hymns. Long meter, short meter and common meter. Historically what happened was African Americans who were enslaved could not read so when they sang songs, the leader would say the words they were supposed to sing. Many of us call this call and response. They would sing them according to the meter the leader told them to sing. If it's long meter, you would stretch out the words, '(singing) Faaattthhheerrr ' Nobody recorded a lot of this stuff so over the course of the years, I would visit Baptist churches and I would write down the words to the songs that I would hear. I then produced a songbook that captured all of those hymns, and there's close to 150 of them now and they're not recorded anywhere. They're just things I heard, and I love that music and the history that produced that music. So that is really one of my favorite pastimes to sit around and sing some of those old hymns that were sung years and years and years before I ever existed."

Chairman Dunlap, on behalf of the NCACC, thank you for your public service and the many gifts you have shared with North Carolina counties. Our state's residents are better off because of your heart work. 🇺🇸



Commissioner Dunlap at NCACC Steering Committee Meetings, June 2024



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FOR NACo 2ND VICE**

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Mecklenburg County Board Chair and 2023-24 NCACC Health and Human Services Steering Committee Chair George Dunlap is a candidate for the office of NACo Second Vice President. Elections for the National Association of Counties (NACo) offices will be held at the NACo Annual Conference in Hillsborough County, Fla., July 12-15, 2024.

The *Local Elected Leaders Academy* (LELA) helps local elected officials develop a mutual understanding of how governing at the local level affects residents and differing constituencies.

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2024 UPCOMING COURSES

Practitioner level LELA 101

Top 10 Primer: Engaging the Community in Public Issues
July 24 Online
2 CREDITS

Working Better Together as a Board
August 22 Durham
6 CREDITS

Top 10 Primer: Transportation Planning and Funding in NC
August 14 Online
2 CREDITS

Fiduciary Responsibilities of Local Elected Officials
November 13 Online
3 CREDITS

Top 10 Primer: Public School Funding Process
September 4 Online
2 CREDITS

Master level LELA 201

Capital Budgeting and Infrastructure Finance
September 26–27 Asheville
9 CREDITS

Mentor level LELA 301

Navigating Challenging Issues through Community Engagement
August 2 Kernersville
6 CREDITS

Affordable Housing Seminar
October 4 Location TBD
6 CREDITS

Managing Difficult Conversations with Constituents
October 10 Chapel Hill
3 CREDITS

Strategic Planning: Linking Strategies to Results
October 23 Online
6 CREDITS

Development Finance Toolbox
December 3–5 Chapel Hill
6 CREDITS

Program information: go.unc.edu/LELA
Course information: go.unc.edu/LELACalendar

RESEARCH PULSE

Agriculture in North Carolina:

From the Recently Released 2022 Census of Agriculture

By Denise Canada, NCACC Fiscal Policy and Research Director

North Carolina has
42,817 farms,
and there are farms in all
100 counties.

.....
Randolph, Buncombe, and
Chatham counties each
have more than 1,000
farms.

North Carolina has
72,479

.....
producers. Around 65%
of producers are male and
35% are female.

.....
Chatham County has the
largest number of female
producers at 737.

Producers reported
3,909

.....
honeybee colonies spread
across 90 counties.

.....
Orange County reported the
highest number of honeybee
colonies at 2,079.

North Carolina has
8.1M acres,
of agricultural land.

.....
Sampson County has the
most agricultural land at
292,205 acres. That is
approximately 457 square
miles.

North Carolina led the
nation in sweet potato
production. Producers
reported harvesting
87,126 acres.

.....
Sampson, Johnston, and
Wilson counties were the
top three producers.

The data above and the brief writeup below are pulled directly from the 2022 Census of Agriculture. Visit nass.usda.gov/AgCensus to learn more and view the full census report.

"The 2022 Census of Agriculture is the 30th federal census of agriculture. ... The census of agriculture provides a detailed picture of U.S. farms and ranches every five years. It is the leading source of uniform, comprehensive agricultural data for every state and county or county equivalent."

Saying Hello to Summer:

Planning for Outdoor Hazards as the Season Heats Up

By Bob Carruth, NCACC Risk Control Manager

With the changes of the seasons, and the arrival of summertime, counties should take extra care in addressing the perils and hazards associated with the summer environment in North Carolina. Either through their assigned duties or through the supervision of county-sponsored activities, county employees and leaders need to keep in mind the most common summertime hazards and how to prevent injuries to employees and the public.

Weather Contingencies

Arguably the most prevalent hazard during the summer is the heat. Summertime comes suddenly and with it, heat-related illness and injury. The most common types of heat injury include sunburn, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke. Employees should be trained on the hazards related to heat exposure. When working outdoors, employees should apply sunscreen and stay hydrated. During the supervision of outdoor activities, leaders need to monitor participants for signs of heat related stress. Finally, be aware of the other summertime weather hazard – the thunderstorm. From 2006-2023, there were 23 fatalities from lightning in North Carolina.¹ With only 10% of strikes resulting in a fatality, then it could be estimated that over 100 injuries occurred during the same period. There are many weather apps that now offer warnings if lightning has been detected nearby. Be aware also of the other hazards a summer thunderstorm may bring — high winds, torrential rainfall, and hail. All of these threats should be taken seriously, and before beginning an outdoor excursion, do yourself a favor and check the weather forecast. If there is a high likelihood of stormy weather, you may want to delay your activity, or have a plan for where to go for shelter.

