Buncombe County, NC

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

Voter Approved Funding for Land Conservation and Affordable Housing in Buncombe County:

Feasibility Report Presentation

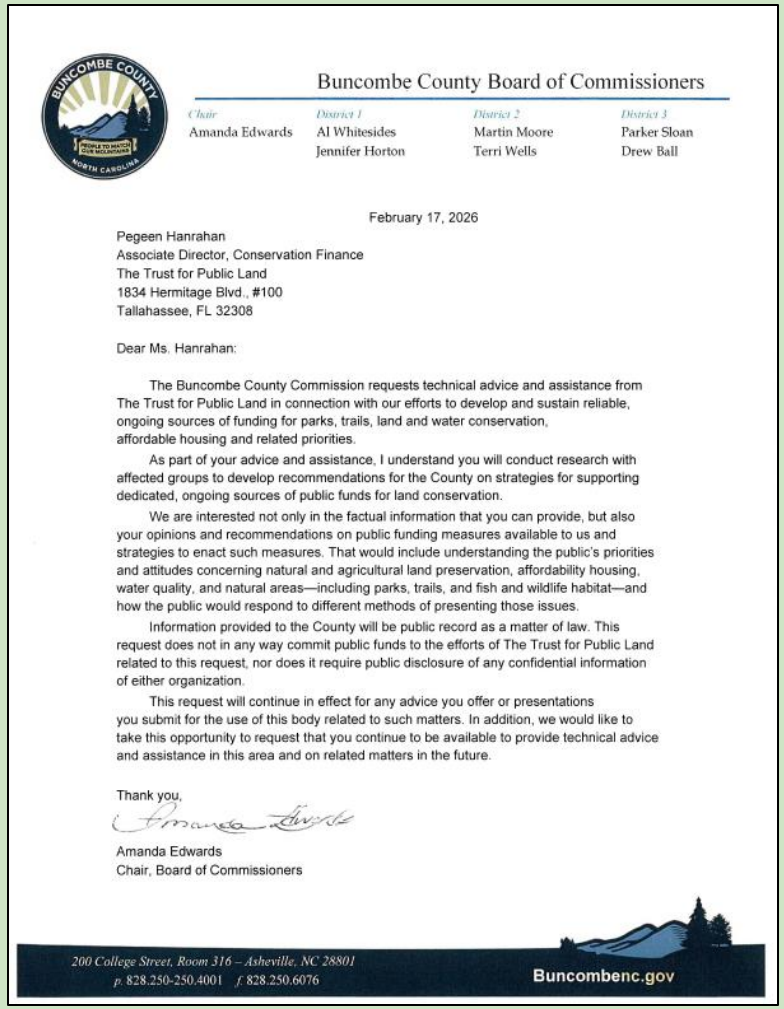
May 5, 2026

Ryan Olson,
Southern Appalachian Conservation Finance Director

Jessica Welch, Senior Conservation Research Analyst

Thank You for Your Request to Assist

The Trust for Public Land's Southern Appalachians work is funded by the Green South Foundation and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.



Buncombe County Board of Commissioners

Chair	District 1	District 2	District 3
Amanda Edwards	Al Whitesides Jennifer Horton	Martin Moore Terri Wells	Parker Sloan Drew Ball

February 17, 2026

Pegeen Hanrahan
Associate Director, Conservation Finance
The Trust for Public Land
1834 Hermitage Blvd., #100
Tallahassee, FL 32308

Dear Ms. Hanrahan:

The Buncombe County Commission requests technical advice and assistance from The Trust for Public Land in connection with our efforts to develop and sustain reliable, ongoing sources of funding for parks, trails, land and water conservation, affordable housing and related priorities.

As part of your advice and assistance, I understand you will conduct research with affected groups to develop recommendations for the County on strategies for supporting dedicated, ongoing sources of public funds for land conservation.

We are interested not only in the factual information that you can provide, but also your opinions and recommendations on public funding measures available to us and strategies to enact such measures. That would include understanding the public's priorities and attitudes concerning natural and agricultural land preservation, affordability housing, water quality, and natural areas—including parks, trails, and fish and wildlife habitat—and how the public would respond to different methods of presenting those issues.

Information provided to the County will be public record as a matter of law. This request does not in any way commit public funds to the efforts of The Trust for Public Land related to this request, nor does it require public disclosure of any confidential information of either organization.

