November 2025

Buncombe County Helene Recovery Plan

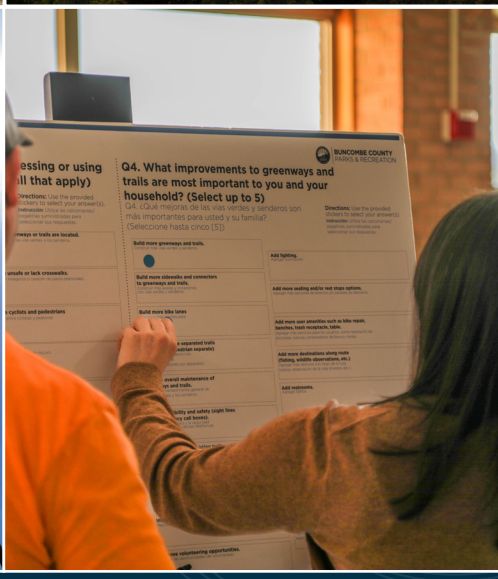












Buncombe County

Recovery Projects

BUNCOMBE COUNTY

MISSION

To promote a healthy, safe, well-educated community with a sustainable quality of life.

VISION

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

279,210
POPULATION

154,504
UNINCORPORATED POPULATION

42.4
MEDIAN AGE

$71,525
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

$328,900
MEDIAN HOME PRICE

$1,267
MEDIAN RENT

659.95
SQ MILES

MUNICIPALITIES
City Of Asheville
Town of Biltmore Forest
Town of Black Mountain
Town of Montreat
Town of Woodfin
Town of Weaverville

UNINCORPORATED CENTERS
Alexander
Arden
Barnardsville
Candler
Fairview
Leicester
Swannanoa

GOVERNMENT PROFILE

GOVERNMENT	ANNUAL BUDGET	EMPLOYEES
Board of Commissioners	$433,096,618	1,741

KEY SERVICES

- Agriculture & Land Resources
- Air Quality
- Economic Development
- Election Services
- Emergency Services
- Health & Human Services
- Justice Services
- Parks & Recreation
- Permits & Inspections
- Planning & Development
- Public Libraries
- Public Safety Communications
- Register of Deeds
- Sheriff
- Solid Waste
- Sustainability

STRATEGIC FOCUS AREA

- Community Health
- Economic Development
- Education
- Energy & Environment
- Growth & Development
- Public Safety

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.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
High	$$$ Medium	Medium

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

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

Purpose

Buncombe County's affordable housing supply was significantly impacted by Tropical Storm Helene. These projects will replace destroyed rental units and build affordable housing in areas that are outside of the floodplain. Prior to Helene, Buncombe County was already at an affordable housing deficit. To meet the County Commissioner approved goal of 2,800–3,150 affordable housing units by 2030, Buncombe County identified 3 development sites with over 74 acres of county-owned land for development.

Roughly 76% of the 6,505 rented housing units damaged by the storm were designated as low- and moderate-income.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

In addition to replacing affordable housing that was impacted by Tropical Storm Helene, this project contributes to economic revitalization by incorporating mixed use options, outdoor public recreation, and other amenities for healthy and thriving communities.

Ferry Road

Conserve more than 70 acres of natural space, provide 4 miles of public trails and greenways, and provide 645 units of rental, ownership, and affordable housing.



Ferry Road Conceptual Design

Coxe Avenue

Provide more than 200 units of 100% affordable housing with redesigned streetscapes, green roofs, interconnected transportation, pedestrian amenities, and mixed-use development.



Coxe Avenue Conceptual Landscape

Valley Street

After additional community engagement, redevelop 2,444 acres of county-owned property to create up to 196 housing units for households earning between 20% - 80% of area median income.



Valley Street Downtown Asheville

Activities & Deliverables

These projects are public-private partnerships with developers experienced in affordable housing. The projects will pursue Low Income Housing Tax Credits, and Buncombe County will work with selected developers to apply for grant opportunities, including CDBG-DR and HOME funding. Plans and permits require approval by the City of Asheville.

Implementation Considerations

These are complex affordable housing development projects that will require considerable staff capacity and financing from multiple resources, including successful tax credit applications and additional gap funding. Other implementation phases include: conceptual design; partner selection; and development agreements that detail project timelines and construction schedules.

Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County Planning & Development

Partners:

- Buncombe County Affordable Housing Subcommittee
- Development Finance Institute – University of North Carolina Chapel Hill School of Government
- City of Asheville
- Tourism Development Authority
- Contracted Developers

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.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
Medium	$$$ Low	Medium

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

COMMUNITY HEALTH

- **Objective 1:** Increase coordination and resilience of community health services to create a healthier and safer community.