Beware of Snakes

There are six types of poisonous snakes in North Carolina.² Although the most intimidating snake is the rattlesnake, they mainly shun people and are found in more remote areas. The most dangerous snake that you are likely to encounter is the copperhead. Although its venom is less potent than its rattlesnake cousins, its bite can still be very painful and debilitating. Any bite by a copperhead should always be treated as a medical emergency. Ninety-eight percent of all snake bites occur to the extremities, with 62% of these being to the feet or ankles. Care should be exercised when walking in high grass, brush, or in times of limited light. When feasible, a light should be used when walking outside at night. Finally, employees should take extra care when clearing brush or leaves, or moving debris piles, as these are often hiding places for snakes.

Wildlife Threats

There are, however, other natural hazards that one needs to be aware of as well. Although rabies among dogs, cats, and other domesticated animals has now been pretty much brought under control due to the ease of getting rabies vaccinations, there were still 303 cases of rabies in North Carolina in 2018. Of the 303 cases, 256 or 83% were from raccoons, skunks, and foxes.³ This should be kept in mind for those who work outdoors or supervise activities in parks or wooded areas. This is especially true for raccoons and skunks, who are most comfortable around human populations. The best practice is to avoid any wild animal and report any suspicious animal to local animal control officers. Also, avoid handling baby animals, as they can look innocent but may already be infected. Finally, do not pick up carcasses of dead animals without wearing gloves. The virus may still be present, and this is another way to be infected.

Although we may accept bee stings as part of the summertime environment, for many individuals, they can be deadly. The most important advice is awareness of allergies – both in fellow employees, as well as those participating in county activities. For the allergic person, a bee sting can become deadly very quickly.

Be Prepared

With all these situations described, planning is critical. Since you are outside, often away from shelter or convenience, you cannot take for granted that water and first aid will be immediately available, or that the sun and heat will take a break for the day. Be prepared for the perils that you will face when outdoors this summer, and it will make your sojourn so much more enjoyable, and may even keep you healthy and alive.

If you need any assistance in reviewing your safety procedures in relation to the outdoor safety of your employees or are interested in how the County Risk Group (CRG) can develop or present training on any of these safety topics to your staff, visit www.ncacc.org/countrysriskgroup or contact our office at 919-719-1117. Have a happy and safe summer! 🍷

1. National Lightning Safety Council, <http://lightningsafetycouncil.org/States/NC.pdf>

2. NC Museum of Natural Sciences, <https://naturalsciences.org/learn/faqs/snake-faq#1>

3. NC DHHS, https://epi.dph.ncdhhs.gov/cd/rabies/figures/2018_rabies_cases.pdf



NCACC'S SMS DIVISION:

A Resource to Help Counties Sustain Momentum and Keep Pace in All Terrain

By Lacy Pate, NCACC ARPA Policy Research Director

By Andreu Sutterby, NCACC ARPA Policy Research Coordinator

As Albert Einstein famously said, “Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving.” Keeping consistent momentum in all kinds of terrain helps sustain a forward-leaning posture. Since the onset of the pandemic, counties have been confronted with constant challenges: maneuvering over bumps, climbing hills, and powering through strong headwinds. Now, after serving on the frontlines of an historic global pandemic and navigating an uncharted path of response and recovery, many counties are also dealing with ongoing workforce pressures.

Through Challenges and Opportunities, Counties Rise to the Occasion

Dating back to the Great Recession of 2008, local governments experienced 437,000 job cuts nationwide and declines in budgets have persisted for years. When the pandemic hit, many counties already had capacity challenges. Then, as the pandemic unfolded, demands for county services surged at the same time counties faced a wave of early retirements. Amidst high turnover and budget uncertainty, communities throughout North Carolina depended heavily on counties for pandemic response and recovery.

While counties received direct federal funds to address the unprecedented pandemic needs, federal rules required counties to adopt complex and evolving eligibility, compliance, and reporting measures. Moreover, counties must meet additional responsibilities, which are governed by multiple sources of regulation, including the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB), North Carolina Law and the Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act (G.S. 159 Article 3).

Despite a myriad of challenges in recent years, counties have been making meaningful community investments with federal funding provided by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and funds from national opioid settlements and bankruptcy resolutions. They have also been working diligently to implement new “GASB measures.” Eager to learn and committed to comply with complex and ever-evolving spending and accounting rules, counties keep rising to the occasion.

The Evolution of County Finance

As the adage goes, “if you want something done, give it to a busy person.” County governments are incredibly busy, and all the additional administrative work is often made possible by county staff wearing multiple hats and swinging

double — or even triple — duty. Additionally, many counties are struggling to attract and retain talent in key county government positions, particularly in rural areas. High rates of turnover due to retirements and job changes are especially acute in hard-to-fill, critical finance positions. These types of positions require technical skills that are specific to county government. This niche skillset is difficult to find, and the highly demanding nature of the work makes employee retention challenging as well.

“I think years ago everybody thought finance was a bookkeeping department, and it’s not a bookkeeping department — the responsibilities extend well beyond daily accounting,” said Amy Cannon, one of four retired county managers serving on the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) Outreach team.

Cannon retired from full-time work after 32 years with Cumberland County, where her career steps included time as finance director, assistant county manager, and county manager, a post she held for more than eight years. Cannon’s progressive career provided her with an insider’s look at the evolution of demands on county financial operations. And as those demands increased in complexity and number and level of responsibilities, Cannon

was positioned well to work over the years with boards of county commissioners to ensure sufficient staffing resources.

“In addition to the daily functions, finance officers are responsible for capital and debt management, financial planning, grant reporting, and grant monitoring,” Cannon said. “They’re responsible for investing the county’s funds, and in small counties the finance officer assists the manager with the budget process.”

A county finance officer’s roles and responsibilities are governed by multiple sources of regulation, including the GASB, North Carolina Law and the Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act (G.S. 159 Article 3), and U.S. Treasury

State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (SLFRF) guidance.

