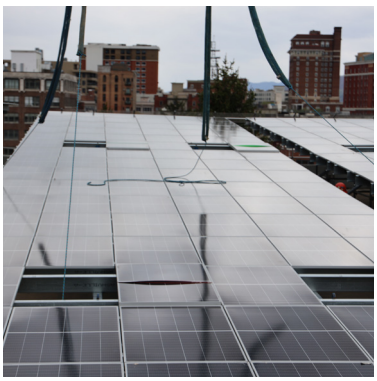
BUNCOMBE COUNTY
STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2030











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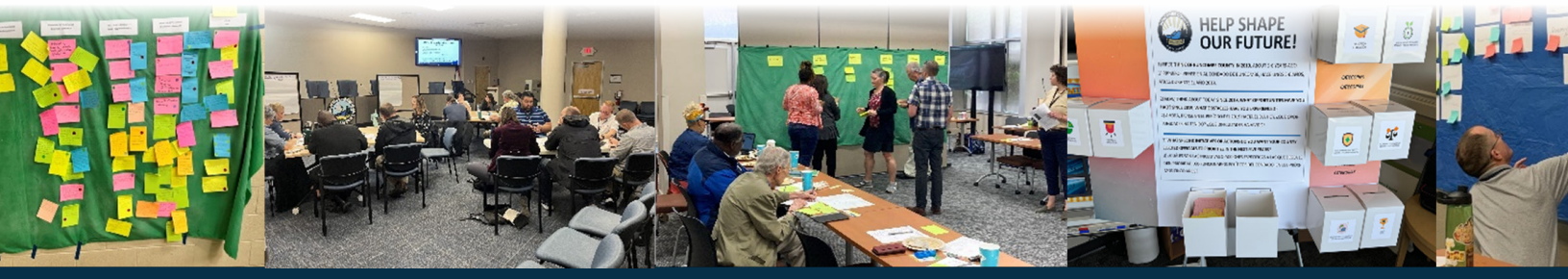
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A letter from the Board of Commissioners Chair

On behalf of the Board of Commissioners, I'm presenting our 2030 Strategic Plan. For the next five years, these priorities will guide our recovery from Helene and address both chronic and exceptional challenges.

Though we nearly had completed the adoption of a strategic plan before Helene, the storm's impacts meant we needed to reevaluate. Our Board began planning and setting focus areas and goals in March. Over a two-month period following that, residents responded to surveys and town halls organized by County staff. Staff then drafted this plan based on those responses and we took it back to the community for feedback before Commissioners reviewed and approved it. This plan reflects what we heard. We acknowledge this compilation is an interpretation of many voices.

Six priorities:

- **Growth and Development:** Creating affordable and diverse housing while preserving the affordable homes we have.
- **Economic Development:** Supporting business expansion and new industry so people can find high-wage jobs and create high-wage jobs.
- **Education:** Extending early childhood education and adult learning opportunities to more people.
- **Community Health:** Increasing access to health care—physical, mental, and behavioral.
- **Public Safety:** Expanding effective crime prevention and harm reduction. Improving emergency response times.
- **Energy and Environment:** Protecting farmland and natural resources. Reducing pollution and preparing for future disasters.

The full plan includes measurable goals. Commissioners and County staff will consistently share our progress toward those goals.

Thank you for helping make Buncombe County better. I look forward to seeing you in our community.



Amanda Edwards,
Chair of the Buncombe County
Board of Commissioners

A letter from the County Manager

Thank you for your interest in Buncombe County's 2030 Strategic Plan. As the County continues to evolve, so do the needs of our community. It's important that we regularly take time to audit emerging issues while revaluating our existing strategic priorities to make sure they reflect the current environment.

As we wrap up our 2025 Strategic Plan and transition to our next five-year strategy, we engaged with the public to get feedback on the types of growth and direction you want to see in Buncombe County. Obviously, Topical Storm Helene brought substantial damage that created new priorities while exacerbating some existing needs. The 2030 Strategic Plan reflects the need to prioritize recovery efforts by encouraging affordable housing, stimulating economic development, increasing early education opportunities, bolstering community health, improving public safety, and continuing our commitment to environmental protection.

Additionally, our mission during every strategic plan cycle is to continue and improve the delivery of high-quality services and resources. We know the importance of the County's day-to-day operations in providing everything from free immunizations and utility assistance to creating new park amenities and growing library programming. We are always striving to make sure your interactions with County staff are positive and satisfying experiences.

Thank you for all your input and feedback throughout this process – we heard from thousands of you – and this plan represents the time and insights you provided. This plan outlines how our dedicated and committed public servants will continue to enhance service delivery while exploring potential new resources. I am excited about the future of Buncombe County and seeing our community recover and flourish with the help of the 2030 Strategic Plan.

Sincerely,



Avril Pinder,
County Manager

Guided by Vision, Mission, & Values

Our vision tells us where we're going. Our mission imparts our purpose. Our values tell us how we'll make decisions that serve the public good. Buncombe County Commissioners agree:

Our Vision

Buncombe County is a caring community in harmony with its environment where residents succeed, thrive, and realize their potential.

Our Mission

We promote a healthy, safe, well-educated, and thriving community with a sustainable quality of life. We provide effective and efficient government our residents can trust. We deliver needed services through a responsive workforce committed to excellence, integrity, and teamwork.

Our Values

Respect • Integrity • Collaboration • Honesty • Equity



Vision

A caring community in harmony with its environment where residents succeed, thrive, and realize their potential

Values

Respect | Integrity | Collaboration | Honesty | Equity

Focus Areas

Growth and Development

Encourage a diversity of housing as a foundation for affordable, healthy, and thriving communities, particularly for the most vulnerable residents

Maximize the use of land, guiding development to targeted growth areas that lead to resilient communities

Economic Development

Increase opportunities and support for local workforce

Increase economic and business opportunities in Buncombe County

Education

Increase opportunities and support for local workforce

Increase economic and business opportunities in Buncombe County

Community Health

Increase coordination and resilience of community health services to create a healthier and safer community.

Improve outcomes in physical, mental, and behavioral health, and increase social connectedness

Improve community well-being by providing person-centered, trauma-informed services

Public Safety

Increase prevention and harm reduction

Increase hazard mitigation and disaster preparedness to support a climate resilient community

Enhance individualized diversion services

Energy and Environment

Preserve the agriculture heritage of Buncombe County and prioritize the conservation of natural resources

Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect air quality

Foundational

Optimize business practices

Focus on strengthening organizational culture

Grow and retain Buncombe County employees



Focus Area: Growth & Development

This focus area guides Buncombe County Community Development efforts to support access to housing. The goals within this focus area are geared toward ensuring our most vulnerable residents can access not only stable housing, but potentially homeownership. Additional efforts to create green spaces for the benefit of all residents and visitors to Buncombe County are within the scope of this focus area. The efforts of this focus area will drive affordable housing, stable community growth, and access to Buncombe County's natural beauty.

Objective 1	Encourage a diversity of housing as a foundation for affordable, healthy, and thriving communities, particularly for the most vulnerable residents.

GOAL

Support development of 1,500-1,850 rental units for households at <80% AMI.

Baseline

169

FY25

Description

The County's population will increase by an estimated 10% by 2030, resulting in the need for an additional 11,106 housing units. Additionally, the county lost 267 housing units during Hurricane Helene, with thousands more suffering damage. This goal is intended to begin to address the significant need for rental units for low- and moderate-income households (<80% AMI) identified in the Housing Needs Assessment.

Target Rationale

Goal derived from Housing Needs Assessment identified housing gaps and anticipated financial investments in affordable rental units by the County.



GOAL

Support development of 400 ownership units for households at <80% AMI.

Baseline

56

FY25

Description

This goal is intended to begin to address the significant need for ownership units for low- and moderate-income households (< 80% AMI) identified in the Housing Needs Assessment.

Target Rationale

Goal derived from Housing Needs Assessment identified housing gaps and anticipated financial investments in affordable ownership units by the County.

GOAL

Support repair of 1,000 units for households at < 80% AMI.

Baseline

356

FY25

Description

The goal is intended to preserve naturally occurring affordable housing that is owned by low- and moderate-income households (<80% AMI) and to ensure ongoing access to safe, affordable living conditions for the financially vulnerable residents where further deterioration of the home, without intervention, may result in displacement.

Target Rationale

Goal derived from waitlists, historical data on County investments, and anticipated County investments.



Objective 2

Maximize the use of land, guiding development to targeted growth areas that lead to resilient communities.

GOAL

Direct greater than 70% of new county residential developments into growth areas as defined by the Growth, Equity, and Conservation (GEC) Framework by 2030. More on this is found in the 2043 Comprehensive Plan.