Purpose

The project responds to worsening food insecurity in the wake of Tropical Storm Helene and aims to build long-term resilience through sustainable action. Buncombe County has a robust network of programs and services that address food needs for low-income households, however Helene exacerbated needs and exposed gaps in access both during regular operations and in times of disaster. As the administrator of the publicly-funded Food and Nutrition Services program, Buncombe County Government is in a unique position to convene and coordinate partners to improve food security.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

- Improve equitable access to nutritious food.
- Build sustainable, hyperlocal food systems.
- Strengthen community and emergency food response systems.
- Establish countywide food policy and planning framework.

Buncombe County received 20,494 applications for Disaster-related Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (D-SNAP) funding over a 4-week period following Tropical Storm Helene.

Activities & Deliverables

- County Food Policy Plan adopted and implemented.
- Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) signed with at least 5 major food distribution partners.
- At least 3 new community food growing spaces established.
- 10% increase in residents' proximity to a fresh food access point.
- Emergency food response protocol integrated into county preparedness plan.
- Partner with community organizations to support food access mapping platform launched and publicly available.

Implementation Considerations

- Coordination with partners to ensure services are developed comprehensively and to avoid duplication or redundancy of efforts.
- Constraints around local government scope or statutory authority and best fit for the work, as well as staff capacity.
- Funding sources for work of implementing activities identified through completion of this plan will be a challenge at the point of future implementation.



Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County Health & Human Services

Partners:

- Buncombe County Agriculture & Land Resources
- Buncombe County Communications & Public Engagement
- Buncombe County Emergency Services
  Buncombe County Planning & Development
- Long-Term Recovery Group
- Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster
- Local Food Production/Distribution Organizations
- Education System Partners

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).

Complexity	Cost	Timing
Medium	$$$ Low	Long-term

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

- **Objective 2:** Maximize the use of land, guiding development to targeted growth areas that lead to resilient communities.

Purpose

A County Code of Ordinances in North Carolina is a comprehensive, legally binding collection of rules and regulations enacted by a County's Board of Commissioners. These codes address a wide range of local issues, aiming to maintain order, promote public health and safety, and regulate land use within the county. Code amendments will identify opportunities to revise and strengthen design standards such as the use of low-impact development and infrastructure improvements. It will also increase adaptive capacity to current and future hazards, while promoting economic and housing recovery.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

Addresses and cultivates recovery, while building resilience in areas of environmental sensitivity, by:

- Recovering and expanding the housing stock.
- Supporting economic development.
- Promoting environmental recovery and resilience.

Communities earn points for various activities, and these points determine their CRS class, which in turn dictates the flood insurance premium discounts offered to property owners in the Special Flood Hazard Area.

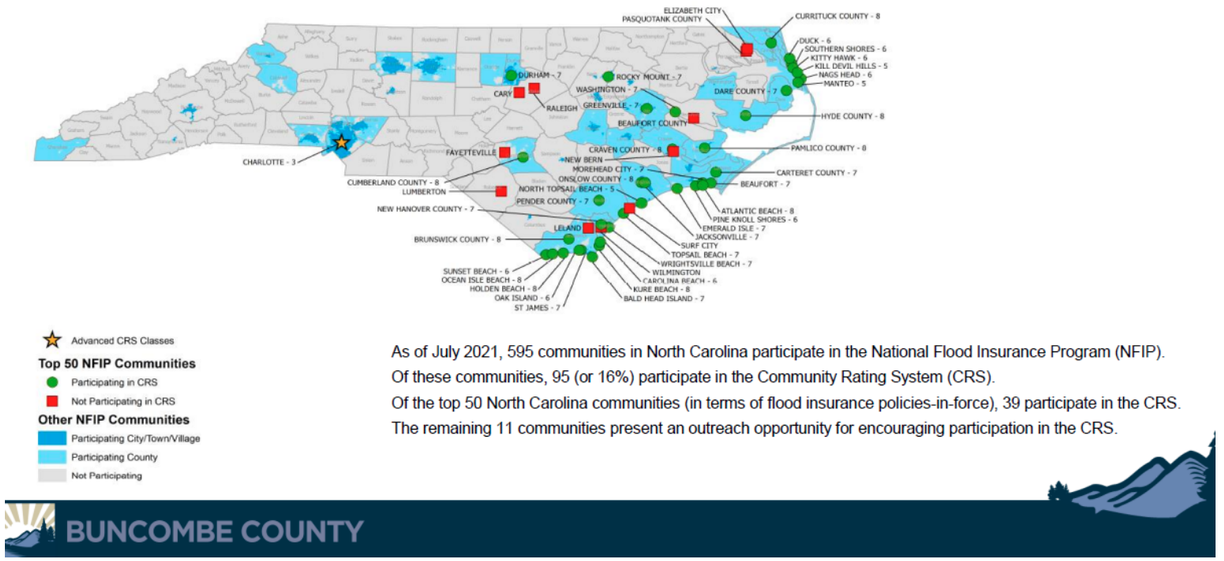
Activities & Deliverables

This program creates new amendments to the code. Key steps include:

1. Research critical issues;
2. Draft proposed code amendments;
3. Introduce, discuss, revise, and hold public hearings with the Planning Board;
4. Adopt the code of amendments through the Board of Commissioners public hearing; and
5. Incorporate into the Code of Ordinances.

Implementation Considerations

Additional floodplain managment personnel will be required for full implementation of CRS. As the ordinances are prepared, and more detail is available on the required steps to implement the ordinance, other staff additions may be required.



Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County Planning & Development Department

Partners:

- Buncombe County Planning Board
- Design Professionals
- The Development Community
- Subject-Matter Experts
- Residents

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.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
High	$$$ High	Medium

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

- **Objective 2:** Maximize the use of land, guiding development to targeted growth areas that lead to resilient communities.

Purpose

Buncombe County has jurisdiction for areas in the county that are not incorporated into cities or towns, and several of these areas such as Barnardsville, Fairview, and Swannanoa experienced physical devastation and economic harms as a result of Tropical Storm Helene. Commercial district revitalization can be used to support the return of businesses in the county to profitability, retaining jobs within the community, and ensuring continued access to products and services for residents. Improvements could include mixed-use projects with commercial and residential components and rehabilitation and installation of infrastructure such as lighting, sidewalks, streetscaping, and recreational amenities.

According to a Riverbird Research Survey, 76% of businesses in Buncombe County reported physical damage from Tropical Storm Helene, and 93% reported financial losses.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

Commercial district revitalization will support unmet economic recovery needs throughout the county's unincorporated areas and improve the county's economic resilience for future disasters. Supporting the commercial activities in these areas allows for businesses and jobs to be retained, supporting the economic security of residents as well as access to products and services for local customers. Along with direct benefits to local economies, revitalizaton activities can serve broader county goals such as greenway and sidewalk improvements, mixed-use commercial developments, and more.

Activities & Deliverables

- Work with unincorporated communities to understand ongoing, unmet recovery needs and develop projects for commercial improvements.
- Design projects to meet these needs and connect with local organizations for support.
- Submit competitive grant applications to funding sources such as Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) and the State's Small Business Infrastructure Grant.

Implementation Considerations

Exact projects will depend on community engagement and resulting priorities as well as grant funding criteria. Infrastructure improvements and maintenance will require General Services coordination for maintenance on some projects (e.g., sidewalks). Other departments with involvement will include Planning and Development and Parks and Recreation, such as for greenway development plans. With multiple departments involved in these projects, consideration should be given to the impacts of staff capacity on the pace of implementation.



Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County
Economic Development

Partners:

- N.C. Department of Commerce
- N.C. Department of Transportation
- Design & Construction Contractors
- Local Business Communities

Community Memory Project

Implement "Come Hell or High Water" 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.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
High	$$$ Low	Short-term

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

COMMUNITY HEALTH

- **Objective 2:** Improve outcomes in physical, mental, and behavioral health, and increase social connectedness.

Purpose

The impact of Tropical Storm Helene extends beyond the damage to the land and infrastructure, leaving people across the region with immense losses that will shape our geography, communities, and collective memory for years to come. The goal of this project is to create a pathway for community reflection, healing, and long-term development of community memory. Alongside crowdsourced materials, the project includes scientific and environmental data, media coverage, and historic photos of past weather events in the region. These resources offer a deeper understanding of the storm's impact by enhancing individual experiences with data driven content and historical context.

The Buncombe County Special Collections library is an archival facility locate in Pack Memorial Library in downtown Asheville that specializes in the social, cultural, and natural history of the area.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

Utilize Buncombe County Public Library's Special Collections at Pack Library to establish a diverse and permanent digital and physical collection of items that document and create context around flooding disasters in Western North Carolina, especially Tropical Storm Helene.



Activities & Deliverables

- Engage with residents of the county and the surrounding region to build a crowdsourced community archive.
- Document the role of local, state, and federal government by archiving relevant materials.
- Build a permanent web-archive capturing fragile digital media.
- Gather detailed, qualitative information about how community members prepared for, responded to, and accessed resources in the aftermath of the storm through oral history interviews.
- Document past disasters using historical photos, newspaper reports, and data.
- Facilitate community programs to include storytelling, creative responses to the storm, environmental history, and more.