This request will continue in effect for any advice you offer or presentations you submit for the use of this body related to such matters. In addition, we would like to take this opportunity to request that you continue to be available to provide technical advice and assistance in this area and on related matters in the future.

Thank you,

Amanda Edwards
Chair, Board of Commissioners

200 College Street, Room 316 – Asheville, NC 28801
p. 828.250-250.4001 f. 828.250.6076
Buncombenc.gov

Connecting everyone to the outdoors™







TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

TPL's Conservation Finance Program works to help communities protect the places they love and improve access for people to enjoy them through approval of funding both legislatively and at the ballot box.

Connecting everyone to the outdoors™

OUR IMPACT ACROSS THE COUNTRY

5,504
Public outdoor spaces created or protected

$112+ Billion
Secured in public funding

We've created
311
Community Schoolyards in **23** states.

4 Million Acres
protected

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND®

HOW WE DO IT



PUBLIC LAND: PUBLIC GOOD

We partner with communities where we know parks and public land have the greatest potential to deliver public good.



DATA & INSIGHT

Our Land and People Lab experts help communities make the case for more green space with sophisticated GIS-informed data.



ADVOCACY

With TPL's support and guidance, voters have approved more than $110 billion in public funding for parks and conservation.



FUNDING & LEVERAGE

Our conservation finance pros deploy their expertise, leveraging every $1 donated to return $2,000 in public funds.



PARK CREATION & TRANSFORMATION

We convene, listen to, and facilitate connections, helping our partner communities leverage relationships to realize their visions.

We Work with Cities, Counties and States to Fund Conservation and Recreation Priorities, and Often Other Needs as Well.





In North Carolina we've assisted 15 counties and municipalities and in 2022 we assisted Buncombe County in successfully passing their previous Open Space and Affordable Housing Bonds. We are currently working with two western NC counties and one municipality toward 2026 referenda.

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

Our Measures Often Include Other Capital Needs



JASPER COUNTY
South Carolina

ROAD REPAIR & GREENBELT FOR WATER & LAND PROTECTION SALES AND USE TAX REFERENDUM

NOV. 5, 2024

YES or **NO** - the decision is yours, Jasper County Voters!

VOTE EARLY OR ON ELECTION DAY

REGULAR VOTING HOURS at your precinct are from 7 A.M. to 7 P.M. on Election Day, Tuesday, November 5, 2024.

EARLY VOTING is available for anyone from Monday, October 21 to Saturday November 2, except Sunday October 27 from 8:30 A.M. to 6 P.M.

EARLY VOTING LOCATIONS:

1: Jasper County Elections Office (1506 Grays Highway, Unit A in Ridgeland)

2: St. Stephens AME Church (710 Main Street in Hardeeville)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

For additional information on Jasper County ***referendum questions*** 1 & 2 on your November 5, 2024 ballot, please contact:

County Administration
jcadministrator@jaspercountysc.gov
843-717-3690

For additional Information on ***voting locations, times and procedures***, please contact:

Jeanine M. Bostick
Director of Elections and Voters Registration
843-726-7709

QUESTION 1:

- **Approval of 1% sales tax** on most retail purchases, not including:
  - Rent/mortgage
  - Fuel
  - Prescriptions
  - Medical supplies
  - Some foods.
- 80% to transportation purposes ($376 million).
- 20% to greenbelt (land and water protection) projects, ($94 million).
- Up to a 15 year authorization, will end once the revenue limit is reached.
- County will seek private, state and federal matching funds.
- All expenditures are subject to full public disclosure and annual independent audits.
- Jointly appointed oversight board representing County, Hardeeville, Ridgeland, and School District.