Baseline

70%

FY19 – FY23

Description

This goal is part of the 2043 Comprehensive Plan and aims to guide new county residential developments during growth years. It will be defined by the new Growth, Equity, and Conservation (GEC) Framework. This framework serves as guidance for the types of development and land uses that meet the community's vision for growth in the county.

Target Rationale

At or above 70% on an ongoing 5-year basis is needed to meet residential development goals.

GOAL

Complete a minimum of 3.5 miles of Buncombe County managed greenway projects by 2030.

Baseline

0

Completed

Description

Currently, Parks and Recreation have greenways that are in development but have not started construction. This goal will speak to the known number of funded miles of greenways that are in development and to complete them by 2030 to help develop a more resilient community.

Target Rationale

Initially, 7.6 miles were funded to be completed by 2030; however, the target of completing a minimum of 3.5 miles of Buncombe County-managed greenway projects by 2030 reflects both the opportunities currently available and the realistic constraints of land ownership, easements, funding, and environmental factors. Tropical Storm Helene has changed the topography and riverbanks where several greenway corridors, including some segments of the Hwy 251 section of the Woodfin Greenway, had been under development; the feasibility of some of these areas remains unknown as we re-survey areas. Of these, approximately 3.5 miles are either designed, funded, or have a clear path to implementation by 2030.



GOAL

Join the FEMA Community Rating System (CRS) and achieve Class 8 status by 2030.

Baseline:

While the County has adopted higher standards throughout our existing Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance, we do not currently participate in this program. This goal was enshrined in the recently adopted Buncombe County 2043 Comprehensive Plan.

Description

FEMA's Community Ranking System (CRS) is a voluntary incentive program that recognizes and encourages community floodplain management practices to exceed the minimum requirements of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). By increasing the County's score, it can not only create a safer, more prepared community, but can also potentially have a financial benefit for the community's flood insurance rates under current federal policy guidelines. The steps in this process include an evaluation of current floodplain management practices and capabilities followed by an application to CRS. After acceptance, which requires an evaluation and verification process by FEMA, the County will receive an initial classification and can move up in classifications from there.

Target Rationale

Over the next 5 years, we will work to achieve CRS Class 8 status which requires 1,000 NFIP CRS credit points and would potentially result in up to a 10% flood insurance premium discount to Buncombe policy holders under current federal guidelines.





Focus Area: Economic Development

This focus area guides Buncombe County's efforts to support and expand a robust and sustainable regional economy that builds on local industries and talents and provides economic mobility for our residents. Paramount to these efforts is increasing high wage jobs in meaningful careers and industries and supporting local businesses in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Helene. The efforts of this focus area will support the local workforce and increase business opportunities across the county.

Objective 1

Increase opportunities and support for the local workforce.

GOAL

Increase the percentage of new Economic Development Investment Program projects that offer worker benefits beyond health care (Ex. childcare, housing, transit, etc.) from 14% in 2024 to 25% by 2030.

Baseline

14%

FY24

Description

Economic Development Investment Program projects are new investment and expansion projects for which companies receive assistance from the County and develop the business and industrial base of the region. Expanding worker benefit requirements for these projects promotes workforce well-being by creating a more livable community and encouraging employer contribution and buy-in to address social needs within the county.

Target Rationale

Increasing the percentage of projects that meet these benefit thresholds to 25% will not only be a significant increase in the number of workers receiving important benefits but is also an achievable target.

GOAL

Increase the percentage of STEP (Skills, Training and Education Program) participants who gain employment upon completion of program from 24% in 2024 to 50% by 2030.

Baseline

24%

FY24

Description

The STEP program is a collaborative effort between A-B Tech and Buncombe County Economic Services. The program allows all food and nutrition service recipients (ages 16 and up) the opportunity to take continuing education courses at A-B Tech at no cost. Covered expenses including tuition and fees, books, supplies and testing. Consideration is being given to tracking average wage rates and demographics.

Target Rationale

Increasing the percentage of STEP graduates employed to 50% will be a more than 2x increase. This target is achievable but also ambitious.

GOAL

Increase the number of library customers who connect to employment information from 734 in 2024 to 1,000 (35% increase) by 2030.

Baseline

734

FY24

Description

Buncombe County Libraries regularly provide connections to employment information and access to employment resources to library patrons. Included in this count are queries that have been received and forwarded to other departments.

Target Rationale

A 35% increase from 734 per year will mean that nearly 1,000 Buncombe residents will be getting connected to job resources via our libraries by 2030.



Objective 2

Increase economic and business opportunities in Buncombe County.

GOAL

Increase total employment in target industries (Professional & IT and advanced manufacturing) from 22,060 opportunities in 2024 to 35,300 (60% increase) by 2030.

Baseline

22,060 employment opportunities in targeted industries: 10,219 in manufacturing and 11,841 IT

FY24

Description

Increasing total employment opportunities in targeted industries (Professional & IT and advanced manufacturing) supports the diversification of the local economy, which is primarily medical, hospitality and manufacturing related. Workforce participation in different industries creates a more resilient local economy, a need made even more pressing in the wake of Tropical Storm Helene. Increasing opportunities is targeted sectors are an indication of progress towards diversification as these jobs require different skillsets, level of education, and provide additional opportunities for residents.

Target Rationale

Over the last five years, there has been a 61% increase in employment opportunities in targeted industries. An additional 60% increase over the next five years would result in 13,236 new employment opportunities. Known expansions coming from current targeted industry employers, along with uncertainties in the future manufacturing, make 60% an achievable but ambitious target.

GOAL

Increase the average wage for Buncombe County Economic Development Investment Program projects from $31.44 in 2024 to $45.50 (30% increase) by 2030.

Baseline

$31.44/hr

FY24

Description

The Economic Development Investment Program is one tool that Buncombe County uses to create an environment that attracts new business and promotes the growth of existing businesses. Paramount to these efforts are increasing high-wage jobs in meaningful careers and industries for residents. Increasing the average wage of incentive projects helps to ensure the County is supporting efforts to attract and retain high-wage jobs within the county.

Target Rationale

This significantly raises the bar for major employers to provide better than good wages. Intent is to encourage employers to pay their workers thriving wages. The average target wage for 2030 is $45.50.

GOAL

Increase average entry level wage for Buncombe County Economic Development Investment Program projects from 92% of projects at the living wage in 2024 to 100% by 2030.

Baseline

92%
based on MIT living wage: $22.85

FY24

Description

The Economic Development Investment Program is one tool that Buncombe County uses to create an environment that attracts new business and promotes the growth of existing businesses. Paramount to these efforts are increasing high-wage jobs in meaningful careers and industries for residents. Entry-level positions that pay a living wage help to ensure that workers can afford basic necessities like food, housing, and healthcare, and fosters economic stability and community development.

Target Rationale

Bringing the entry level wage for incentive projects up to at least 100% of the living wage ensures that all employees of incentive project businesses will at least earn competitive wages. The living wage will change each year, and this goal will seek to continue to raise the floor of earnings.

GOAL

Decrease the number of households in Buncombe County that are unserved or underserved by high-speed internet from 5,530 in 2024 to 2,765 (50% reduction) by 2030.

Baseline:

5,530
unserved and underserved households

FY24

Description

Buncombe County continues to have areas that are unserved or underserved by high-speed internet. Increasing access to high-speed internet in rural communities helps to create greater economic opportunities and increases remote work opportunities, educational opportunities, and access to healthcare and government services.

Target Rationale

This is an ambitious target but the subject matter experts feel that a 50% reduction is obtainable and would be a significant, positive impact on the community.

GOAL

Increase the number of small businesses in Buncombe County from 9,429 in 2023 to 9,900 (5% increase) by 2030.

Baseline:

9,429
establishments
in 2023

Description

Small businesses are a key driver of Buncombe County's local economy and community vitality. Supporting the growth and sustainability of these enterprises is essential to maintaining a resilient and inclusive economy. For the purposes of this goal, small businesses are defined as establishments with less than 50 employees. Between 2019 and 2023, the number of small businesses in Buncombe County increased by 10%.

Target Rationale

FEMA reports that over 40% of small businesses never reopen following a disaster. This target aims to increase small businesses beyond the pre-Helene levels and accounts for an assumed loss of small businesses in both 2024 and 2025. A 5% increase from the 2023 baseline translates to 471 new small businesses.





Focus Area: Education

This focus area serves to guide Buncombe County's efforts surrounding the education and lifelong growth of our community members. Buncombe County Government serves many educational partners, those that serve the youngest minds and bodies in Pre-K and early childcare settings, our local education partners that operate our K-12 schools, and our local charter and private school providers. Additionally, Buncombe County boasts numerous post-secondary educational programs serving the diverse needs of our community members, and those that relocate here to further their studies. The direct education-focused work carried out by Buncombe County serves to create an environment where growth and learning will thrive unobstructed.

Objective 1

Enhance early and adult learning.