Cannon explained that managing all these different roles and sources of compliance requires an individual to be trained in highly specialized areas that weren’t necessary in previous years. Transitioning county systems to new financial systems can help, but finance personnel need an elevated level of mastery to gain the full potential of these platforms. Hiring experts in these areas ensures effective financial management; finding and/or training these experts presents a unique challenge.

Cannon added that broader employment trends accentuate this problem. Generational workforce transitions, high rates of turnover,

and a dwindling number of qualified professionals are all contributors to a growing issue of meeting the demands caused by community growth. As counties grow or face changes in their financial responsibilities, staffing levels need commensurate adjustments. County budgets play a significant role in determining staffing levels. Finance offices must allocate resources efficiently while meeting essential service needs.

“Finance has lost a lot of seasoned staff over the past eight to 10 years. There’s been a mass exodus of finance professionals. They have left the field and switched to entirely different professions,” Cannon said. “[The] new pipeline falters to exist as well as colleges and universities are reporting that the number of applicants for the accounting curriculum has decreased significantly.”

Columbus County Finance Director Lacie Jacobs emphasized that proper staffing in finance offices helps a county keep pace with demand for increased and more complex financial services, as the volume of financial transactions, budgeting, accounting, and reporting tasks directly impacts workload and the need for professionals with expertise in various functional areas of local government financial operations and management. Jacobs cited this as a growing challenge for her and her team in Columbus County.

“A lot of the challenge is capacity,” she said. “[With] COVID funding, additional directed grants from the Legislature, new GASB requirements, and other financial reporting requirements, finance departments have faced added demand for training, additional dollars, and additional resources. It’s an immense amount of work ensuring the financials are accurate.”

Melissa Cardinali, NCACC County Financial Management Associate, has provided coaching and guidance

Based on recent data collected by the NCACC, 44% of county finance officers in North Carolina have between 0-3 years of experience with their current county.

In addition, new complexities of the finance department also contribute to an unfamiliar and difficult climate. New regulatory requirements, increased workload and service demands, and budget constraints are just some of the ways the finance director role has grown increasingly complex in the last 15 years.



NCACC Strategic Project Coordinator Hannah White



for Jacobs over the past year. Professional-level support for county staff is a key component of the NCACC Strategic Member Services (SMS) division.

"I appreciate how plugged in [NCACC is] and makes sure that we have all the tools. I think [NCACC] being plugged into so many different things is very helpful, especially for those of us who may not have enough funding in the budget to attend every training and opportunity that may be available," Jacobs said.

Expanding Member Services With a Strategic Mindset

Acknowledging the increasing workload for counties and staff capacity challenges, the North Carolina General Assembly in late 2021 provided an historic appropriation to NCACC to develop a technical assistance program for counties. Thanks to these unprecedented grant funds, as well as philanthropic and other state grant funding to specifically support local government assistance with opioid settlement funds, NCACC created Strategic Member Services (SMS).

Through SMS, the NCACC strives to provide a high level of professional support services to counties in key areas of administration and operations, while concurrently recruiting and training future county government leadership and workforce. The services offered through SMS represent new ways to help all 100 North Carolina counties move forward while maintaining balance and building strength along the way.

At a holistic level, SMS builds stronger, more resilient county leaders via a robust level of professional support. Experienced professionals and technical experts on the SMS team serve to coach, mentor, and guide both county government professionals and early

career employees who are building skillsets and relevant experience for careers in North Carolina county government.

Technical assistance teams are available to aid counties in planning, ensuring compliance, reporting, and addressing other requirements linked to ARPA fiscal recovery funds, state-funded county grants through ARPA, and opioid settlement funds.

A team of experienced county government professionals, with extensive backgrounds in county and financial management, offer practical advice and expertise in various areas. They provide coaching and technical support to county finance officers and staff, guidance on budget policies and procedures, conduct departmental assessments and peer reviews, facilitate planning retreats for county boards of commissioners, and assist with county manager recruitments and interim placements.

The SMS cohort offers direct capacity assistance to counties through Strategic Project Coordinators — master's-level professionals who embed within individual county operations to assist with a range of duties such as project management, grant management, subrecipient management, reporting, community outreach, communications, and other duties upon request. This program not only provides direct, immediate help for county governments, but it also strategically seeks to rebuild and expand the workforce pipeline by drawing professionals into county careers.

So far, NCACC has trained and embedded 15 early career professionals into counties throughout the state to provide direct, temporary capacity support. The goal of the program is for strategic project coordinators to be hired by counties and pursue a lifelong career in government. The concept has shown early success with four

strategic project coordinators already hired by North Carolina local governments.

In addition, an education and training arm of SMS develops programs and content to meet the needs of county commissioners and support the growth of strategic project coordinators.

Each line of service within SMS includes a responsibility to serve the professional support needs of current and future county leaders,

Over the past year, roughly 70 counties received some form of direct capacity assistance during each quarter, with certain counties receiving intensive day-to-day support.

and focused teams within SMS work together to help counties address complex issues and critical needs.

Since its inception in 2022, SMS has developed several new service lines to address the most urgent and critical needs to keep our counties moving forward, strengthening the foundation of county governance and mitigating burnout and post-COVID fatigue among county staff. NCACC is encouraged by the initial positive feedback from counties that received capacity support through SMS and welcomes input from counties. As counties endeavor to enhance and improve the quality of life for their citizens, SMS strives to remain a valuable resource and reliable partner in this important work.

For more information about SMS, visit www.ncacc.org/sms or contact Jason King, NCACC Director of Strategic Member Services at jason.king@ncacc.org. 



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Considering Diversifying Your Investment Options?

Three questions counties should ask before leaping into an investment

By Karen Magness, NCIP Program Administrator

This article was written for CountyQuarterly by NCIP, a partner of NCACC.

