Helene Recovery Update

Tuesday, September 15, 2026

Presented by

Helene Recovery Office

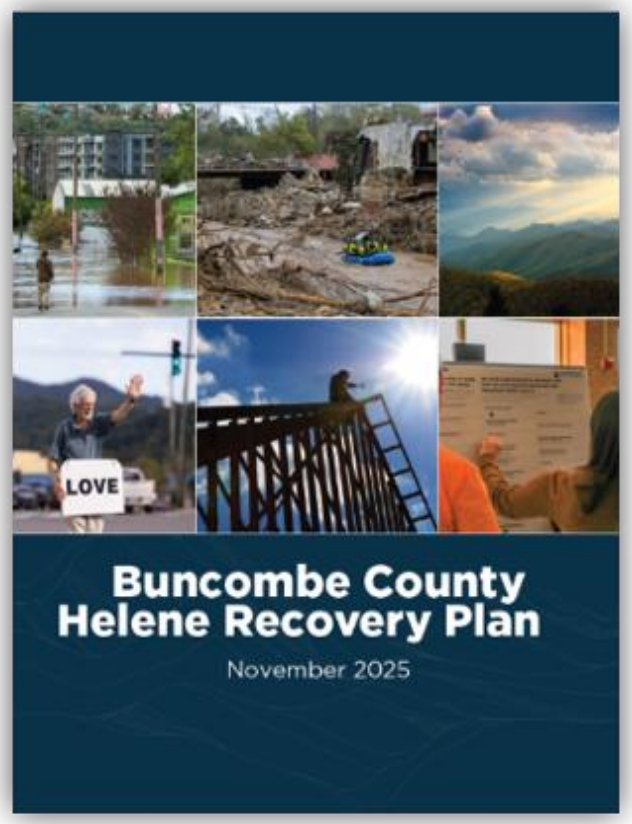
Strategy and Innovation

Snapshot

- **2-year anniversary of Tropical Storm Helene is less than two weeks away**
  - A Tropical Storm Helene anniversary video is in development
  - Helene Recovery Office staff are working with partners to identify upcoming events
- **FEMA Housing Mission concludes at the end of September**
  - NCEM Disaster Case Management (DCM) is supporting housing plans
  - GROWNC is connecting with individuals/families with unmet needs
- **Disaster Case Management**
  - NCEM DCM team extended to January 2027
  - Buncombe County Long Term Recovery Group (LTRG)
- **Housing Assistance**
  - RenewNC continues to serve residents with repair, rehabilitation, and reconstruction
  - NCEM and FEMA funded HMGP acquisitions awards are over 260

Agenda

- **Helene Recovery Plan Projects**
  - Preparedness Action Plan
  - Public Safety
  - Growth and Development
  - Energy and Environment
  - Economic Development
  - Community Health
- **Recovery Funding**
  - FEMA Public Assistance
  - Grant Programs
- **Upcoming Efforts**



Preparedness Action Plan

Project Updates

Preparedness Action Plan

HIGH PRIORITY

CORE RESPONSE CAPACITY

Critical capabilities needed to respond effectively during a major emergency.



- Emergency Operations Center infrastructure and staffing
- Communication and IT redundancy
- 911 operations and continuity
- Pre-positioned contracts and critical resources
- Warehousing and commodity distribution

MEDIUM PRIORITY

OPERATIONAL SYSTEMS & COORDINATION

Plans, partnerships, training, and systems that strengthen and sustain the response.



- Training and exercises
- Partner and municipal coordination
- Shelter operations and family assistance
- Logistics and resource tracking
- Damage assessment
- Feeding, commodities, PODs/CCSs
- Continuity planning and backup infrastructure

LOW PRIORITY

COMMUNICATION & SUPPORTING READINESS

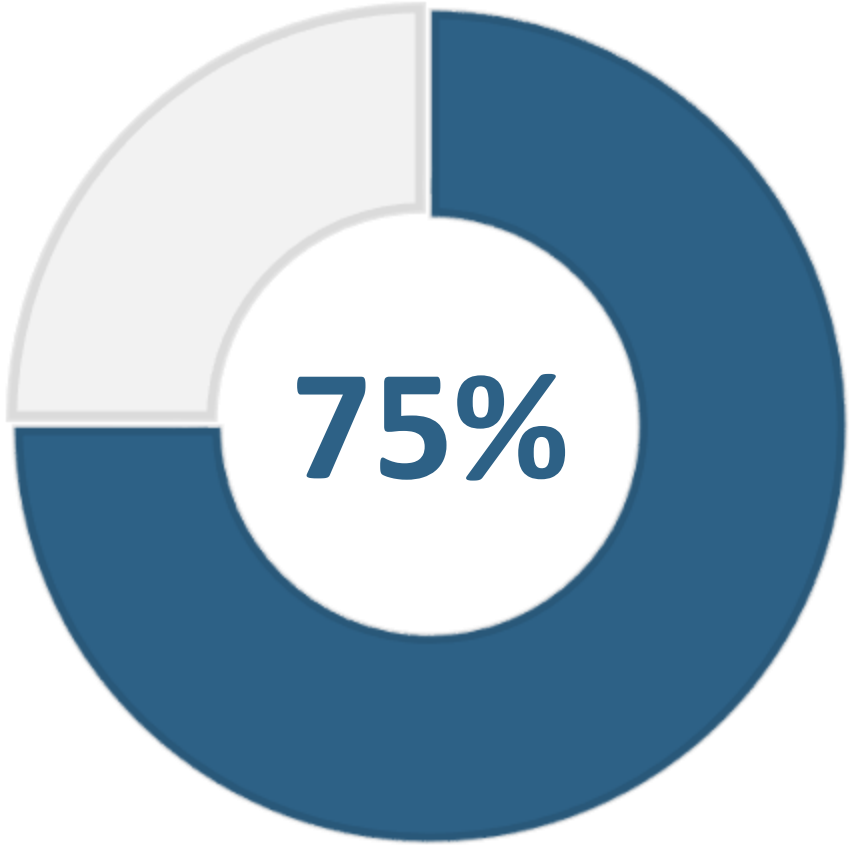
Important supporting capabilities that build community preparedness and awareness.