GOAL

Partner with community organizations to increase the percent of children aged 0-5 in childcare and Pre-K from 27% in 2025 to 31% by 2030.

Baseline

As of June 2025, the value is **27%**.

Description

This goal is to increase the percentage of children enrolled in childcare and the County's primary influence is through the Early Childhood Education and Development Fund. This goal aligns with one of the directional objectives of the Early Childhood Education Committee around increasing children in Pre-K childcare. At a high level, both the NCELI and MClass assessments show that children attending Pre-K generally score higher. The measure calculates the percentage based on children in childcare as a percentage of the total population of 0–5-year-olds.

Target Rationale

Historically the value fluctuates around 29% and has declined in the current year to 27.2%. Targeted initiatives, with collaboration of the Early Childhood Education Committee, will potentially increase the value from 27% towards the 31% target.

GOAL

Work with community partners to decrease the percentage of youth ages 16-24 who are disconnected from school or work from 9.9% in 2023 to 9.0% by 2030.

Baseline

The most recently reported value of **9.9%** was for 2023 (2024 value to be published Sept. 2025) and the historical average for the past 5 periods is **11.2%**

Description

Disconnected Youth (federally designated as Opportunity Youth) are persons aged 16-24 who are neither in school nor working full – or part – time. Ages 16-24 represent a critical period in the transition to adulthood—higher rates of opportunity youth suggest these young adults are cut off from critical social supports and experiences that can help them build a path to the future. MyFutureNC.org publishes this data annually and we've been able to obtain annual data going back to 2018.

Target Rationale

The subject matter experts feel that County programs and initiatives tangentially could influence this measure. Until future programs and initiatives can be developed, the subject matter experts recommend a target of 9% with future consideration for lowering based on progress.



GOAL

Work with community partners to increase the adjusted four-year cohort graduation rate average from 90.7% in 2024 to 92% by 2030.

Description

This goal focuses on improving graduation outcomes for ACS and BCS high school students. An adjusted four-year cohort graduation rate is a group of students who enter 9th grade in the same year, plus transfers in and out. Students who drop out during high school and any students who are still enrolled remain in the adjusted cohort. Buncombe County can influence the graduation rate by addressing socioeconomic conditions, access to resources, and school-level initiatives.

Baseline

The consolidated (ACS & BCS) value for the 2023 – 2024 school year was **90.7%** with the average over the past six years being **90.2%**. The state average is **87%**

Target Rationale

The target was suggested by the Board of Commissioners during the August 22, 2025 work session.

Objective 2

Improve outcomes in education.

GOAL

Work with community partners to reduce disparity in youth court referrals by 35% for at risk populations by 2030.

Description

This goal seeks to reduce disparities in Buncombe County youth court referrals. The measure leverages school-based offense data from the NC Dept. of Public Safety dashboard found here. A School-Based Offense is an offense that occurs on school grounds, school property (buses, etc.), at a school bus stop, or at an off-campus school-sanctioned event (field trips, athletic competitions, etc.).

Baseline

The most current data point is for 2023 (2024 data to be published in Sept. 2025) and the ratio value was 1.6 (a value of 1.0 reflects parity) – this indicates that there are youth that are 1.6 times as likely to have a school-based offense than their peers.

Target Rationale

A 35% reduction to a value of 1.0 would mean that no student is more at risk than any other for a school-based offense.

GOAL

Engage with partners to move towards parity in the kindergartner readiness gap for at risk populations with a 45% reduction by 2030.

Description

Baseline

The gap value for the 2023-24 school year was

17.3

a **45% reduction** would result in a gap value of approximately 10.

The goal is to reduce the disparities in kindergarten readiness by race and ethnicity in Buncombe County. This measure is based on the NCELI assessment results from both school districts and is reported annually to the Early Childhood Education Committee. NC Early Learning Inventory (NCELI) is an observation-based formative assessment that leverages the Teaching Strategies Gold tool and is administered within the first 60 days of school year across the state for all entering kindergarteners. For purposes of the strategic plan, we'll be reporting the "gap" or difference in assessment scores between BIPOC and white children.

Target Rationale

Given the complexities and nuances of factors affecting a child's performance on the assessment, the subject matter experts feel that a reduction of 45% is obtainable.

GOAL

Work with community partners towards parity in the public school graduation gap with a 50% reduction amongst at risk populations by 2030.

Baseline:

The gap value for 2024 is **2.8 points.**

Description

The goal is to reduce disparities within 4-year cohorts in public-school graduation rates in Buncombe County. The data leveraged is from a dashboard published by NC Dept of Public Instruction and for purposes of the strategic plan we'll be reporting the "gap" or difference in graduation rates as a consolidated value for both ACS and BCS.

Target Rationale

The subject matter experts feel that a 50% reduction in the gap to a value of 1.4 is obtainable with progress beyond this value being a significant stretch.



Focus Area: Community Health

This focus area is dedicated to promoting the health and wellbeing of Buncombe County community members. Community health encompasses the physical, emotional, behavioral, and social dimensions of wellness, seeking to cultivate a community where all residents can thrive through the following areas of work within Buncombe County's scope of operations:

- Public health information, programming, and services
- Mental health, substance use, and trauma support resources
- Youth & family development services
- Maternal & infant health care
- Support for older adults & aging in place
- Emergency Medical Services
- Recreation, exercise, and physical development activities
- Support for social connectedness

Objective 1

Increase coordination and resilience of community health services to create a healthier and safer community.

GOAL

Increase the number of residents successfully connected to the health resources they need through a community referral system from 61.1% in 2024 to 76.1% by 2030.

Baseline:

As of **June 2025**, the value is

27%

Description

Connecting people to health resources through a community referral system is best practice because it bridges gaps in care by addressing social determinants of health, such as housing, nutrition, and transportation. By linking individuals to trusted local services, this approach enhances access, promotes preventive care, and ultimately leads to improved health outcomes and lower healthcare costs. The data source for this goal, NCCare 360, reports accepted referrals by service types. Monitoring progress toward this goal can include distinct reporting on each of the services detailed below:

- Benefits navigation
- Clothing & housing good
- Education
- Employment
- Entrepreneurship
- Food assistance
- Housing & shelter
- Income support
- Individuals & family support
- Legal
- Mental/behavioral health
- Money management
- Physical health
- Social enrichment
- Spiritual enrichment
- Sports & recreation
- Substance use
- Transportation
- Utilities
- Wellness

Target Rationale

As a relatively new tool, Buncombe County has witnessed consistent growth in the utilization of NCCare 360 for community referrals between local service providers over the past 3 years. Establishing a goal of 25% increase in accepted referrals, to 76.1% by 2030, represents an ambitious effort to continue this growth at a pace of approximately 5% per year, while also acknowledging that the exponential growth observed in the earliest years of the system's launch is likely to taper as utilization becomes more routine and standard practice.

GOAL

Decrease the number of community members over 65 with reported independent living difficulty from 6.4% in 2023 to 4.8% by 2030.

Description

The ability of our community members to remain in their homes as they age past 65 is foundational for their continued ability to thrive and remain connected and engaged.

Baseline

6.4%
as of calendar year 2023
(see chart)

65 to 74 Years (male and female)

5yr Estimates Detailed Tables	2020	2021	2022	2023
With independent living difficulty	2,293	2,342	2,166	2,135
No independent living difficulty	28,114	29,707	30,507	33,542
Total	30,407	32,049	32,673	33,542
% w/ indepentdent living difficulty	7.5%	7.3%	6.6%	6.4%

Target Rationale

The biggest opportunity to decrease independent living challenges is in the 65- to 74-year-old range which comprises approximately 50% of that population. Establishing a target of no more than 4.8% of community members over the age of 65 with reported independent living difficulties by 2030 represents a target that seeks to remain in line with recent trends of roughly 1 percentage point decrease between 2020 & 2023 amidst the challenges of maintaining this trajectory over time, as well as in the context of changing funding landscapes in the health and human services field.

GOAL

Increase the percentage of former Buncombe County foster care children enrolled in the Extended Foster Care program (18 to 21 year-olds) from 73% in 2025 to 85% in 2030.

Description

Young adults who were in foster care upon their 18th birthday may continue to receive foster care benefits and services up to 21 years of age as long as they are enrolled and regularly attending secondary education (high school), a program leading to an equivalent credential, or an institution that provides postsecondary or vocational education. If they are not in school, they must regularly participate in a program or activity designed to promote or remove barriers to employment or work at least 80 hours per month. If the young adult is not in school or employed, they must have a qualifying medical condition or a disability. Young adults who initially choose to opt out of foster care upon attaining 18 years of age may choose to receive Foster Care 18 to 21 services at a later date as long as they have not reached their 21st birthday, and they meet at least one of the program eligibility requirements listed above. Young adults receiving Foster Care 18 to 21 services may reside in a licensed foster care home or facility, a college or university dormitory, or in a semi-supervised independent living setting such as an apartment or a host home.