From time-to-time, county officials and administrators may be approached by someone selling a new investment or financial product — one that might carry the promise of higher yields or total returns. With the emergence of additional investment pools available to counties, it's the ideal time to review approaches and considerations for evaluating investment options.

County officials and administrators should ask themselves the following key questions prior to investing:

Is the investment statutorily compliant?

North Carolina General Statute 159-30(c) sets forth allowable investments for idle funds. In May 2021, the North Carolina Investment Pool Liquid Portfolio was introduced into the fold of permitted investments for North Carolina counties. The North Carolina Investment Pool ("NCIP" or "Pool") is a local government investment pool established to invest idle funds in various short-term investments in accordance with North Carolina General Statute 159-30(c). NCIP is duly authorized under N.C. General Statute 159-30(c)(10) and was created through an interlocal agreement between Wake and Buncombe counties established under N.C. General Statute 160A-461 through 464. NCIP is administered by a statutorily compliant trust for the benefit of North Carolina units and is overseen by a five-person Board of Trustees comprised of North Carolina finance professionals.

How safe and liquid are our deposits?

Public officials should be confident in the safety and liquidity of public funds during times of relative stability and during economic or financial crises. The NCIP Liquid Portfolio ("the Portfolio") seeks to maintain a stable net asset value of \$1 per share for each dollar invested by participants. As shares are purchased and redeemed by participants and as the market fluctuates, the portfolio managers monitor the market and buy and sell permitted investments from broker-dealers and government agencies to keep the Portfolio's assets in line with permissible investments.

The Portfolio maintains a AAAM rating from Standard and Poor's and a AAAMmf rating from Fitch.¹ The ratings signify safety of investment principal, overall credit quality, diversification, and low exposure to interest rate and spread risks.

Having the right amount of liquidity means having access to funds when needed without worrying about risk to principal. And, because NCIP is a cash-management vehicle, those needs often translate to same-day access to

monies. NCIP provides same-day liquidity when orders are received by 1 p.m.

Does this fit into our plan?

After considering statutory compliance, safety, and liquidity, yield is an important factor when considering an investment. County officials should judge an investment, not solely based upon (the highest) yield, but rather on whether the investment aligns with the county's investment program objectives. Counties should consider creating — and sticking to — a written investment policy statement describing the specifics of its financial goals. This statement serves as a roadmap for a host of long- and short-term variables that counties may experience, as well as address risk, needs, and expectations. Once established, plan to review and update the investment policy to address the changing needs of the county and to take advantage of statutorily compliant options to diversify investments. NCIP, created by and for North Carolina local governments units, is one such option. Participants invest in a portfolio of high-quality fixed income securities, as allowed under N.C. General Statute 159-30, limiting the concentration risk of investing in individual securities. The Portfolio's allocation to highly rated commercial paper could provide incremental income to participants.

These represent just a few of NCIP's suggestions for assessing whether an investment or financial product is appropriate for your county.

To discuss these issues in greater detail or to learn more regarding NCIP, contact us at Contact_NCIP@pfmam.com or visit investNCIP.com. PFM Asset Management LLC serves as the investment advisor for NCIP and has over 43 years of experience managing local government investment pools nationally. 

1. Rated AAAm by Standard & Poor's (S&P) and AAAMmf by Fitch Ratings ("Fitch"). S&P's fund ratings are based on analysis of credit quality, market price exposure, and management. According to S&P's rating criteria, the AAAM rating signifies excellent safety of investment principal and a superior capacity to maintain a \$1 per share net asset value. The Fitch AAAMmf rating reflects Fitch's review of the portfolio's overall credit quality and diversification and low exposure to interest rate and spread risks as well as the capabilities and resources of PFM Asset Management LLC as investment adviser. According to Fitch's rating criteria, the AAAMmf rating signifies an extremely strong capacity to achieve the portfolio's investment objective of preserving principal and providing shareholder liquidity through limiting credit, market, and liquidity risk. However, it should be understood that these ratings are not "market" ratings nor a recommendation to buy, hold, or sell the securities. For a full description on rating methodology, visit www.standardandpoors.com/en_US/web/guest/home and www.fitchratings.com.

This information is for institutional investor use only, not for further distribution to retail investors, and does not represent an offer to sell or a solicitation of an offer to buy or sell any fund or other security. Participants should consider the North Carolina Investment Pool's ("NCIP" or the "Pool") investment objectives, risks, charges, and expenses before investing in the Pool. This and other information about the Pool are available in the Pool's current Information Statement, which should be read carefully before investing. A copy of the Pool's Information Statement may be available by calling 1-833-736-6247 or is available on the Pool's website at www.investncip.com. While the Pool seeks to maintain a stable net asset value of \$1 per share, it is possible to lose money investing in the Pool. An investment in the Pool is not insured or guaranteed by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation or any other government agency. Shares of the Pool are distributed by PFM Fund Distributors, Inc., member Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) (www.finra.org), and Securities Investor Protection Corporation (SIPC) (www.sipc.org). PFM Fund Distributors, Inc. is an affiliate of PFM Asset Management LLC.



Washington Watch

NC Counties Federal Goals: FY24 Appropriations Outcomes & Legislation to Monitor

By Ryan Murphy, Strategics Consulting Government Relations Advisor
This article was written for CountyQuarterly by Strategics Consulting, a partner of NCAACC.

After months of debates on Capitol Hill, all Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) Appropriations bills were passed in late March 2024, effectively funding federal programs through September 30, 2024. The FY24 Appropriations provide \$773 billion in non-defense discretionary spending (\$1.6 trillion total). The March 2024 federal spending package directly addresses several of North Carolina counties' federal objectives.

The U.S. Department of the Interior's (DOI) **Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT)** program was fully funded. DOI is currently collecting data to calculate payments scheduled for June 2024. Local governments should ensure their System of Award Management (SAM) account is active and banking information is up to date.