QUESTION 2:

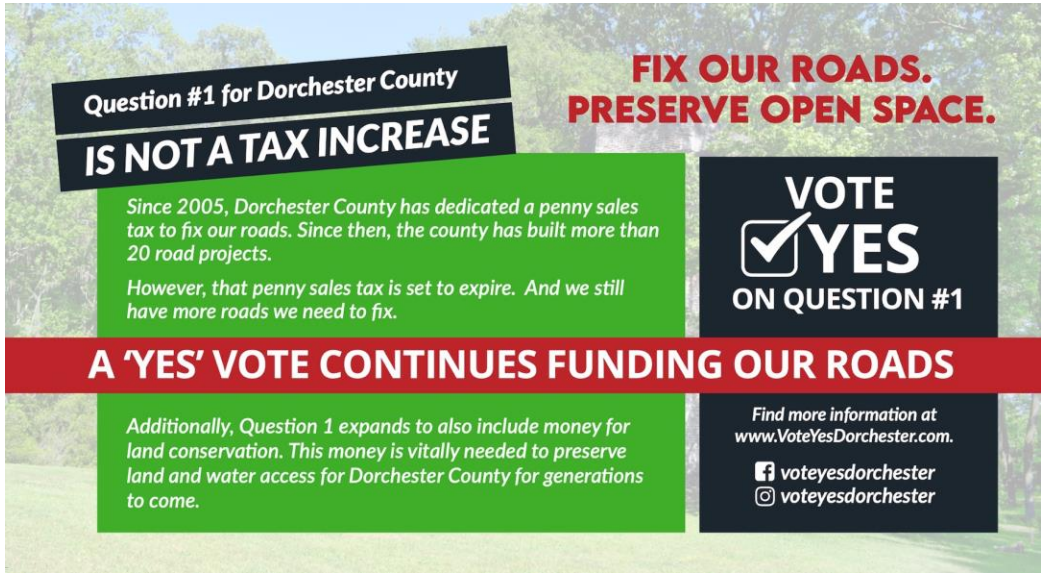
- **Approval to bond** $150 million of funds from Question 1 to complete some projects sooner.

Jasper County Questions #1 & #2 are at the **END** of your ballot!