Baseline

As June 30, 2025 the baseline is 73% of eligible young adults are active in the Extended Foster Care (EFC) program.

Please see below for details:

Total number of adults who have aged out of Buncombe County custody and are eligible for EFC = **52**

Number of adults who have aged out of Buncombe County custody, and are currently enrolled in EFC = **38**

Percentage of eligible young adults active in the Extended Foster Care (EFC) program = (38/52) = **73%**

(Historical data is not available for this metric)

Target Rationale

While the goal is for 100% of youth to choose this path, it is a voluntary program; accordingly, an improvement of around 10% represents an ambitious, yet realistic target for improvement.

Objective 2

Improve outcomes in physical, mental, and behavioral health, and increase social connectedness.

GOAL

Decrease the infant mortality rate from 5.0 in 2023 to 4.5 by 2030.

Baseline

2019 = 4.9
(12 deaths / 2,464 births)

2020 = 6.9
(16 deaths / 2,327 births)

2021 = 4.5
(11 deaths / 2,447 births)

2022 = 5.0
(12 deaths, 2,399 births)

2023* = 5.0
(12 deaths, 2,388 births)

* Please note, there is a significant lag in the state's data reporting, with death data typically made available 24-28 months after the end of each calendar year.

Description

The current infant mortality rate for Buncombe County is 5.0 (representing the number of deaths to infants less than 1 year old per 1,000 live births); reducing this rate aligns with North Carolina's Perinatal Health Strategic Plan, Buncombe County's Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), and ongoing strategic focus on improving well-being for all Buncombe County residents.

Target Rationale

In 2020 the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services released the "Healthy North Carolina 2030" report, which lays out the path toward improvement around a variety of public health topics across the state. This report cites multiple levers for change to reduce infant mortality rates in our state, including: increase access to health insurance, pre-conception counseling, home visiting programs, and reduction in maternal tobacco use. Buncombe County currently operates and/or coordinates with statewide programs to provide access to these interventions for local residents. In light of changing policy trends at the both the state and federal levels impacting Medicaid access, the cost of private health insurance, and funding for home visit and tobacco cessation programs, a target infant death rate of 4.5 by 2030 represents an ambitious yet realistic goal to reduce infant deaths to the lowest number seen in Buncombe County since prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

GOAL

Increase number of participants attending County-sponsored, in-person programs that offer opportunities for recreation, social connectivity, and promote mental health, physical wellness, and overall wellbeing in the community from 35,111 in 2024 to 41,431 (18% increase) by 2030.

Baseline

The number of participants in County-sponsored recreation and wellness programs for 2024 was **35,111** (includes programing from Parks & Recreation as well as Libraries).

Description

A person's connection to their home and community has a huge impact on long term health outcomes. It is imperative to promote social connections to decrease loneliness and isolation, lowering the risk of related detrimental health impacts observed by public health officials nationwide since the COVID-19 Pandemic. This goal seeks to increase opportunities for Buncombe County community members to engage with others while also enjoying opportunities for physical, mental, and/or personal enrichment designed to positively impact participants' quality of life.

Target Rationale

With a concerted effort to engage county residents and provide opportunities for participation, an increase of 18% is feasible.

Objective 3

Improve community well-being by providing person-centered, trauma-informed services.

GOAL

Improve mental health outcomes in the community as indicated by a reduction in the number of per capita deaths by suicide from 18.8 in 2023 to 12.5 (33% reduction) by 2030.

Baseline

2019 = 51
(262,049 total population) / 19.5 per capita

2020 = 44
(269704 total population) / 16.3 per capita

2021 = 37
(271,984 total population) / 13.6 per capita

2022 = 61
(274,112 total population) / 22.3 per capita

2023* = 52
(276,789 total population) / 18.8 per capita

*Please note that there is a significant lag in the state's data reporting, with provisional numbers for the previous year typically made available 4-8 months after the end of calendar year, while definitive data is generally available for the 9-18 months prior to any given reporting period.

Description

According to the North Carolina Department of Health & Human Service's Suicide Prevention Action Plan, suicide prevention represents the intersection of individual mental health and community mental health. In Buncombe County, the growing rates of suicide and suicidal ideation among both adults and children are a critical public health concern. Significant events like Tropical Storm Helene have contributed to an increase in experiences of anxiety, depression, and trauma among residents, likely to exacerbate existing mental health vulnerabilities in our community. These challenges touch the lives of many Buncombe County residents and therefore demand a comprehensive and empathetic approach to improving all residents' ability to live a safe and fulfilling life in Buncombe County.

Target Rationale

According to the North Carolina Department of Health & Human Services' "Healthy North Carolina 2030" report, deaths by suicide are projected to increase across the state of North Carolina through the year 2030. Considering this trend and the traumatic impacts of Tropical Storm Helene across Buncombe County, a 33% reduction (to 12.5 deaths per capita) by 2030 represents an ambitious target for this goal.

GOAL

Reduce the per capita rate of substance use-related deaths from 44.6 in 2024 to 33.5 (25% reduction) by 2030.

Description

Since 2017 Buncombe County has experienced loss of life as a result of substance use at a rate that is consistently among the highest in North Carolina. In 2020, the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners formalized a commitment to reversing this trend by including a goal to eliminate substance use-related deaths in the 2025 Strategic Plan, and in 2024 provisional data indicates that Buncombe County will have observed a decrease in overdose deaths for the first time since 2018. Nonetheless, overdose death rates in our community continue to rank among the highest in the state, indicating that prioritization of life-saving substance use recovery efforts remains vital to community health.

Baseline:

2020 = 108 deaths;
40.0 per 100K people

2021= 122 deaths;
44.9 per 100K people

2022= 151 deaths;
55.2 per 100K people

2023 = 152 deaths;
55.1 per 100K people

2024* = 123 deaths;
44.6 per 100K people

*Please note that there is a significant lag in the state's data reporting. Provisional numbers for the previous year typically made available 4-8 months after the end of the year, while definitive data is generally available 9-18 months after the end of each calendar year.

Target Rationale

Projected trends indicate a 19% reduction in overdose deaths in 2024, compared to 2023. Establishing a target of a 25% reduction by 2030 represents a realistic goal to advance this trend through ongoing commitment to and investment in life-saving interventions around substance use in our community.



Focus Area: Public Safety

The scope of the Public Safety focus area includes the following areas of work within the Buncombe County government:

- Preventing and/or protecting residents from crime, emergencies, and disasters.
    - » This includes fraud, gun safety, substance use and mental health-related emergencies, and internet safety.
- Ensuring the efficacy and responsiveness of law enforcement and emergency services through coordination of trauma-informed resources, training, and knowledge.
- Promoting safe and secure home, work, childcare/school, and everyday environments for all community members.
- Management of the Buncombe County Detention Facility.

Objective 1

Increase prevention and harm reduction.

GOAL

Partner with community organizations to reduce gun-related injuries and deaths from 48 in 2024 to 43 (10% decrease) by 2030.

Baseline

2024 – 48
(41 injuries; 7 deaths)

2023 – 61
(37 injuries; 24 deaths)

2022 – 70
(42 injuries; 28 deaths)

2021 – 40
(23 injuries; 17 deaths)

2020 – 49
(33 injuries; 16 deaths)

2019 – 29
(24 injuries; 5 deaths)

Description

Buncombe County works closely with community-based organizations to reduce gun violence in our community. The Board of Commissioners proclaimed June 2024 as Gun Violence Prevention and Awareness Month. The measure for this goal will pull from Emergency Services medical software system (ESO) to identify all gun-related incidents requiring emergency medical response in Buncombe County.

Target Rationale

The recommended target for this goal is influenced by a variety of factors, including the significant fluctuation and lack of clear trending direction among numbers of gun-related injuries/deaths year-to-year, and the variety of factors outside of county control that will impact these numbers. While Buncombe County can realistically expect to impact the amount of gun-related injuries in our community through the work of the Buncombe County Sheriff's Office and efforts such as the Safety Justice Challenge and Justice Service's Community Safety & Violence Prevention Plan; many factors impacting these numbers fall outside of county control, such as policing practices and policies in municipal departments and anticipated population growth during the lifespan of this strategic plan. Given the variety of influences on this trend data, subject matter experts advise setting targets at a level that account for the potential for outside environmental factors to pose a challenge to violence-reduction efforts by the county.

GOAL

Increase the number of community members that are trained in risk reduction/preparedness from 3,307 in 2024 to 20,000 by 2030.