The **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)** was authorized \$5.7 billion to fund community programs designed for challenges facing job seekers and employers.

Regarding **disaster preparation, assistance, and mitigation**, approximately \$3.2 billion is dedicated to the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for grants to state and local governments, including \$324 million for the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant program to assist fire departments and first responders. The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) was also reauthorized. FEMA funded 22,150 additional U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) agents and officers but cut its Shelter and Services Program funding.

Expanding **high-speed broadband access** was a popular bipartisan issue. FY24 Appropriations continued funding for rural broadband programs at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Rural Development (USDA-RD); namely, the ReConnect, Distance Learning and Telemedicine

Grants, and the Community Connect Grant programs. There was emphasis on rural broadband connectivity involving several programs and critical policy riders that will make it easier for counties to provide critical mental health services to residents. However, \$500 million was cut from USDA-RD programs nationwide.

- **Pro-tip:** For USDA-RD grant proposals with potential eligibility issues, counties' proposal/project managers should contact the North Carolina Rural Development State Office early in the project's feasibility stage for clarification.

A significant moment in **behavioral health and substance use disorder (SUD) program funding**, providing **counties autonomy with treatment options**, the FY24 federal spending deals reform the Institutions for Mental Disease (IMD), making permanent the option for states to waive IMD exclusions for SUD treatment and services. For context, the federal government does not match state payments for services to 21 – 64-year-old Medicaid enrollees in certain inpatient facilities; however, reimbursement is available via several exceptions to the IMD exclusion. This option was first provided in the 2018 SUPPORT Act, granting state Medicaid programs federal match options for SUD treatment in certain IMDs through temporary waivers.

- **Supporting the SUPPORT Act:** The 2018 Substance-Use Disorder Prevention that Promotes Opioid Recovery and Treatment for Patients and Communities (SUPPORT) Act funds community-based SUD-related treatment and recovery programs and grows the behavioral health workforce. Consider contacting your members of Congress to request that the SUPPORT Act, and other programs in this list set to expire in September 2024, be reauthorized in full.

FY24 Appropriations significantly benefitted North Carolina counties' priorities of **funding health, human, and economic services programs**, with sustained funding for U.S. Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) was also extended (which was last reauthorized in 2005 and has existed through piecemeal extensions since 2010). Additionally, local health departments will now receive direct federal funding, which is big news for the multitude of county health systems operating local departments. Finally, FY24 also saw an increase in federal funding for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and a \$725 million bump to the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG).

Regarding **healthcare for county detainees**, the FY24 Appropriations bills require states to suspend an individual's Medicaid benefits immediately upon

incarceration. The suspension offers a preferred option of reinstating an individual's benefits upon release from incarceration, rather than fully reenrolling in Medicaid. This suspension holds whether the individual is detained prior to conviction or during post-adjudication sentencing.

- **Other Medicaid moves in FY24 spending include:**
 1. An \$8 billion annual cut to Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) payments, which offsets costs for county-owned hospitals treating disproportionately large numbers of Medicaid beneficiaries, is delayed until January 1, 2025;
 2. Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) coverage is now a permanent offering for state plans;
 3. Title IV-B Child Welfare Services grants, which provide flexible funding to support family services and prevent child abuse, are extended through December 31, 2024.

The FY24 Appropriations package will sustain funding for several of North Carolina counties' high priority federal funding programs and legislative goals. Significant reauthorizations include PILT, WIOA, CDBG, and TANF. More broadly, there is increasing momentum toward supporting mental and behavioral health services, treating substance use-related disorders, and improving accessibility to healthcare via broadband. Conversely, popular and transformative programs like the SUPPORT Act and the ACP will expire soon without compelling advocacy.

Aside from the appropriations process, there are also important ongoing legislative negotiations that will affect counties' programs and funding.

Regarding funding and flexibility in services for **older Americans and veterans**, on February 6, 2024, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced updated regulations to the Older Americans Act (OAA). However, the OAA was only temporarily extended and is also due for reauthorization in September. Currently, the legislation is being negotiated in the Senate's Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee, whose membership includes Sen. Ted Budd (R-NC).

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently announced **funding and regulations news for emerging contaminants and drinking water**, setting maximum contaminant levels (MCLs), on several polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in drinking water. The new federal regulation means hundreds of water systems must routinely monitor for PFAS and report the results to customers. Utilities that have drinking water contaminated with PFAS exceeding the MCLs have five years to integrate technology that will bring them into compliance. The Bipartisan Infrastructure

Law (BIL) appropriated \$1 billion (FY2022 to FY2026) in allocations and competitive funding to address emerging contaminants through the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) Emerging Contaminants funding. Excluding BIL funding, FY24’s federal budget provides \$2.77 billion for the CWSRFs.

With regard to spending **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF)**, the U.S. Department of Treasury recently released rules in the SLFRF FAQ document providing additional flexibilities which NCACC supported to help counties obligate their remaining SLFRF funds by December 31, 2024. A bill intended to remove these helpful clarifications was defeated in the Senate on May 15, 2024. Given that threats to ARPA flexibility and funding are not over, North Carolina counties should continue sharing positive stories regarding their ARPA funded programs with their members of Congress. Two more important dates related to SLFRF program are:

1. Funds for Title I projects and Surface Transportation projects must be expended by September 30, 2026;
2. Funds for all other eligible uses must be expended by December 31, 2026.

Update to NCACC’s Spring 2023 CountyQuarterly, “2023 Farm Bill – Supporting Agriculture and Food Programs for Years to Come”

Last authorized for five years in 2018, the Farm Bill is set to expire on September 30, 2024. On May 17, 2024, the U.S. House of Representatives Agriculture Committee released its first version of the new, five-year 2024 Farm Bill. (Available on the U.S. House of Representatives website at www.agriculture.house.gov/farmbill.) From here, the draft legislation will undergo an internal “mark-up” period before it can be passed onto the Senate for negotiation and approval.