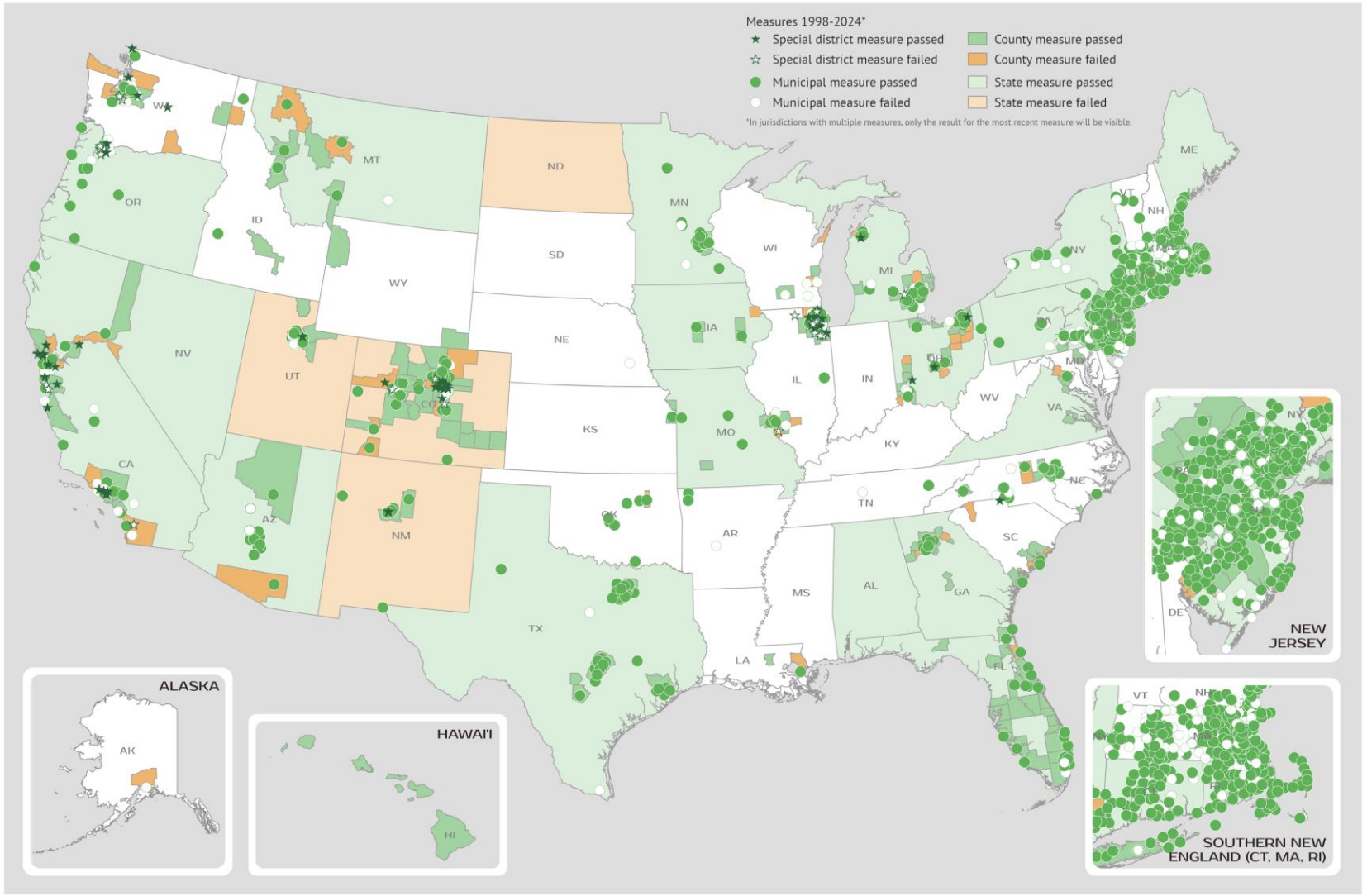








TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™



LandVote

STATE, COUNTY, MUNICIPAL, AND SPECIAL DISTRICT MEASURES 1998-2024

December 6, 2024. Copyright © Trust for Public Land. Trust for Public Land and Trust for Public Land logo are federally registered marks of Trust for Public Land. Information on this map is provided for purposes of discussion and visualization only. www.tpl.org

LandVote
www.LandVote.org

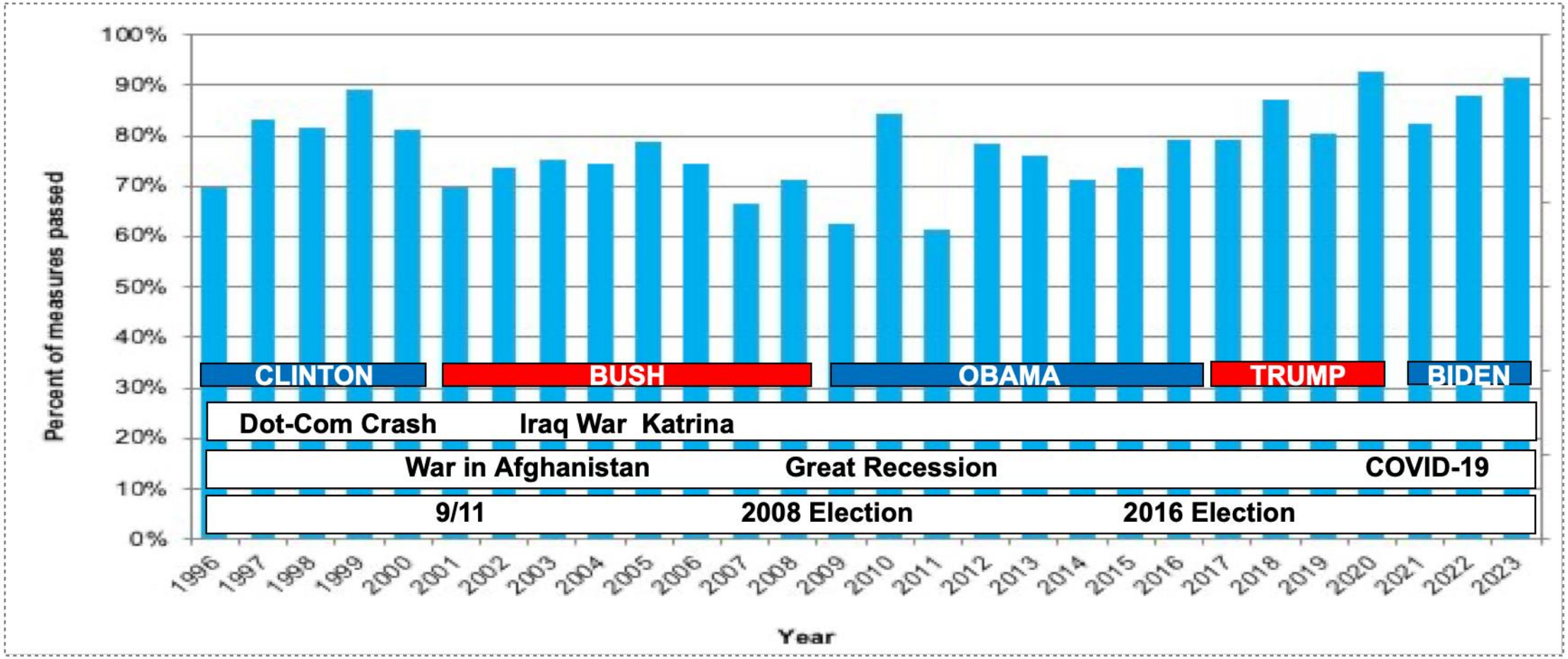
TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND®