Baseline

3,307
community members trained

FY2024

Description

The purpose of these trainings is to provide community members with information about ways to mitigate disasters within their homes and communities, expose them to helpful equipment and materials to have in an emergency, and to help them develop the ability self-sustain in the immediate hours following a disaster. This goal seeks to increase community preparedness and prevention. Training on topics including fire prevention, emergency management and response principles, emergency preparedness planning will reduce community members' vulnerability to the most detrimental impacts of increasingly prevalent natural disasters.

Target Rationale

Based on the number of resources currently available for conducting these training courses, the County's subject matter experts believe that increasing the number of community members trained to 20,000 is an achievable target.

GOAL

Improve the percentage of Child Protective Services cases that are initiated on time from 87.2% in 2024 to 95% by 2030.

Baseline

FY 2024
87.2%

FY 2023
86.8%

FY 2022
87.2%

FY 2021
90.2%

FY 2020
92.2%

Description

This goal seeks to improve the percentage of Child Protective Services cases initiated "on time," as determined by NC General Statute. This involves ensuring alleged victim children are seen, initial interviews take place and safety planning with caregivers begins immediately, within 24 hours or within 72 hours, based on the severity of the allegations.

Target Rationale

Based on the number of resources currently available for conducting these training courses, the County's subject matter experts believe that increasing the number of community members trained to 20,000 is an achievable target.

Objective 2

Increase hazard mitigation and disaster preparedness to support a climate resilient community.

GOAL

Increase the number of core emergency capabilities tested from 9 in 2025 to 21 (65% of the total 32) by 2030.

Description

This goal aligns with Federal standards to increase disaster resilience through the establishment of facilities, rehearsal of policies and procedures to coordinate emergency responses across departments and municipalities. These efforts will increase emergency response programs' ability to mitigate harm and increase safety during public health crises and/or natural disasters. The "response capabilities" included in this goal refer to the 32 total Core Capabilities defined by FEMA for disaster preparedness.

Target Rationale

Public Health tests roughly 30% of its current capabilities. Emergency Services personnel advise that some of the FEMA-defined capabilities are broad and touch multiple disciplines and are easily included in various types of exercises (e.g., Situation Assessment, Operational Coordination), while others (e.g., Forensics & Attribution, Supply Chain Integrity) are more specialized/granular and can be difficult to incorporate into some scenarios. Currently, Emergency Services are ramping up their testing of core capabilities and should be able to meet the increase by 2030. This target reflects a desire to have integrated emergency preparedness training across departments and agencies.

Baseline

There are a total of 32 total capabilities - the table below shows current progress

Public Health:
15 Core Capacities

2024
5 core capabilities tested

2023
5 core capabilities tested

2022
2 core capabilities tested

Emergency Services:
17 Core Capacities

2025
4 core capabilities tested

2024
0 core capabilities tested
(not tracked)

GOAL

Increase the number of stream gauges from 12 to 18 (50% increase) by 2030.

Description

Stream gauges are tools for monitoring and managing water resources to assist with flow measurements, flood forecasting, and water quality monitoring. Data from stream gauges are vital for predicting floods and managing flood risks through real-time monitoring of flows to issue timely warnings to protect life and property.

Baseline

July 2024 **NCFIMAN** (Flood Inundation Mapping and Alert Network) website shows

12

stream gauges in Buncombe County.

Target Rationale

Current cost of stream gauges with integration to the NCFIMAN system is approximately $25,000 each. Subject matter experts believe that a 50% increase was a feasible goal since we currently only have 12 gauges and that would equate to adding six. Six additional gauges would be $150,000 expenditure. Limiting factors are funding and appropriate bridges in proximity to areas of concern for mounting the gauges, and NCDOT or municipally maintained roads as opposed to private roads.

GOAL

Implement four levels of public safety communication planning for emergency operations based on the PACE model by 2030.

Description

The PACE model for public safety communications identifies four levels of communication – Primary, Alternative, Contingency, and Emergency – for ensuring effective public services during routine operations and disaster scenarios alike.

Establishing a comprehensive communication strategy through the implementation of this model will ensure continuous and reliable communication, even if the primary systems fail. This will provide continued support and effective emergency responses for the community during any incident or event that may affect general communication lines.

Baseline

The baseline for this measure is 0, as the work of assessing and improving Buncombe County's compliance with these standards was initiated in response to Tropical Storm Helene's catastrophic impacts on communications infrastructure and access in Buncombe County.

Target Rationale

The implementation of a four-tiered communication strategy using the PACE model is essential to strengthen and maintain the reliability and resiliency of 911 emergency operations. Successful implementation of this model will require planning, coordination across agencies, and integration of new technologies; accordingly, 2030 represents an ambitious yet achievable timeline to ensure Buncombe County actively operates all four levels of the PACE model. Approximately $25,000 each. Subject matter experts believe that a 50% increase was a feasible goal since we currently only have 12 gauges and that would equate to adding six. Six additional gauges would be $150,000 expenditure. Limiting factors are funding and appropriate bridges in proximity to areas of concern for mounting the gauges, and NCDOT or municipally maintained roads as opposed to private roads.

GOAL

Develop and conduct annual wildfire hazard seasonal awareness campaigns targeting areas where risk is high by 2030.

Description

Many recent natural disasters are scientifically linked to climate change, including more frequent and severe hurricanes, floods, droughts, and wildfires. Through preparedness education and reactionary support to the severe impacts associated with climate change, Emergency Services and CAPE will work to conduct outreach with the community on how to be more climate resilient.

Baseline

We have historically completed some public awareness efforts but not specifically targeted at residents of hazard areas. Targeting the information to those most at risk (i.e. residents in particular hazard areas) is a new idea.

Target Rationale

Given the current capacity of the organization, prioritizing an annual wildfire outreach campaign is achievable and a worthwhile objective.

Objective 3

Enhance individualized diversion services.

GOAL

Increase the number of responses by trauma-informed alternate emergency responder services from 5,208 in 2025 to 6,250 (20% increase) by 2030.

Baseline

2025 (based on annual run-rate) – 5,208 total responses annually

BCSO Co-Responder (April 2024 - July 2025): 926 - Avg. per month of 62 or 744 annually

Community Paramedic PORT (April - December 2024): 2,976 – Avg. per month of 372 per month or 4,464 annually

Description

This goal seeks to increase the number of emergency calls for immediate assistance that are responded to by alternate responder services in Buncombe County. “Alternate emergency responder services” include the Community Paramedics Post Overdose Response Team (PORT) program and the Sheriff’s Office co-responder unit. These trauma-informed services seek to divert individuals in need of behavioral health support away from criminal detention and/or hospitalization, toward sustainable care with community-based providers.

Target Rationale

This recommendation is based on an analysis of recent trends in response demand by the two existing alternate emergency response services actively operating under the county umbrella: the Buncombe County Sheriff’s Office CoResponder Unit and the Community Paramedic PORT program. While the PORT team has been in operation since November 2020 the Co-Responder unit is a newer program, with data tracking back to April of 2024 when the program launched in earnest following a successful pilot in the summer of 2023. The target has been established based on current staffing levels, call volume, and available program funding.

GOAL

Maintain the percent of Community Re-entry program participants who do not receive new charges within in a 6-month period at 80%.

Baseline

2025:

83.4%

2024:

80.8%

Description

Most rearrests happen in the first year following release from a period of incarceration, indicating that the months immediately following release are a crucial period in a person's re-entry process. The Community Re-entry program is designed to assist those recently released from incarceration. providing community linkage to care and support for up to 12 months post-incarceration for individuals with severe and persistent mental health conditions and/or substance use disorders. This goal aims for at least 80% of participants in the Community Re-entry program to not experience an arrest for new charge within the first six months of program participation.

Target Rationale

Most new charges occur within the first year following an individual's release from a period of incarceration, indicating that analysis of new charges 6 months after program engagement is a potent assessment of program efficacy.

GOAL

Increase the number of eligible cases referred for diversion services from 340 in 2025 to 364 (10% increase) by 2030.

Baseline

FY 2022: **237**

FY 2023: **377**

FY 2024: **423**

FY 2025 (Q1-Q3): **176**

FY 2025 projection based on previous Q4 enrollments: **256**

Baseline is an average of FY 2024 & 2025: **340**

Description

This goal seeks to increase the number of eligible cases that are enrolled in county-operated diversion programs. One of the core purposes of diversion programing is to increase public safety by reducing individual criminal justice involvement by addressing issues directly related to an individual's likelihood to re-offend and commit another crime. This goal will include the felony drug diversion program and the adult misdemeanor drug diversion program.

Target Rationale

10% increase would be an additional 34 enrollments by 2030. Subject matter experts feel that this is an obtainable target due to recently revised eligibility criteria and approval processes with the D.A.'s office.



Focus Area: Energy and Environment

This focus area is dedicated to preserving Buncombe County's natural resources while advancing sustainability and environmental stewardship. The Energy and Environment focus area prioritizes preserving the county's agricultural heritage, conserving natural resources, promoting climate resiliency, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions to ensure a more sustainable future for all residents.