Meanwhile, members of Congress have introduced legislation that will likely be included in the 2024 Farm Bill and directly impact counties’ interests:

- *Treating Tribes and Counties as Good Neighbors Act* (S.697/H.R.1450) extends eligibility for the Good Neighbor Authority program to counties, allowing reinvestments of receipts gained from restoration projects.
- *Rural Partnership and Prosperity Act of 2023* (S.3309) creates a competitive grant program to provide multiyear, flexible funding for rural development initiatives, and another expanding technical assistance in rural areas via the Rural Partners Network.
- *Expanding Childcare in Rural America Act* (S.1867) would improve the availability and affordability of childcare in rural communities through childcare

workforce professional development and retention activities.

The 2018 Farm Bill contained several important funding sources and considerations for North Carolina counties:

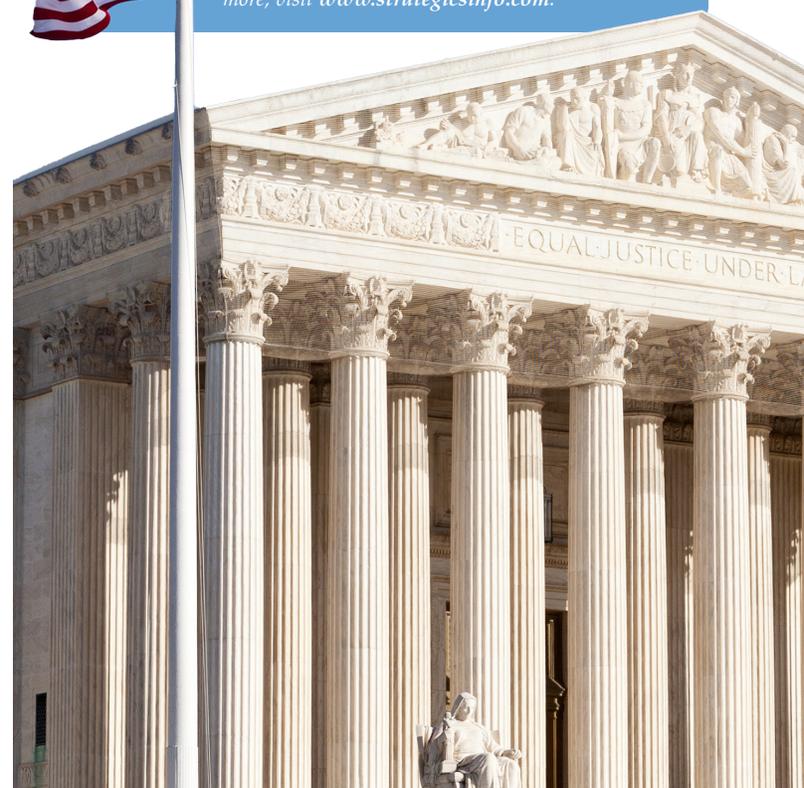
- \$350 million for rural broadband infrastructure and increased flexibility for USDA broadband loans and grants.
- Permanent reinstatement of a USDA Undersecretary to oversee more than \$200 billion in the USDA-RD portfolio.
- \$150 million for the Water and Wastewater Program to finance critical infrastructure projects and provide rural communities access to affordable and clean water.
- SNAP full reauthorization, maintaining eligibility and work requirements with expanded job training programs.

Fully funding all 12 titles of the 2024 Farm Bill reauthorization would maintain these and other vital provisions of the 2018 Farm Bill. Counties should develop a timely strategy with clear talking points before contacting their North Carolina Congressional Delegation regarding the 2024 Farm Bill and associated legislation slated for inclusion. 🗳️



More information about NCACC’s Federal Issues and 2023-2024 Federal Legislative Goals are available at www.ncacc.org/county-advocacy/federal-issues.

About the author: Ryan Murphy is a Government Relations Advisor for Strategics Consulting, NCACC’s federal government relations consulting firm. To learn more, visit www.strategicsinfo.com.



The Raleigh Recap

Building Partnerships on Shared Priorities

By Amber Harris, NCACC Director of Advocacy and Policy

Earlier this year, the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) embarked on a County Conversations Tour, traveling across the state to hear from commissioners in their home counties on issues impacting their communities. County commissioners shared successes in improving and expanding emergency management facilities and services, capital investments in county facilities and schools, and modernizing parks and recreation services (pickleball anyone?!). Participants in these conversations also shared challenges in attracting and retaining employees, water and sewer infrastructure, behavioral health, gaps in foster care, and affordable housing.

As the legislative short session commences, NCACC begins the months-long process of setting its legislative agenda. And, as boards of county commissioners decide which needs they want the state to prioritize, it's clear that county issues are state issues. Many of the projects counties counted as successes were enabled via state appropriations to individual counties, grants distributed by state agencies, or – in the case of school capital – sustained investment and support for counties via needs-based and other state lottery funds.