Trust for Public Land has helped pass 688 ballot measures for parks, land, trails and schoolyards since 1996, representing $112 billion in funding, with an 84% win rate.

In North Carolina we've worked on 15 successful ballot measures with a 87% win rate.

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

This is True in Good Times and Bad



77% Overall Approval Rate Across the United States

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

History of Conservation Finance Measures in NC

North Carolina Local Conservation Finance Measures, 1996-present					
Finance Mechanism	# Measures	# Passed	% Passed	Conservation Funds Approved	Total Funds Approved
Bond	54	48	89%	$768,898,735	$1,651,740,000
Sales tax	2	1	50%	$10,000,000	$32,000,000
Property tax	1	0	0%		
Total	57	49	86%	$778,898,735	$1,683,740,000
Source: Trust for Public Land's LandVote Database, www.landvote.org					

We follow a well-tested road map to help decisionmakers assess funding options to see if there is one that the community will embrace.



- County's Request for Technical Assistance
- Feasibility Research
- Public Opinion survey
- Program Recommendations and Ballot Language
- Privately Funded Campaign (Mostly Locally Raised Funds)

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

Outline of TPL's Current Assistance to Buncombe County:

- Our work is entirely privately funded
- Must have a request for technical assistance from the County Commission (**completed**)
- Completion of feasibility report (**completed**)
- Completion of public opinion polling (in the field this week)
- Recommendations on program elements (by May 15)
- Work with private citizens to communicate to voters, County cannot spend resources to advocate (post-referral by the County Commission)

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

Feasibility Research

Buncombe County, NC
Public Finance Feasibility Study
March 2026



- Demographics
- Current Parks and Conservation Budget
- Fiscal Capacity and Finance Options
- Political Profile
- Election History
- Election Requirements
- Ballot Language Requirements
- Pathways to the Ballot
- Best Practices

Review of Successful 2022 Buncombe County Measures

- $30 million bonds for Open Space – Passed with 68.9% voting YES
- $40 million bonds for Affordable Housing – Passed with 61.9% voting YES

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

Buncombe County Voter Registration and Turnout

VAs of February 2026, there were 214,286 registered voters in Buncombe County. The chart on the following page shows voter turnout for every countywide election in Buncombe County since November 2014. Turnout is highest for presidential elections.