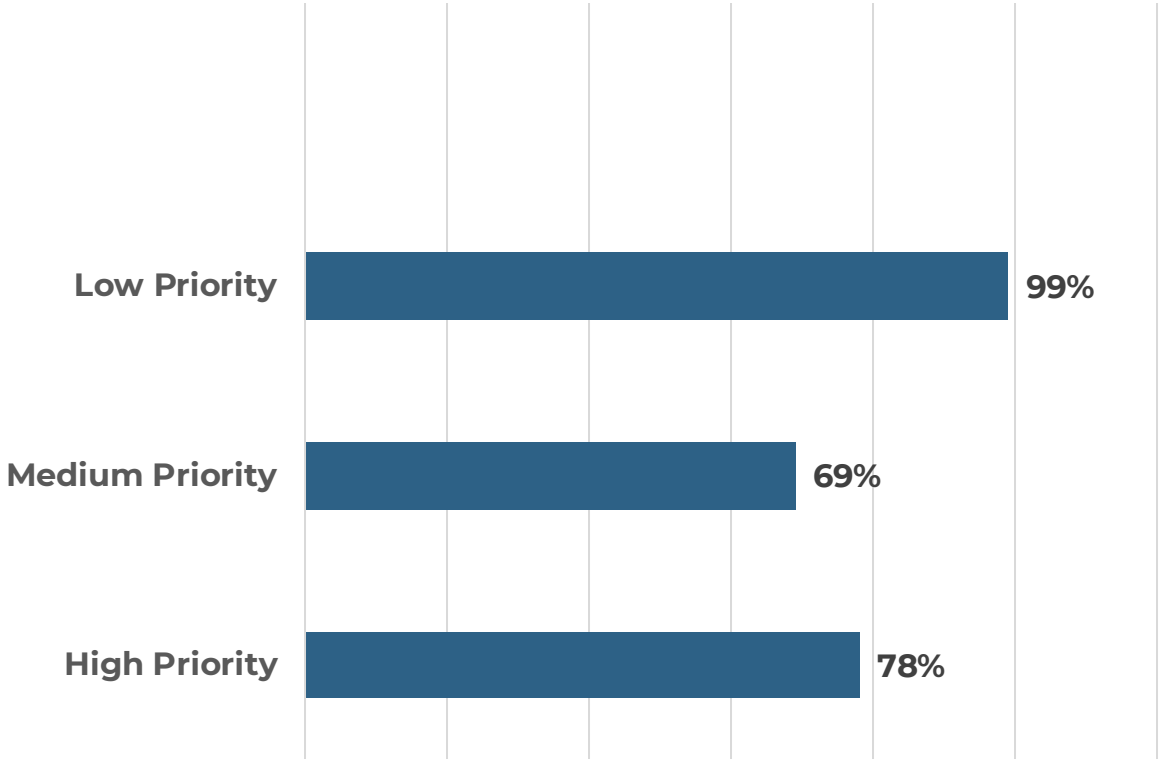


- Public information and preparedness outreach
- Crisis communications
- IPAWS / public alerting
- Employee contact and communications systems
- Emergency hiring procedures
- Call center communications
- Established damage assessment procedures