Objective 1

Preserve the agriculture heritage of Buncombe County and prioritize the conservation of natural resources

GOAL

Increase economic viability and stability of agriculture by supporting 20 farmers with workshops, business planning, and farm estate planning by 2030.

Baseline

This is a new program, so the baseline is zero.

Description

Ag and Land Resources is currently working with partners to create a task force to support local farmers to not only conserve the land, but to ensure that the land is used for farming with future generations and owners. Part of the plan to create this is to work individually with farmers through workshops to teach and empower them to create business plans and future estate planning to reach those goals.

Target Rationale

Based on current research, we know there is interest in the community and the target of 20 farmers seems achievable but far from certain.

GOAL

Increase the percentage of total recycled waste generated in Buncombe County to include Construction & Demolition waste (C&D) from 9.9% in 2024 to 20% by 2030.

Baseline

9.9%

FY24

Description

Through Buncombe County's continued emphasis on its recycling program and partnerships and its upcoming composting facility pilot program, Buncombe County Solid Waste is dedicated to diverting 20% of waste, including construction and demolition waste, from the County's landfill.

Target Rationale

- Rapid and exponential growth in our county creates more waste from consumers as well as construction and demolition debris.
- Consideration must be given for large Industrial and/or commercial businesses creating large amounts of waste that are not recyclable and must be landfilled; thus, driving our diversion rate down.

GOAL

Restore 10,000 linear feet of streambank by 2030.

Description

This goal is more important than ever given the impacts of Tropical Storm Helene. Streambank restoration is essential to improve water clarity, for erosion control, to promote habitat restoration for organisms which increase water quality, flood mitigation, and aesthetic and recreational value. Ag and Land Resources is going to work with community and state partnerships to obtain resources, promote, and fund the projects necessary to improve and maintain the cleanliness of our waterways.

Baseline

This is a new measure. We do not currently have a baseline.

Target Rationale: 10,000 linear feet.

We do not have the budget to implement the program; we will rely on partners and grant funds primarily. Also, we must find willing landowners who meet grant guidelines which could prove to be challenging due to buffer requirements, need agreements between several adjacent and across the creek landowners.

GOAL

Conserve 20% of the county's total acres by 2030 by initiating conservation of 700 acres per year (board adopted goal).

Description

This is a goal that has been previously adopted by the BOCC outside the Strategic Plan. Elevating this goal into the Strategic Plan further increases its priority.

Baseline

When this goal was created, we needed to protect an additional 5,566 acres to meet the goal of 20% of Buncombe County protected by 2030. We currently stand at 19.5% of the 20% goal.

Target Rationale

Since the Commissioners began supporting conservation easements in the general fund back in 2006, we have fully protected 8,929 acres through LCAB and AAB. The Commissioners allocated roughly $9,000,000 to protect these acres. We currently have an additional 2,537 acres that are in the process of being protected but have not been closed. Currently we have approximately $3,000,000 allocated to these projects. So, in the span of 18 years, we have initiated the protection of 11,466 acres or on average 637 acres protected per year. If we stay on that trajectory, over a 5-year span that would equate to 3,185 additional acres protected. Buncombe County is comprised of 420,480 acres. One percent of that equates to 4,205 acres. Thus, for every percentage point raised, the result would be an additional 4,205 acres we would need to identify for protection. And remember, with every easement closed it becomes more difficult to identify suitable lands for conservation – meaning that meet the criteria for conservation easements. Timing to close – 1) if it's a donation, it takes up to 1.5 years; 2) if it requires funds, it take up to 3 years to close; 3) thus, .07 is not insignificant.

We are on track to meet this goal and possibly exceed it by a fraction. If we went to 21%, we do not have those additional acres identified in our pipeline currently. At current expenditure of the Open Space Bond, it is highly unlikely that funding will be available to assist with achieving protecting these additional acres.

Objective 2

Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect air quality.

GOAL

Increase residential solar installations from 165, which resulted from a previous solarize campaign in 2022, to 200 from future solarize campaigns (an 18% increase), by 2030.

Baseline

165

participants in the 2022 solarize campaign

Description

County-wide solarization programs connect homeowners and businesses to affordable options and resources to funding assistance for solar energy projects. This program helps to create more alternative energy options for Buncombe County residents.

Target Rationale

Subject matter experts, recommending a target of 200 residential solar installations, considered the following:

- Data from other communities show a 30-50% drop in participation for each successive solarize campaign – diminishing returns.
- Assumes that available incentive programs will minimize drops in participation.

GOAL

Increase the quantity of organic compost offset from the landfill from 250.5 tons in 2024 to 900 tons by 2030.

Baseline

250.5

tons FY2024

Description

Buncombe County Solid Waste is in the first stages of their composting facility pilot program which aims to divert organic waste and materials from the landfill to both extend the life of the landfill and increase the green footprint associated with Solid Waste programs.

Target Rationale

While current NC permitting requirements will cap the amount of compost the facility can initially accept, the 900-ton diversion goal remains a long-term target. Achieving it by 2030 will depend on scaling operations over time, which would require new permits and

updates to the facility plan to transition from a pilot program to a more permanent operation. Additionally, the current 250.5-ton baseline is the result of a food scrap pilot drop-off program, so more will be anticipated when this full-scale program becomes increasingly operational.

GOAL

Increase publicly available electric vehicle charging ports at County facilities from 9 in 2024 to 25 by 2030.

Baseline
9
as of September 2024

Description

Expanding electric vehicle charging ports at County facilities supports Buncombe County's transition to a cleaner fleet and reduces greenhouse gas emissions from government operations. It also increases public access to sustainable transportation infrastructure, aligning with the County's broader renewable energy and climate goals.

Target Rationale

Based on planned construction projects and site suitability, staff believe this is a reasonable target.

GOAL

Achieve 100% renewable energy usage for County operations by 2030 (board adopted goal).

Baseline
8%
as of July 2024

Description

Buncombe County's 100% renewable energy goal reflects a strategic commitment to transition government operations to renewable sources by 2030 and extend that shift community-wide by 2042. This initiative emphasizes operational efficiency, fiscal responsibility, and regional collaboration while supporting clean energy infrastructure aligned with the County Commissioners' priorities

Target Rationale

The subject matter experts recommend a target of 40% considering the following:

- The 5 MW Woodfin solar facility is now operational
- The goal will not be achieved through the purchase of RECs
- Most viable rooftops have already been developed
- New buildings being designed solar but are still not net-zero
- Utility scale projects take multiple years to identify, design, install, permit



Focus Area: Foundational

This focus area is centered on the internal operations of Buncombe County as an organization. While the other focus areas concentrate on various elements of life in Buncombe County as a community, identifying goals the county will pursue to enhance the overall quality of life for Buncombe residents; the Foundational focus area seeks to establish priorities to enhance operational excellence for the county as an employer and customer service provider. Put differently, this focus area supports departments' ability to meet the goals laid out in the rest of the strategic plan.

Objective 1

Optimize business practices.

GOAL

Increase small business participation (based on responses) in solicitations by at least 10% year over year through 2030.

Baseline

Small business participation in the bidding process is not currently measured

Description

This goal seeks to strengthen Buncombe County's Procurement processes, providing equal opportunity for small businesses (as defined by the state), where Federal, State, and Local law allows.

Target Rationale

10% can be realistically achieved according to Finance staff, but this is new work, and we don't really know what's possible.

GOAL

By 2030 ensure 85% of annual service contracts have at least 2 performance indicator.

Baseline

This is not currently measured.

Description

This goal seeks to create consistency in the annual service contract terms and ensure we are measuring and tracking the outcomes of Buncombe County's contracts.

Target Rationale

County staff believe 85% is achievable due to the work within HHS (which has the bulk of County contracts).

GOAL

Increase the overall quality of customer service rating on the community survey from 65% in 2024 to 75% by 2030.

Baseline

65%
on 2024 survey

Description

This is a question on the bi-annual community survey that is sent to Buncombe County residents. The question asked is, "Please rate the overall quality of customer service received"

Target Rationale

10 percentage points given historical survey data.

GOAL

Ensure 85% of annual service contracts have standardize data collection by 2030.

Baseline

Unknown

Description

This goal seeks to ensure data collection is built into annual service contracts so Buncombe County can increase the available data on services offered to the community and do it in a standardized way.

Target Rationale

We are following the target from goal #2 in this objective with the logic that we will be edited and tracking annual service contracts for performance indicators and can utilize that process to standardize the related data collection.

Objective 2

Focus on strengthening organizational culture.

GOAL

Increase the favorable score on cross department collaboration from 53% in 2024 to 64% (the government benchmark) by 2030.