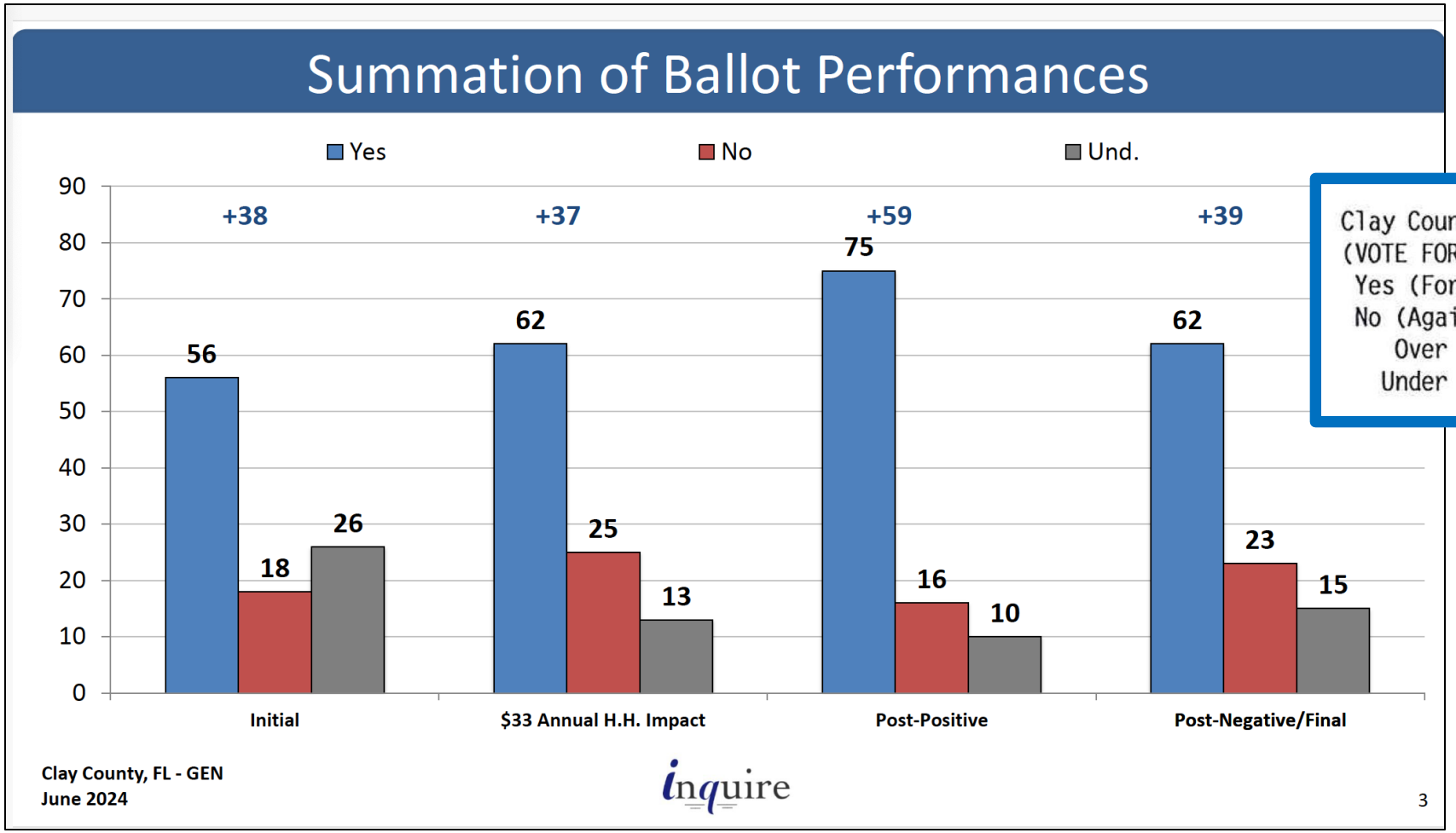
Buncombe County Registered Voters		
Party	Voters	% of Total
Unaffiliated	96,370	45%
Democratic	71,147	33%
Republican	44,965	21%
Libertarian	1,555	1%
Green	249	0%
Total	214,286	100%
Source: https://vt.ncsbe.gov/RegStat/, as of 2/21/2026		

Report Findings Include Bond Plus Millage Options

Buncombe County Bond Financing Estimates							
Bond Issue	Interest Rate	Maturity (years)	Annual Debt Service	Total Taxable Value*	Tax Required (per $100)	Annual Cost per $100k	Annual Cost for Median Home**
$10,000,000	5.5921%	20	$843,199	$52,959,961,443	$0.0016	$1.59	$7
$20,000,000	5.5921%	20	$1,686,398	$52,959,961,443	$0.0032	$3.18	$15
$30,000,000	5.5921%	20	$2,529,597	$52,959,961,443	$0.0048	$4.78	$22
$40,000,000	5.5921%	20	$3,372,796	$52,959,961,443	$0.0064	$6.37	$30
$50,000,000	5.5921%	20	$4,215,995	$52,959,961,443	$0.0080	$7.96	$37
*Buncombe County FY2026 Budget							
**Median sale price $465,000, January 2026, redfin.com							

TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

Third Step - TPL Will Complete Polling for Buncombe County Using Grant and Privately Raised Funding



Clay County Land Conservation Referendum to Protect Wate
(VOTE FOR) 1

Yes (For Bonds) (NPA)	87,650	72.93
No (Against Bonds) (NPA)	32,536	27.07
Over Votes	32	
Under Votes	7,411	

Our polling indicated that without negative messaging the Clay County measure polled at 75%, it won with 73% in November 2024.