Overall Completion of Preparedness Action Plan

Preparedness Action Plan





Category: High-Priority Items – 78% Progress

Preparedness Action Plan

Public Safety

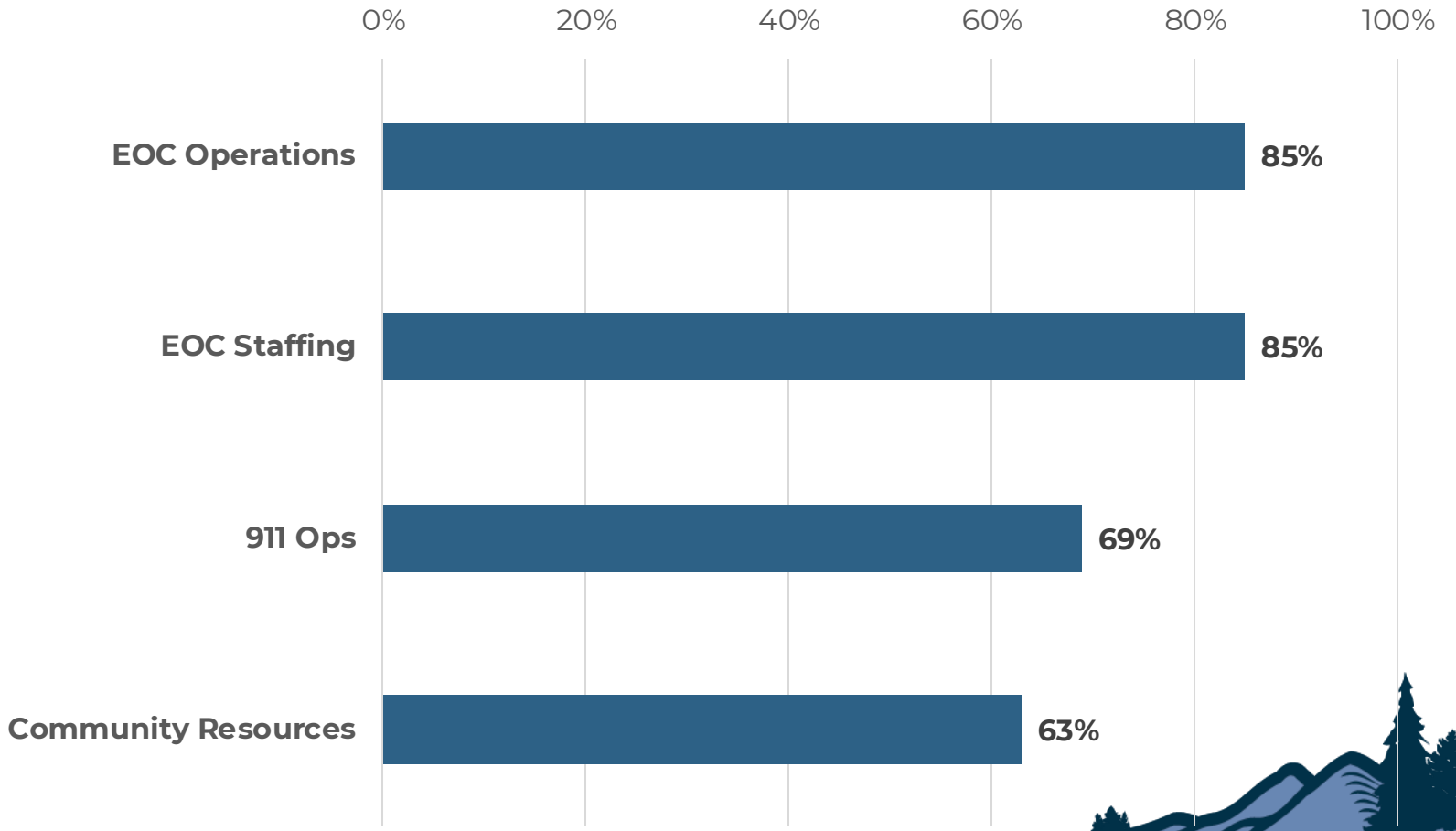
HIGH PRIORITY

CORE RESPONSE CAPACITY

Critical capabilities needed to respond effectively during a major emergency.



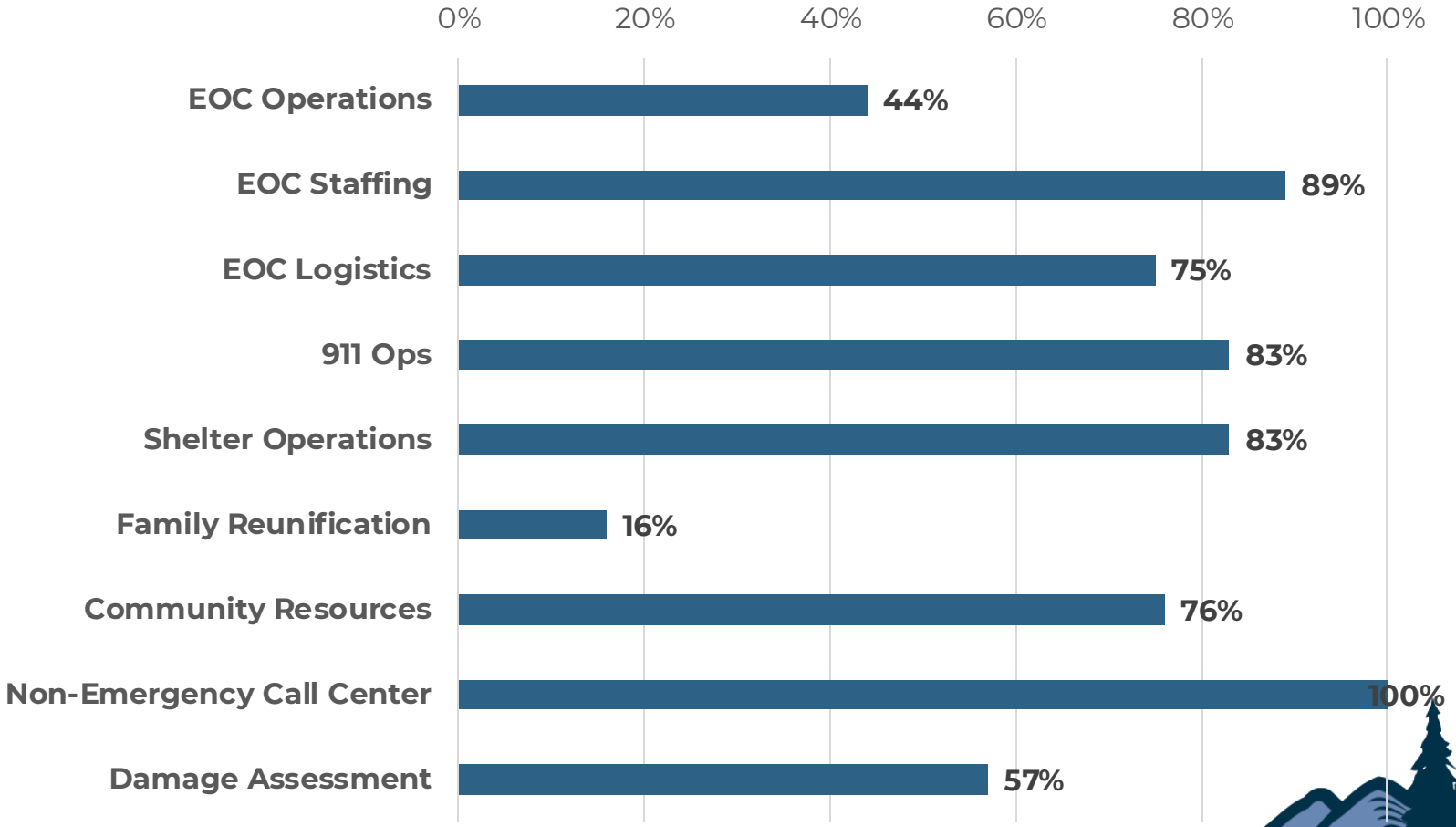
- Emergency Operations Center infrastructure and staffing
- Communication and IT redundancy
- 911 operations and continuity
- Pre-positioned contracts and critical resources
- Warehousing and commodity distribution



Category: Medium-Priority Items – 69% Progress

Preparedness Action Plan





Public Safety

Public Safety

Category 8: Non-Emergency Call Center

Preparedness Action Plan



This category focuses on creating a year-round call center that can be activated during disasters to provide non-emergency public assistance.