Baseline

53%
on 2024 survey

Description

This will be captured via an employee survey question of, “There is effective collaboration between teams at this organization”

Target Rationale

Government benchmark (2024 is 64%).

GOAL

Increase the favorable score on the work life balance category within the employee survey from 63% in 2024 to 76% (the government benchmark) by 2030.

Baseline

63%
on 2024 survey

Description

This will be captured via 2 employee survey questions to gauge employee sentiments regarding work-life balance: “This organization supports my efforts to balance my work and personal life” and “I can manage my job responsibilities in a way that enables healthy work-life balance.”

Target Rationale

We want to reach the government benchmark (2024 = 76%).

GOAL

Increase the favorable score on the work life balance category within the employee survey from 63% in 2024 to 76% (the government benchmark) by 2030.

Baseline

AVG 53%
(63% psychological safety, 43% communication)
on 2024 survey

Description

This will be captured via the following employee survey questions:
““I can share my opinions openly without fear of retaliation,” “My manager values my perspective, even if it is different from their own”, and “there is open and honest communication at this organization.”

Target Rationale

The average of the government benchmark (2024 = 62%).

GOAL

Increase the overall quality of satisfaction with internal service departments according to the internal customer service survey from 60% in 2024 to 70% by 2030.

Baseline

60%
on 2024 internal survey

Description

This measure will come from an annual survey sent to supervisors and above within the organization and asks the question, ““What is your level of satisfaction with internal customer service.”

Target Rationale

County staff feel 10 percentage points is appropriate given historical survey data.

GOAL

Increase the favorable score on employee innovation from 70% in 2024 to 75% (the corporate benchmark) by 2030.

Baseline

70%
on 2024 employee survey

Description

This will be captured via the following employee survey question, “I am encouraged to come up with better ways of doing things.”

Target Rationale

The corporate benchmark (2024 is 75%).

Objective 3

Grow and retain Buncombe County employees.

GOAL

Increase the favorable score on the meaningful recognition employee survey question from 57% in 2024 to 64% (the government benchmark) by 2030.

Baseline
57%
on 2024 employee survey

Description

This measure will come from the employee survey question of, "I receive meaningful recognition when I do a good job."

Target Rationale

The government benchmark (2024 is 64%).

GOAL

Increase the favorable score on the employee survey questions related to career development & growth from 61% in 2024 to 67% (the corporate benchmark) by 2030.

Baseline
61%
on 2024 employee survey

Description

This measure will come from the employee survey questions of, "Overall, I feel that my career goals can be met at this organization" and "I have meaningful discussions with my manager about my career development."

Target Rationale

Corporate benchmark (2024 = 67%).

GOAL

Decrease Annual Turnover from 13% in 2024 to 10% by 2030.

Baseline
13.35%
FY24

Description

The purpose of this goal is to focus on retaining the talent that exists within Buncombe County. Potential initiatives that would be implemented to impact this goal include a focus on new hire turnover, formalizing an exit process, and creating stay surveys.

Target Rationale

A 3% decrease is realistic given historical turnover rates.

Appendix

Strategic Plan 2030

Community Engagement Report

Strategy & Innovation

November 2025

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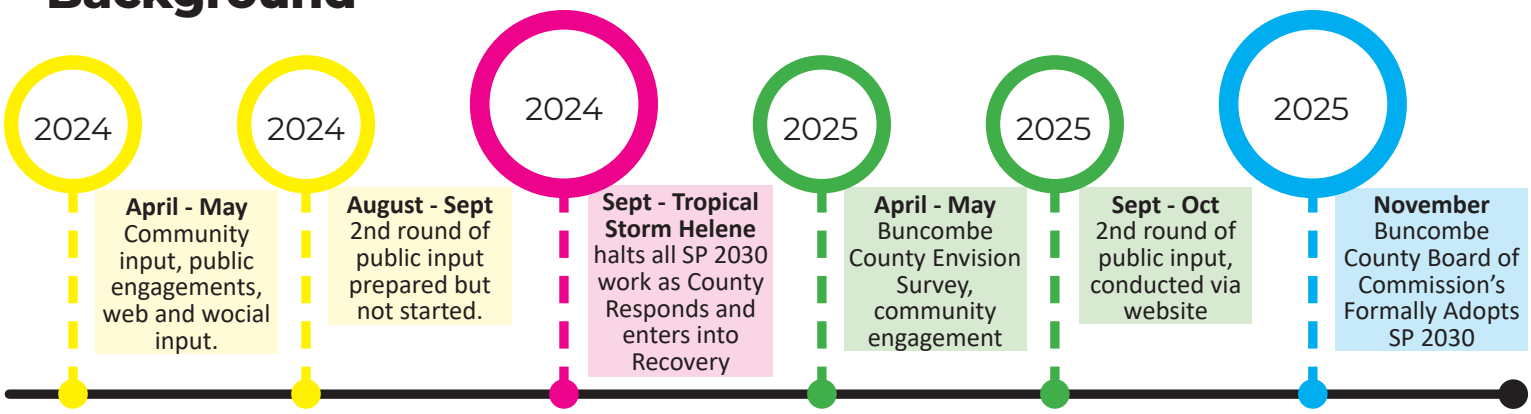
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Background



Development of Buncombe County's 2030 Strategic Plan began in early 2024, as the 2025 Strategic Plan was scheduled to sunset at the end of that year. By the fall of 2024, the new Strategic Plan was close to completion, with a thorough round of community input complete and draft strategic goals developed by county staff. The plan was in its final stages of development moving toward adoption by the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners scheduled for October of 2024. However, when Tropical Storm Helene impacted Buncombe County that September, the County moved quickly into disaster response and recovery; providing the community with life-saving and sustaining recovery resources became the focus, and strategic planning efforts were placed on hold.

In the spring of 2025, work began again on the Strategic Plan, now organized in coordination with the novel necessity of outlining long-term needs to repair the damage caused by Tropical Storm Helene. In order to reintroduce the Strategic Plan to the community while also identifying priorities for disaster recovery, Buncombe County conducted a comprehensive survey designed to gather public input on development of the Tropical Storm Helene Recovery Plan while also informing updates to the draft 2030 Strategic Plan to ensure this document accurately reflects emerging priorities for a community in recovery from natural disaster.

This survey, launched under the brand "Envision Buncombe" asked participants to (1) rank Strategic Plan focus areas by the degree to which they reflect recovery priorities, (2) select projects most important to repair and restore the community from the impacts of the storm, and (3) to share open-ended feedback about what they would like to see Buncombe County prioritize in these efforts.

County staff worked closely with subject matter experts and the elected Board of County Commissioners to reflect insights from the Envision Buncombe survey into the original draft strategic plan developed prior to Tropical Storm Helene. To ensure that these edits accurately captured the sentiments gathered in the spring of 2025, the county conducted a final round of community engagement, titled "Envision Buncombe: A Path Forward" in the fall of 2025 to provide community members a chance to see the draft Strategic Plan and provide feedback on this content.

This report details the efforts and results from all three stages of community engagement – the original public input captured in 2024, the renewed efforts in the spring of 2025, and final feedback requested in the fall of 2025 – conducted by Buncombe County to inform content development of the 20230 Strategic Plan prior to its adoption.

Engagement overview

2024

Initial community engagement for the 2030 Strategic Planning process was conducted in April and May of 2024 through multiple formats, including in-person facilitated discussions, drop-in mobile community input opportunities, virtual feedback opportunities, and an online survey. A summary of this engagement approach can be seen below:

- Engage Buncombe online survey
  - » Marketed through social media, radio advertising, traditional media press releases
- 15 facilitated discussions with community organizations, including:
  - » Neighborhood associations
  - » Special interest communities, such as:
    - ▫ Aging residents
    - ▫ Youth organizations
    - ▫ Associations representing community members who speak English as a second language
  - » Buncombe County employees
  - » Faith leaders
  - » Virtual public forum on strategic planning
- 4 mobile drop-in events, inviting written input via display table at community events
- In-person events were held in 9 distinct zip codes across Buncombe County:

28701	28730	28801
28709	28748	28803
28715	28778	28806

Spring 2025

"Envision Buncombe" engagement and surveying were conducted from April 10 - May 31, 2025. The goal of this survey was to seek community input on Tropical Storm Helene Recovery Plan and the 2030 Strategic Plan priorities.