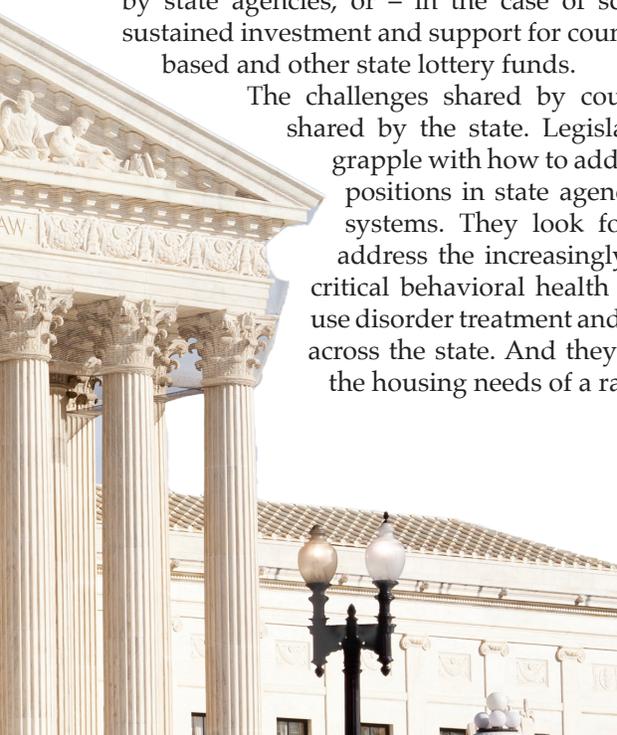
The challenges shared by counties are also shared by the state. Legislators regularly grapple with how to address hard to fill positions in state agencies and water systems. They look for solutions to address the increasingly acute lack of critical behavioral health and substance use disorder treatment and foster services across the state. And they try to balance the housing needs of a rapidly growing

state and the existing communities in urban and rural counties.

The County Conversations Tour over the winter and early spring months provided a framework for the organization's advocacy work this year. As county commissioners adopt resolutions on their legislative priorities, it is important to reflect on how these issues are impacting their local communities and look to the state for collaboration and support. In June, they convened in Raleigh for County Advocacy Days to share their stories, by thanking legislators for investments and highlighting areas for future focus and joint problem-solving. This elected-to-elected advocacy and resulting collaboration is critical to ensuring the best North Carolina for all 100 counties. NCACC's government relations team will share these stories as they advocate for state funds to address gaps in child welfare, support and technical assistance for county finance functions, local input and authority in behavioral health governance, and continued state support for various water and sewer infrastructure issues.

The challenges shared during the County Conversations Tour are difficult and widespread across our state. They will require significant investments, innovation, compromise, and collaboration. They won't be resolved overnight. Investments must be sustained over time, and innovation and collaboration ongoing. As spring turns to summer and eyes turn to Raleigh and the work of the General Assembly, it is clear that the partnership between county commissioners, state legislators, state agencies, and county departments is vital when there are big problems to solve. 🗣️

On the next page, there is a full review of the 2024 County Conversations Tour. This spread highlights the top accomplishments and challenges across the state and across each region. There are resources listed on page 25 that the NCACC offers, and for more information on our advocacy goals and legislative goals process, visit www.ncacc.org/county-advocacy.

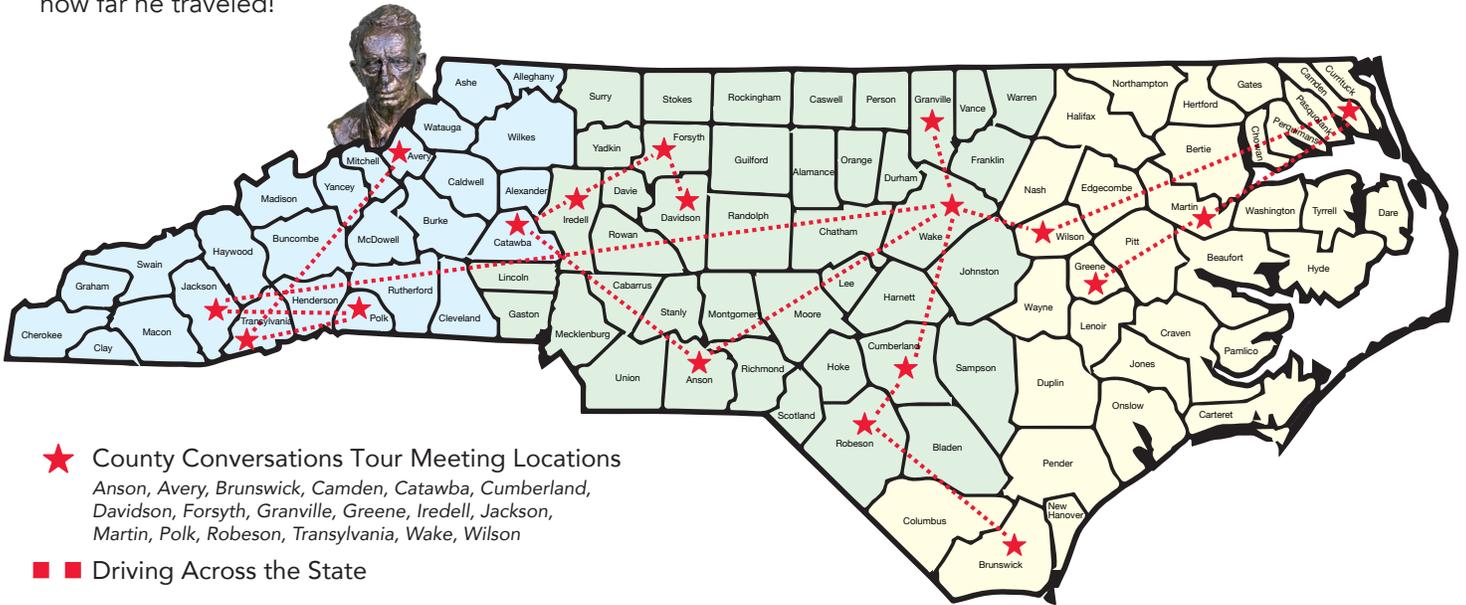




A ROAD MAP OF THE 2024 COUNTY CONVERSATIONS TOUR

BY ABBEY THAYER, NCACC BOARD CLERK AND EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

Over the course of five months, NCACC Executive Director Kevin Leonard drove across the state to visit all 18 NCACC county districts. From 85 counties across the state, county commissioners and staff attended the meetings to discuss their challenges and accomplishments, share ideas with one another, and talk to Kevin directly. Below is a map of just how far he traveled!