+19% Increase from FY26 Q4

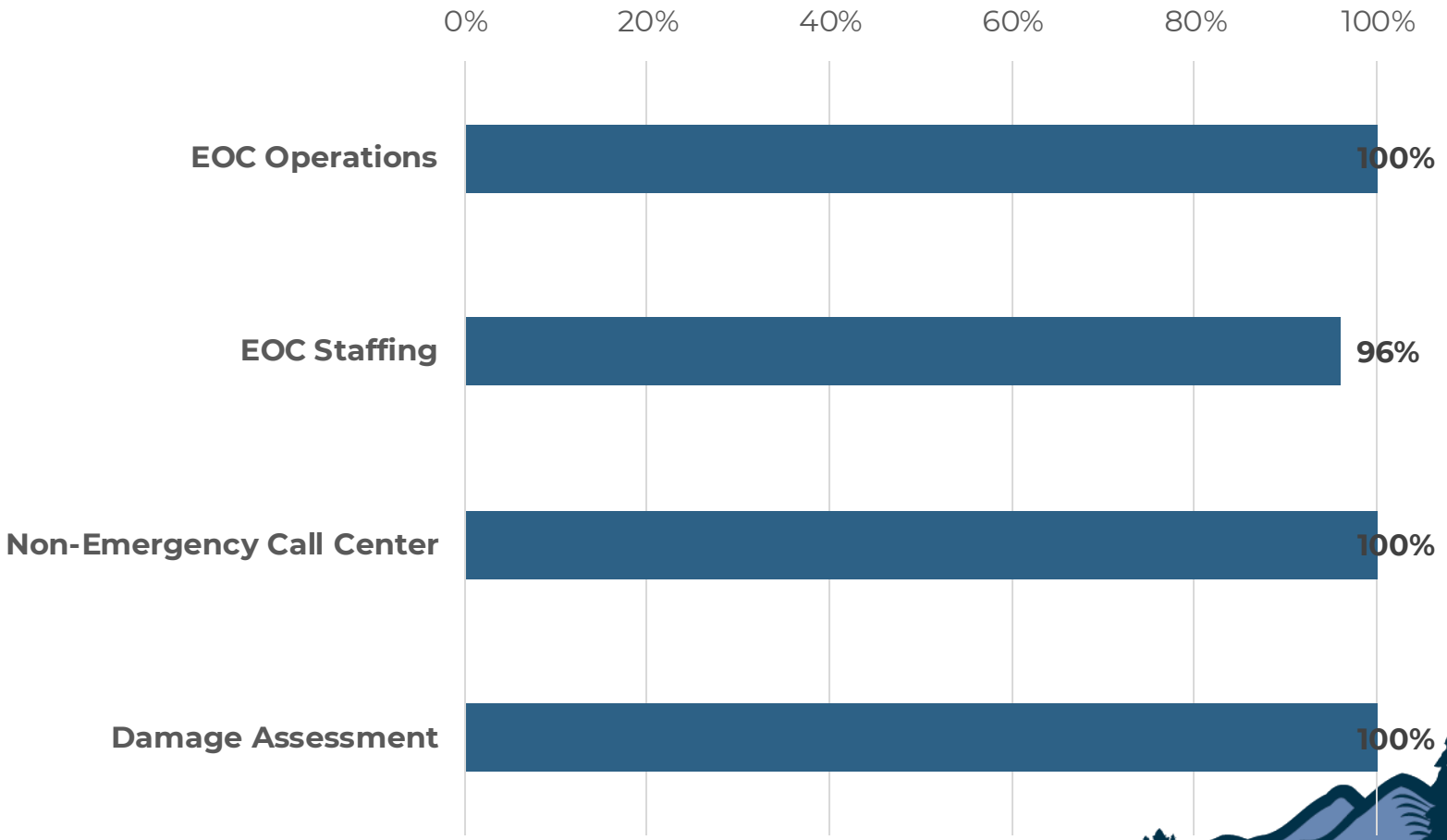
Completed Actions:

- Created a Non-Emergency Call Center for disaster-specific assistance – the One Buncombe Hotline
- Completed operating guidelines for Call Center operations
- Created an internal communication plan for the Non-Emergency Call Center