- Digital marketing campaign & online engagement opportunities were promoted through social media, radio programming, and the Public Input Envision Buncombe website.
- Engagement included 28 in-person events:
  - » Tabling at 12 community events & resource fairs
  - » Informational presentation facilitated with 11 community partners
  - » Presentation to 5 municipal districts:
    - ▫ Weaverville Town Council
    - ▫ Biltmore Forest Board of Commissioners
    - ▫ Black Mountain Town Council
    - ▫ Montreat Town Council
    - ▫ Woodfin Town Council
- In-person events were held in 13 distinct zip codes:

28701	28711	28757	28801	28806
28704	28715	28778	28803	28709
28730	28787	28804		

Fall 2025

In the Fall of 2025, from September 16 through October 3, a second round of post-Helene surveying was conducted. Titled "Envision Buncombe: A Path Forward", this survey provided an opportunity for community members to provide feedback on the 2030 Strategic Plan and Helene Recovery Plan content. Digital marketing of this survey was conducted through:

- Press releases
- Announcements and posts on the County's social media pages
- An internal email campaign to all Buncombe County employees
- Radio interviews
- Direct email outreach to participants who requested process updates through the community input survey conducted in the spring of 2025

Participation overview

2024

In total, the Engage Buncombe facilitated discussions, drop-in mobile events, and online surveys conducted in the fall of 2024 gathered input from 407 participants, who self-identified as living within the following zip codes across Buncombe County:

Spring 2024 Participation, by Zip Code	Responses
28806	17%
28803	13%
28704	9%
28801	7%
28715	6%
28787	6%
28748	5%
28711	5%
28805	5%
Other (< 5% each)	27%

Spring 2025

The “Envision Buncombe” survey conducted in the spring of 2025 resulted in the following participation:

2,622 survey submissions

Survey participation, by locality*:

Alexander	1%	Ridgecrest	<1%
Arden	5%	Swannanoa	10%
Barnardsville	2%	Town of Biltmore Forest	3%
Buncombe County – other	7%	Town of Black Mountain	5%
Candler	7%	Town of Montreat	1%
City of Asheville	35%	Town of Weaverville	6%
Fairview	6%	Town of Woodfin	3%
Fletcher	1%		
Leicester	6%		
Outside Buncombe County	2%		

*Please note, respondent home location data was collected by locality during the survey conducted in spring 2025 to reflect the hyper-regional impacts of Tropical Storm Helene. While all of Buncombe County was impacted by the storm, some areas experienced more

catastrophic damage than others. Allowing participants to select their home community, beyond zip code designations, was an intentional strategy to enhance understanding of the survey results, particularly for those questions designed to inform development of the Helene Recovery Plan.

Fall 2025

The dynamic marketing strategies for the online-only survey form of engagement for the fall 2025 feedback survey resulted in the following participation*

- 3,387 individual views of the survey page/content
- 41 participants
- 45 Comments Submitted

*Participant location data is not available for the fall 2025 data, due to limited response to the survey question asking respondents to self-identify their home locality within Buncombe County.

Results

2024 Trending Data

During the 2024 engagement activities, participants were provided with the opportunity to share their priorities for change and/or movement toward their desired for vision for Buncombe County in 2030. Those open-ended responses were categorized by strategic plan focus area, topic, and key themes within each topic. Details of this categorization can be seen in the tables below:

In total, residents and employees submitted 1,076 responses, the breakdown of which are displayed below:

2024 Public Input, by Focus Area		
Focus Area	**# of Responses**	**% of Responses**
Education	170	16%
Economic Development	120	11%
Growth & Development	294	27%
Health & Public Safety	169	16%
Energy & Environment	120	16%
Other	155	14%
TOTAL	**1,076**	

2024 Public Input Results, Themes by Topic			
Rank	Topic	Category Themes	Focus Area
1	Affordable Housing & Cost of Living	Rising rent and housing prices, correlation between housing prices and homelessness, need for affordable housing options	Growth & Development / Health & Public Safety
2	Transportation & Public Transit	Increased traffic congestion, need for public transportation infrastructure, environmental impact of limited transportation options	Growth & Development
3	Supporting Teachers and Students	Increased funding and support for educators, equity in education, mental health and safety	Education
4	Healthcare Access & Services	Accessibility and dependability of healthcare services, mental health and substance use treatment, workforce turnover in healthcare	Health & Public Safety
5	Land Use & Zoning	Balancing growth with infrastructure development, protection of natural resources, support for legacy neighborhoods	Growth & Development
6	Environmental Conservation & Renewable Energy	Protection of natural resources, investment in renewable energy, transportation's environmental impact	Energy & Environment
7	Public Safety & Law Enforcement	Increased support for first responders, trauma-informed alternatives to policing, perception of safety decline	Health & Public Safety
8	Support for Local Businesses	Easier access to resources and funding, diversity and inclusion, cooperative business models	Economic Development
9	Supporting the Unhoused	Correlation between mental health/ substance use and homelessness, dissatisfaction with homelessness visibility, creative housing solutions	Health & Public Safety
10	Support & Access for Underserved Communities	Need for more resources for underserved communities, concerns about gentrification and displacement, mistrust in local institutions	Health & Public Safety / Growth & Development
11	Affordable Childcare	Increased options and expansion of childcare, financial incentives for providers, integration with education system	Education
12	Living Wage	Fair compensation, improved housing conditions, tax relief programs	Economic Development
13	Mental Health Services	Strain on mental health services, insufficient treatment options, support for mental health professionals	Health & Public Safety

14	Education & Teacher Pay	Staff and financial incentives for teachers, comprehensive benefits, recruitment of black teachers	Education
15	Community & Public Safety	Trauma-informed alternatives to policing, perception of safety decline	Health & Public Safety
16	Environmental Sustainability	Desire for green spaces, interest in recycling, correlation with transportation infrastructure	Energy & Environment
17	Homelessness & Support Services	Investing in support programs, preventing homelessness, incentivizing long-term rentals	Growth & Development
18	Infrastructure & Road Improvements	Repair and maintenance of infrastructure, frustration over road expansion delays, investment in multi-modal transportation	Growth & Development

Spring 2025

The following table represents the results of the spring 2025 Envision Buncombe survey question pertaining to the 2030 Strategic Plan:

"Please rank these topics, based on which most strongly reflects your priorities/needs to fully recover from the impacts of T.S. Helene"

Rank	**Topic**
1	Community Health
2	Public Safety
3	Energy & Environment
4	Economy/Workforce
5	Education
6	Growth & Development/Infrastructure

The table below reflects themes identified through qualitative analysis of survey responses to an open-ended question asking to describe their post-disaster priorities, coded by Strategic Plan Focus Area:

Focus Area	**Spring 2025 Survey Response Themes**
Community Health	Concerns about mental health, trauma, and substance use post-Helene. Support for more trauma-informed care and accessible community wellness programs. Requests for improved senior services and mobile health outreach, especially in rural areas.
Economic Development	Interest in diversifying the economy beyond tourism: investments in local arts, agriculture, trades, and green jobs. Support for living wages, small business relief, and re-skilling for displaced workers. Desire for long-term economic strategies that reduce dependency on a small number of industries.

Education	Community demands renewed investment in public schools, particularly in hard-hit areas. Emphasis on teacher retention, student mental health, and year-round after-school programs. Requests for climate and disaster preparedness education in schools.
Energy & Environment	Prioritization of flood mitigation, riparian zone restoration, and green infrastructure. Advocacy for hybrid vehicles, solar energy, and energy grid upgrades. Concern over wildfire risk due to debris and tree loss; need for long-term environmental restoration plans
Growth & Development	Resistance to further construction in flood-prone or ecologically sensitive areas. Calls for updated zoning and permitting processes to prioritize environmental resilience. Advocacy for repurposing underutilized buildings for community housing and public.
Public Safety	System-wide calls for improved disaster communication systems (e.g., emergency sirens, printed contingency plans). Support for enhanced disaster response training & institutional infrastructure. Recognition of fire departments as central responders.

Fall 2025

The following table represents key themes gathered from open-ended responses to the fall 2025 “Envision Buncombe: A Path Forward” survey question pertaining to the 2030 Strategic Plan:

“Do you believe there is anything missing within the Draft Buncombe County Strategic Plan?”

Topic	
Growth & Development / Infrastructure	Homelessness
Preparedness & Resilience	Economy / Workforce Support
Public Safety	Transportation
Housing	Aging Population
Mental Health	Parks / Greenways / Green Spaces
Energy & Environment	Government Accountability

Summary

Community engagement for the 2030 Strategic Plan included numerous outreach and feedback efforts, both in person and online. Engagement work began in the Spring of 2024 but was interrupted and delayed following Tropical Storm Helene. Community outreach resumed in the Spring of 2025, with a focus on updating priorities and adapting the Strategic Plan to reflect the County's post-disaster challenges. Community guidance led the County to develop 7 focus areas that include 17 objectives with 64 goals. These goals and objectives reflect community input, guidance from subject matter experts, and reflect priorities resulting from the storm. Overall, Strategic Plan 2030 integrates broad community input into a cohesive strategy that will guide county work, investments and, recovery efforts through 2030.

Overall, 3,739 responses were collected, and County staff conducted 45 in person events and 2 virtual town halls.


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Avril Pinder



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