★ County Conversations Tour Meeting Locations
 Anson, Avery, Brunswick, Camden, Catawba, Cumberland, Davidson, Forsyth, Granville, Greene, Iredell, Jackson, Martin, Polk, Robeson, Transylvania, Wake, Wilson

■ ■ Driving Across the State

A STATEWIDE GLANCE

TOP CHALLENGES

The points below are some of the top most mentioned challenges that counties across the state brought to light at the meetings.

- Employee attraction and retention
- Affordable housing
- Mental health in jails
- School funding
- Broadband
- Water and sewer infrastructure

TOP ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The points below are some of the top most mentioned accomplishments that counties across the state brought to light at the meetings.

- Economic development
- EMS service improvements
- New parks and recreation areas
- Utilizing ARPA and opioid settlement funding

SHARE YOUR STORY WITH US

Every week, the NCACC sends out the *Weekly Update* email to more than 2,500 recipients detailing past and upcoming Association events and important county headlines from the week. If you would like to share your county accomplishments to be featured in the County News section, please email communications@ncacc.org.

When traveling across regions in the state, some trends emerged as challenges and accomplishments counties face within a particular region. During district meetings, commissioners and staff discussed various projects they are undertaking and what is working well and what needs further attention. The points listed below are the top two most mentioned challenges and accomplishments across the western, central and eastern regions.

WESTERN	<p>CHALLENGES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure pressures related to growth • Childcare options 	<p>ACCOMPLISHMENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture land preservation • Trash and recycling centers
CENTRAL	<p>CHALLENGES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast population growth • Inflation 	<p>ACCOMPLISHMENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opioid committees and overdose response teams • Water plant and industrial park revitalization
EASTERN	<p>CHALLENGES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population loss • Reverse osmosis plants 	<p>ACCOMPLISHMENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board’s teamwork and county collaboration • Upgrading software programs

NCACC RESOURCES

At the NCACC, we are committed to providing direct assistance and helpful resources to all 100 counties. It was very beneficial for us to hear, firsthand, what counties may be struggling with and are most proud of as public servants. The items listed below are only some of the services and resources that the NCACC offers to our member counties. Learn more about the Association at www.ncacc.org.

CONNECTING COUNTIES PLAYBOOK

The Connecting Counties Playbook is a product of NCACC Past President and Washington County Commissioner Tracey Johnson’s presidential initiative that aims to expand broadband access across North Carolina counties. This playbook is both a toolkit and collection of resources available for county leaders to learn more about broadband expansion. To view the playbook, visit www.ncacc.org/playbook.

ARPA RESOURCE LIBRARY

The NCACC Strategic Member Services (SMS) team released the ARPA Resource Library that highlights six distinct sections of ARPA resources and strategies. This resource is a compilation of guidance, templates, and information that is useful to all counties. To view the library, visit www.ncacc.org/arparesourcelibrary.

STRATEGIC MEMBER SERVICES

NCACC Strategic Member Services (SMS) was established to offer a variety of assistance to counties, including building a pipeline of future county government professionals and bridging the gap between graduate programs and county government. SMS includes ARPA technical assistance, opioid settlement assistance, outreach services, and direct county assistance from its cohort of strategic project coordinators. For more information about SMS, visit www.ncacc.org/sms.



Kevin Leonard
NCACC Executive Director

Dear County Commissioners,
In recognition of National County Government Month, observed in April, we wanted to say — THANK YOU! (I am guessing you may not hear that frequently.) So, on behalf of the entire Association staff, I wanted to take this moment to offer our thanks and gratitude to you.

We often hear you thank your county staff teams and volunteers for all the work they do to support your county, and we know that you likely do not get appropriately recognized for your public service. Serving as an elected official often brings many challenges and volumes of public feedback, complaints, and criticism that can be daunting. Like many of you understand, we understand that comes with the job. The Association staff and the NCACC Board of Directors truly appreciate the value that your leadership brings to your county and to our state. The long-term satisfaction of your public service is oftentimes delayed. You work through meeting agendas, budgets, and policy decisions, realizing that the difference you are making is primarily for the long-term gains of your county and community.

These long-term results may not be felt for several generations, and this is one of the aspects that makes public service and leadership a special endeavor. Attempting to be a forward thinker or a visionary, while at the same time being grounded in the here and now, can often result in conflict. Leaders develop the skill to balance both of those things, and that allows them to accomplish great things. It takes a lot of hard work, and as a county commissioner, it is not an easy job to build, maintain, or nurture relationships that help lead to productive results.

Over the years, I have heard and learned from seasoned county commissioners who have relayed their own experience about building partnerships and friendships with unexpected people. They shared that investing the time and energy in cultivating those pivotal relationships paid great dividends which resulted in creating and funding critical infrastructure projects like water, sewer, broadband and school buildings. These investments and commitment to the greater good changed the landscape of their counties for future generations. As forward-thinking leader Henry Ford explained: "Coming together is the beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success."

On behalf of the Association, thank you for your dedication to public service in pursuit of improving the lives of all North Carolinians. We appreciate you!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin Leonard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

SHAPING COUNTY FUTURES

117TH NCACC ANNUAL CONFERENCE

AUGUST 8-10, 2024
FORSYTH COUNTY



Learn more about
this year's conference at
www.ncacc.org/ncacc117.

*Photography courtesy of the Reynolda
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County Quarterly

The story of North Carolina counties



**North Carolina Association of
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