Category: Low-Priority Items – 99% Progress

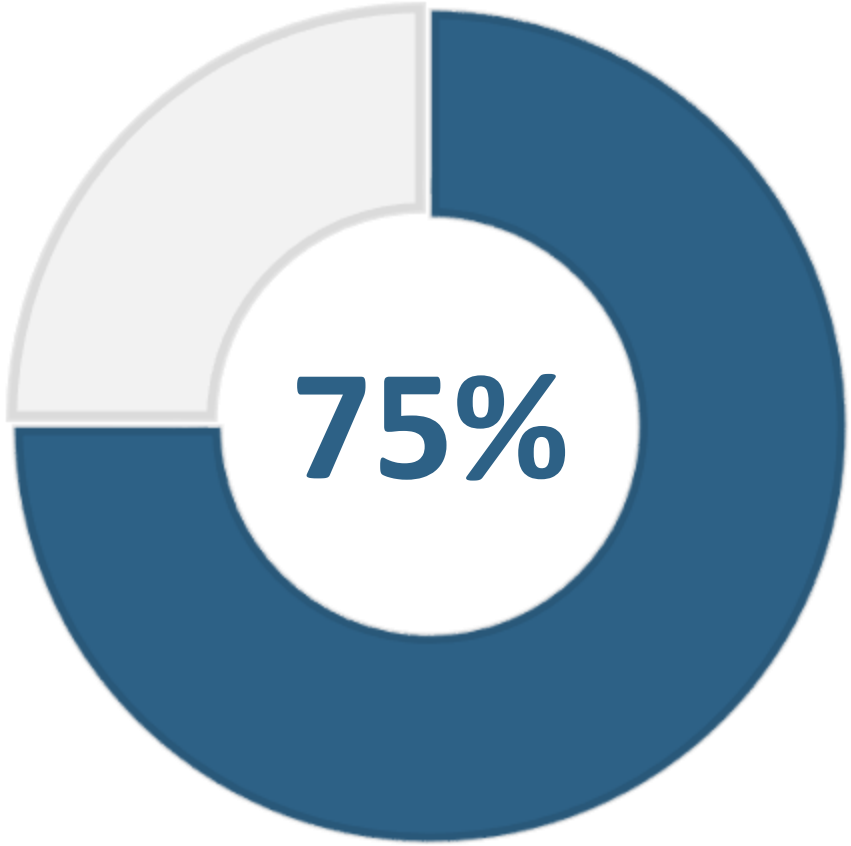
Preparedness Action Plan

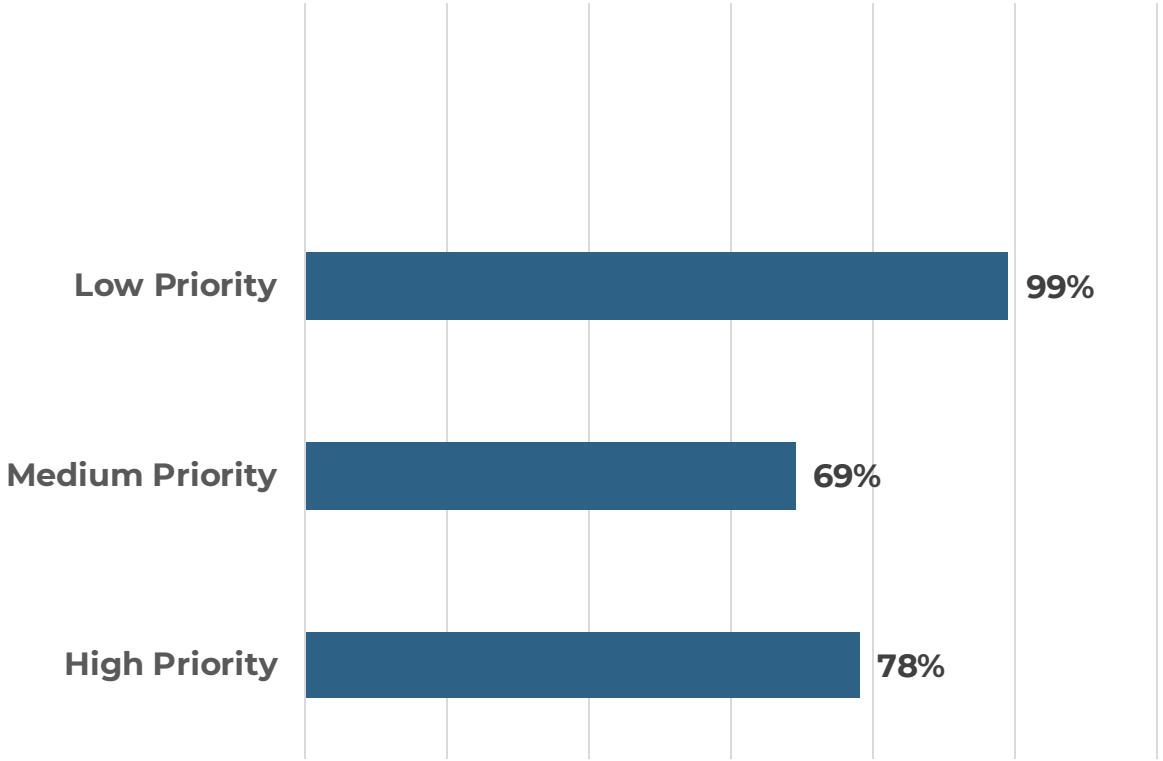




Overall Completion of Preparedness Action Plan

Preparedness Action Plan





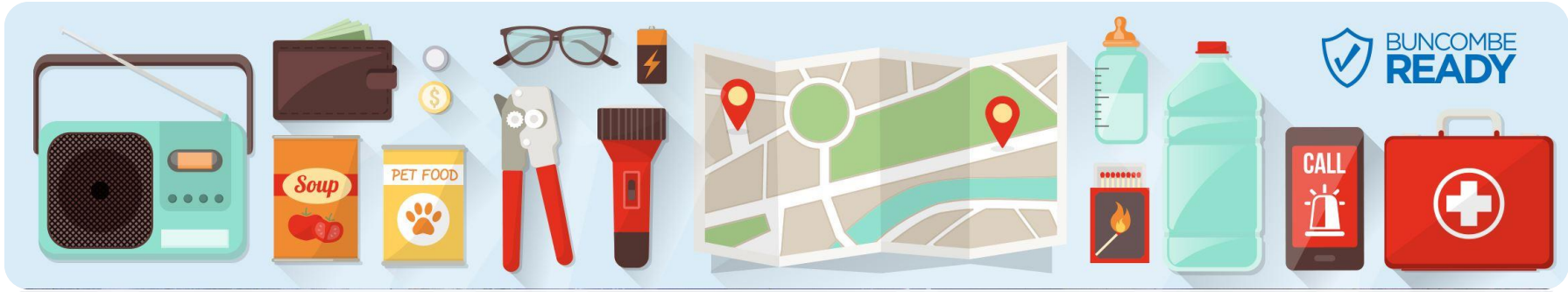
Public Safety

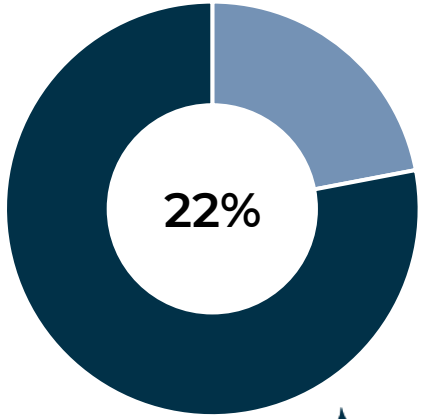
Additional Project Updates

Community Risk Reduction

Complexity: Low | Cost: Low | Timing: Short-Term

- CERT program developed and implemented, including a training plan and council
- Developed and launched a countywide disaster preparedness education campaign
  - Buncombe Ready: Barnardsville was the first event at Barnardsville Elementary School on August 15th
- Additional campaigns to be held throughout the calendar year



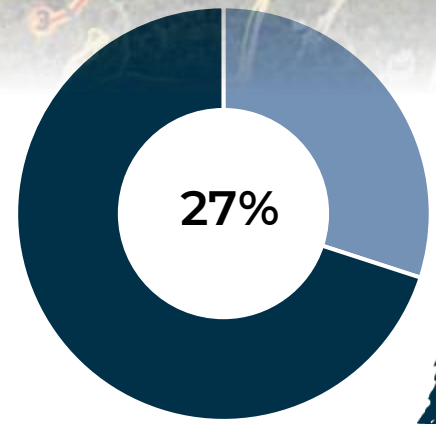


Landslide Mitigation

Complexity: High | Cost: High | Timing: Long-Term

- **Grovemont**
  - Received initial draft report from landslide assessment
  - Entering last phase with engineering design
- **Garren Creek**
  - Contractor and Helene Recovery Office in the planning stage
  - Gathering right of entry (ROE) forms for private property
- **Multi-slide Project**
  - Selected contractor developing the statement of work and proposal
  - Sites to be assessed include the following landslides:
    - Beaverdam (4)
    - Black Mountain (1)
    - Fairview (5)
    - Garren Creek (1)
    - Lakey Gap (4)
    - Reynolds (1)
    - Riceville (1)
    - Swannanoa (2)
    - Upper Hominy (1)





Growth & Development

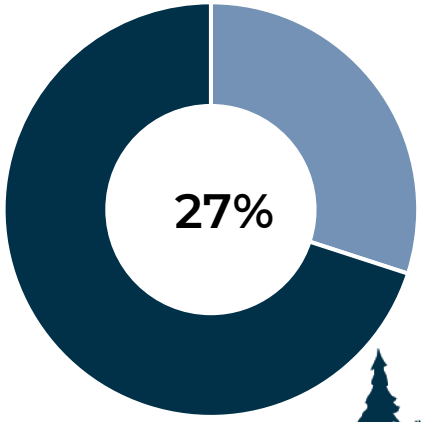
Project Updates

Home Repair | RenewNC

Complexity: High | Cost: High | Timing: Medium

- The North Carolina Department of Commerce led RenewNC single family housing program continues to serve residents in Buncombe County
  - **35 homes have been completed**