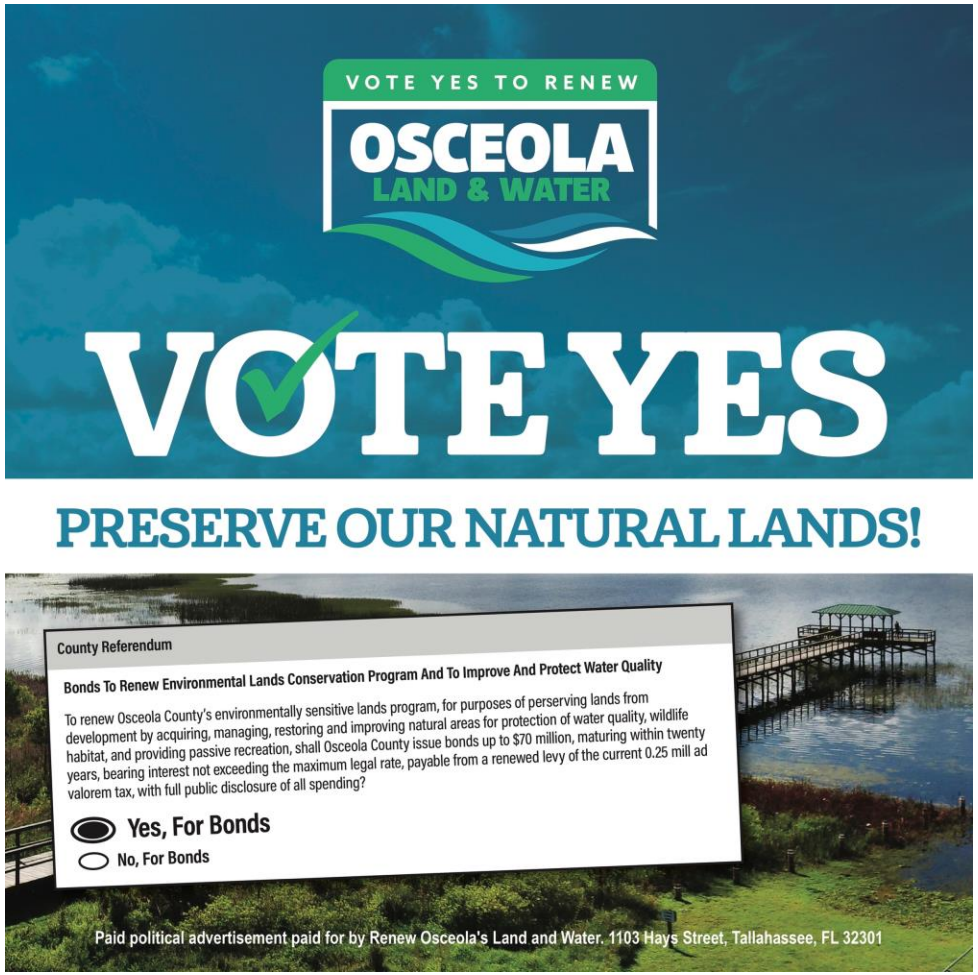
Program Recommendations Reinforce Accountability

- Community outreach to inform on plan
- Equitable distribution of funds and transparent selection process
- Fiscal impact: Prefer under $50 per household per year in new revenue is ideal; renewal is easier than new, lower cost is usually easier to pass
- Levy duration: Less sensitive than the amount, but 10 years is often a dividing line
- Large November elections have higher success
- Citizen oversight, independent audit for how funds are spent – accountability is key



TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND™

Fifth Step – Campaign, Must be Privately Funded





As with candidate campaigns, elected officials and staff should NOT expend any county resources to advocate for or against passage. Unlike candidate campaigns, non-profits may legally do so. Funds for advocacy are publicly disclosed through a PC.

For Further Information:

Ryan Olson
Trust for Public Land

Southern Appalachian Conservation
Finance Director

Ryan.Olson@tpl.org
Website: tpl.org
843-384-0199