  - **29 are now in construction**
  - 123 in the pre-construction phase
  - 101 have been awarded and awaiting next steps
  - Temporary Relocation Assistance is 192
  - **38 currently in TRA housing**

Program Types and Timelines	
Rehabilitation including move-out and move-in	66 Days
Replacement including move-out and move-in	81 Days
Reconstruction including move-out and move-in	171 Days



Affordable Housing Development

Complexity: High | Cost: High | Timing: Medium

- A Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) application has been submitted for roadway infrastructure supporting the Ferry Road affordable housing development
  - $13M for CDBG-DR Community Infrastructure in the first round
- Multiple LIHTC applications submitted
  - Coxe Ave Development
  - Ferry Rd Development
- Collaboration with state partners to identify additional funding opportunities

Energy & Environment

Project Updates

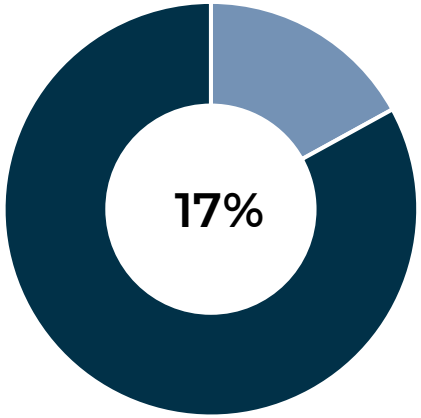
Open Space

Complexity: High | Cost: High | Timing: Medium

Planning meetings are continuing to assess properties and develop strategies in line with county open space planning and federal/state required deed restrictions for acquired parcels

North Carolina Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) status updates

- **Group 1**: 23 properties awarded
  - All acquisitions and demolitions completed
- **Group 2**: 26 properties awarded
  - 24 acquisitions completed, 2 remaining will close this month
  - 19 demolitions completed, 5 with demo notice to proceed
- **Group 3**: 152 properties awarded (*142 batch 1, 10 batch 2*)
  - 5 properties remain in pending status with NC DOT review
  - 20 applicants withdrew prior to Award notification
- **Group 4**: 62 properties awarded
  - 10 properties remain in pending status with NC DOT review



Open Space | HMGP Refresher

Complexity: High | Cost: High | Timing: Medium

- The program is designed to reduce the loss of life and property as well as lessen the impact to local communities due to natural disasters
- Participation in the program is voluntary
  - No relocation assistance is provided (Unless tenant occupied)
  - Owners are encouraged to stay involved
- Compensation is based on pre-event fair market value
  - Effective date of the appraisal is prior to Tropical Storm Helene
  - "Fair Compensation" is NOT the same as the tax assessed value
- Demolitions should be completed 90 days following closing
- Denied applicants are notified this month by email and letter of their ineligibility

Program Funding	
FEMA	75%
NCEM	25%
Local	**0%**

Economic Development

Project Updates

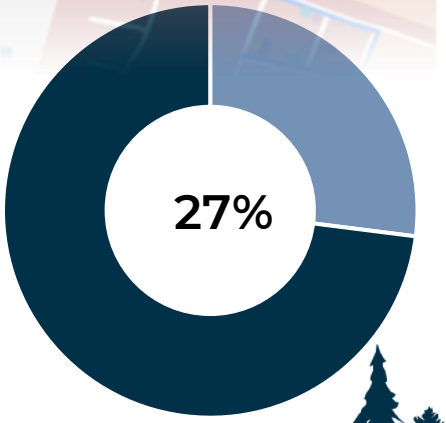
Commercial District Revitalization

Complexity: High | Cost: High | Timing: Medium

Recent Activity:

- Submitted grant applications for sidewalks in Swannanoa
  - **Awarded**: $979K for Whitson Ave
  - **Awarded**: $786K for Railroad, Alexander, and South
  - *Pending*: $10M for HWY70 (Whitson Ave to Warren Wilson Rd)
- Submitted a grant application for unincorporated Commercial District recovery
  - *Pending*: $8.96M for remediation and revitalization





Community Health

Project Updates

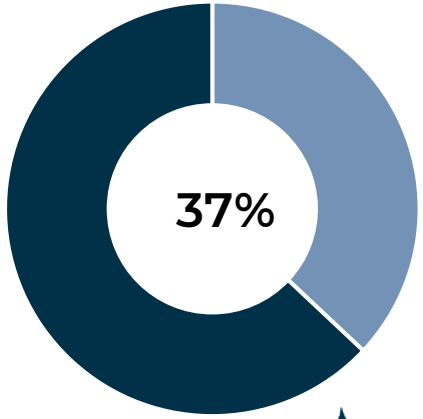
Community Health

Cultural Asset Restoration

Complexity: Medium | Cost: High | Timing: Medium

Recent Activity:

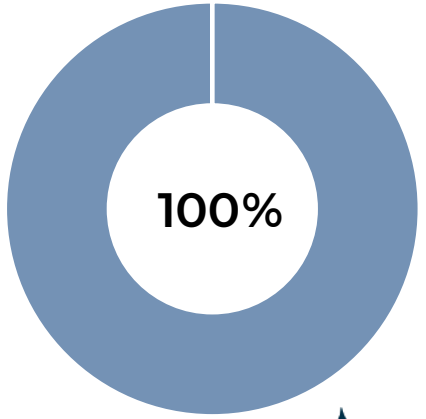
- Completed and presented the final design for Owen Park
  - Pending next steps on $17.6M for FEMA Public Assistance (PA) funding
  - Additional FEMA PA funding for Hominy Park is approx. $6M
- Submitted a CDBG-DR Community Infrastructure grant application for Parks Resiliency & Recovery
  - Pending grant of $11.1M for Alexander, Deaverview, & Lake Julian
- Funding opportunities for streambank restoration
  - **Awarded**: $65K Walnut Island (*partnership with Mountain True*)
  - **Awarded**: $20K Ledges (*partnership with Mountain True*)



Community Memory Project

Complexity: High | Cost: Low | Timing: Short-term

- Completed all key project activities:
  - Collection and preservation of community records from Tropical Storm Helene
  - Development of public exhibits and digital archives highlighting community recovery experiences
  - Community engagement activities focused on documenting local history, recovery efforts, and lived experiences
  - Coordination with local organizations, cultural partners, and community stakeholders to support memory preservation efforts



Grants & Funding

Updates

FEMA Public Assistance

- 57 projects submitted to FEMA for Public Assistance
  - **55 obligated projects at $39.62 million**

    (*$20.58M reimbursements*)
  - **$26.66M received by the County**
- Finalizing last group of projects to submit to FEMA
- 2 Obligated projects in versioning process for a second round of funding with 2 additional entries soon
- Recent Activity
  - 5 projects are full Closed Out including EOC Operations, PPDR, and Employee Labor

PA Obligations	Amount
A - Debris Removal	$7.42M
B- Emergency Protective Measures	$26.71M
C - Roads & Bridges	$1.32M
E - Building & Equip	$728K
G - Parks, Rec, Other	$2.53M
Z - Mgmt Costs	$904.5K
Total Obligations	**$39.6M**

HMGP Infrastructure Projects

- 7 projects submitted to FEMA for final HMGP review
  - **Total of $17.91 million**
  - Projects include Early Warning Systems, Wildfire Protection Plan, and Risk Reduction Campaign
- 2 alternate projects submitted if additional funding becomes available
  - **Total of $12.44 million**
- No flood proofing, wind hardening, or erosion control/land stabilization projects were moved forward

Confirmed Projects	Amount
Early Warning Systems	$13.71M
Education and Outreach	$439K
Post-Disaster Code Enforcement	$2.59M
Risk Assessment and Planning	$1.17M
Total Submission	**$17.91M**

Questions

Thank you

Affordable Housing Development

Work with selected developers to build affordable housing on county-owned property, including parcels on Coxe Avenue, Ferry Road, and Valley Street.

Buncombe County Food Security

Develop and implement a countywide initiative aimed at improving food security through strategic planning, local food system development, community partnerships, and emergency preparedness.

Code of Ordinance Amendments

Update County codes related to housing, economic development, and environmental resiliency, including modifications to the Flood Prevention Ordinance, creating progress towards joining the National Flood Insurance Program's (NFIP) Community Rating System (CRS).

Commercial District Revitalization

Revitalize commercial districts damaged by Helene in unincorporated areas such as Barnardsville, Fairview, and Swannanoa to support commercial recovery, encourage economic opportunities and support jobs.

Community Memory Project

Implement "Come Hell or High Water" (CHHW) to collect, index, preserve and present records that convey the stories and impacts of Tropical Storm Helene while creating pathways for community reflection, and healing.

Community Organization Support

Enhance disaster preparedness, response, and recovery capacity by partnering with community-based organizations such as nonprofits, faith-based groups, and local initiatives that collaborate to address the needs of communities affected by disasters.

Community Risk Reduction Campaign

Implement a countywide risk reduction (CRR) campaign to promote emergency preparedness to increase community readiness and mitigate risks from future disasters.

Critical Facility Upgrades

Upfit critical public facilities for county operations with installation of floodproofing, wind hardening, and secondary power sources (such as backup batteries, generators, and solar systems) to ensure continuous operation before, during, and after future disasters.

Cultural Asset Restoration

Restore county parks, libraries, and community centers to address storm damages while enhancing and expanding cultural and recreational amenities.

Disaster Response Heavy Equipment

Evaluate Buncombe County's access to heavy equipment and enhance where needed through methods such as purchase, lease, contract, or mutual aid. Examples include debris removal vehicles and water rescue equipment to respond to emergency in both rural and urban environments.

Down Payment Assistance

Establish a down payment assistance program for low- and moderate-income households affected by Helene. Down payment assistance would provide loans to income-eligible homebuyers who have been permanently displaced due to the storm.

Emergency Operations Center

Construct a new, resilient facility to house an Emergency Operations Center for unified management, command and control of all disasters and emergency events affecting Buncombe County.

Emergency Shelter Facility

Construct a new multi-purpose facility to serve a year-round county use such as a recreation center, which converts to mass care shelter in the event of a disaster.

Fleet & Facilities Restoration

Conduct repairs and replacements to address damages from Tropical Storm Helene to county-owned fleet and facilities while incorporating mitigation measures to prevent damage from future disasters.

Home Repair

Implement a grant program to assist low- and moderate-income survivor households with home repair needs beyond what other disaster resources can meet.

Landslide Mitigation

Conduct assessments of landslides on county-owned and private property to identify imminent threats to life, property, and infrastructure. Seek mitigation or buyout opportunities through state and federal partnerships for qualifying slides on impacted properties to avoid future damage.

Mental Health Trainings & Support

Work with partners to develop and deliver a comprehensive plan for effective community mental health support during and after disaster events, including series of trauma-informed mental health support trainings for community members, first responders, educators, social service providers, and local businesses across the county.

Natural Hazard Monitoring

Implement environmental data tracking technology such as weather & air quality monitors, river gauges, and landslide monitors where applicable and effective to improve emergency notification, prevent loss of life, and support public health - particularly in high-risk areas.

Open Space Property

Create and implement a land use and management plan for hazard mitigation properties acquired by the county as a result of Tropical Storm Helene to ensure open space, natural resource conservation, floodplain management, and allowable recreational and agricultural uses.

Preparedness Action Plan

Implement recommendations from the County's Tropical Storm Helene Preparedness Action Plan to enhance organizational capacity to effectively respond to future disasters.

Public Art

Commission and install public art pieces across key public spaces in Buncombe County, focusing on neighborhoods, commercial corridors, and community gathering areas.

Public Safety Communications Resilience

Assess capabilities and perform resilience upgrades to critical public safety communications infrastructure - including solar for radio towers, community notification technology, backup systems, and satellite communication devices for emergency services and critical facilities.

Resilience Hubs

Add features to public facilities (e.g. libraries, community centers, schools) for resilience before, during, and after emergencies. Features may include alternative energy sources, telecommunications, wind hardening and floodproofing, water hookups and storage, enhanced air filtration systems, accessibility, and adaptable multi-use spaces.

Sewer Extension & Septic Mitigation

Work with partners to develop and implement plans for sewer system expansions, to include the removal of septic systems and package plants, generating environmental benefits and opportunities for economic development in unincorporated Buncombe County.

Skills, Training, & Employment Program (STEP)

Increase STEP enrollment and program graduation rates to serve Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients with opportunities to earn a living wage by offering reskilling through continuing education courses and living wage job access.

Small Business Grants

Provide financial support in the form of grants to small businesses that experienced negative economic impacts from Tropical Storm Helene, aiding their recovery.

Social Services Emergency Response Plan

Develop and implement an integrated social services disaster plan that ensures the effective and equitable delivery of social services to all residents of Buncombe County before, during, and after a disaster event.

Stream Stabilization

Undertake activities to stabilize and restore streambanks, to include both county property (such as the County's river parks) and private property (such as residential and farmland property).

Swannanoa Small Area & Resilience Plan

Engage the Swannanoa community in needs/priority assessment and the development of a framework to guide future development and public investments in this unincorporated area of Buncombe County that was severely impacted by Helene.

Vehicle Resilience

Assess and improve fuel and energy resiliency for Buncombe County business travel during times of emergency, such as expansion of mobile or fixed-location fuel storage and electric vehicle charging solutions.

Wildfire Protection Plans

Complete a comprehensive Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) for each of 19 fire districts to provide hazard and risk identification along with pre-planning for mitigation measures and response plans

Website Development Update

- Collaborating with CAPE
- Focusing on project updates and progress
- Reworking current Helene Recovery website resources
  - Cleaning up outdated programs
  - Streamlining and organizing
- End stages, should be live soon