Implementation Considerations

Long-term information technology support for hosting and backups will be required. Successful implementation should also include support/ contributions to the archive from other Buncombe County agencies. This may include the contribution of deliverables that could be considered to hold "enduring historical value," documenting staff experiences via oral histories with critical emergency operations staff members, and ensuring that staff and the public are aware of the archive and its potential uses.

BUNCOMBE COUNTY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County Public Libraries

Partners:

- University of North Carolina at Asheville
- Swannanoa Valley Museum & History Center
- Preservation Society of Asheville & Buncombe County
- Friends of Buncombe County Special Collections
- Warren Wilson College
- Montreat College
- Area Art, History, Science, & Learning Institutions

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.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
Medium	Low	Medium

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

PUBLIC SAFETY

- **Objective 2:** Improve outcomes in physical, mental, and behavioral health, and increase social connectedness .

Purpose

During Tropical Storm Helene response efforts, aid was delivered by dozens of community-based organizations. This includes well-established disaster response and recovery agencies as well as other groups with steady state missions unrelated to disaster. Real-time collaborations emerged, allowing Buncombe County to partner with community-based organizations for access to food, water, emergency supplies, housing and social services as well as accounting for disaster-related donations and volunteer management. Best practice models call for year-round collaboration and formalized partnerships to enhance effectiveness in disaster response. Examples include: Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD), and Long-Term Recovery Group (LTRG).

Some of the organizations that came to support Western North Carolina include World Central Kitchen, Redneck Airforce, and Mennonite Disaster Services.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

Broad and ongoing coordination across sectors and organizations enhances effectiveness across all disaster phases: preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation. Pre-established relationships and partnerships allow for swift and coordinated response when a disaster strikes, which streamlines access and reduces duplication in services to the public.



Activities & Deliverables

- Regularly convene VOADS and/or COADS.
- Maintain a repository of disaster-related community resources, providers, and contact information.
- Establish pre-positioned mutual agreements for key services (e.g. donations management, warehousing).
- Conduct shared trainings and disaster preparedness exercises
- Maintain volunteer and donation policies.
- Participate in Long-Term Recovery Group addressing unmet needs of survivors.

Implementation Considerations

Preparedness initiatives such as VOADs & COADs can be difficult to maintain during “blue sky days” when it has been a while since a community has been directly impacted by a disaster. Therefore, it’s important to assign multiple points of contact for continuity during turnover, and meeting agendas should include meaningful, engaging activities such as tabletop disaster drills. See related project, “Social Services Emergency Response Plan.”

Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County Strategic Partnerships

Partners:

- N.C. Voluntary Organizations in Disaster
- Buncombe County Public Safety Communications
- Long-Term Recovery Group
- Voluntary & Community Organizations Active in Disaster

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, including a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
Low	$$$ Low	Short-term

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

PUBLIC SAFETY

- **Objective 1:** Increase prevention and harm reduction.

Purpose

Buncombe County faces increasing risk from hazards including wildfires, floods, winter storms, and house fires. Many residents, especially those in rural, low-income, or immigrant communities, are underprepared due to limited access to resources or lack of awareness. Action on this topic can prevent loss of life, injuries, and property damage during emergencies.

> *"If our citizens are educated and prepared, there will be less fear and negative responses in future disasters."*
>
> *— Envision Buncombe Survey Response*

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

A community risk reduction campaign is intended to lead to enhanced risk literacy in the community, increased household and business preparedness, and reduced avoidable emergency incidents (e.g., structure fires, flood exposure).

Activities & Deliverables

- Develop a community awareness curriculum, including disaster preparedness guidelines, for community members and promotion of early action, expecially among at-risk groups.
- Distribute awareness materials and host community education events.
- Design and implement a CERT program, including a council and training plan.
- Conduct CERT Trainings.
- Maintain records of training and current roster of CERT team members.

Implementation Considerations

Where possible, the program should focus benefit for historically marginalized and underserved communities, non-English-speaking households, rural and geographically isolated populations, and youth and older adult populations through school and caregiver outreach. There is an opportunity to develop this program along with Resilience Hubs and other preparedness programs. The program would benefit from engagement with libraries and emergency services on educational sessions. Pacing of the program may be dependent on staff capacity.



Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County Emergency Services

Partners:

- Buncombe County Communications & Public Engagement
- Fire Districts
- School Systems

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.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
Medium	$$$ High	Long-term

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

PUBLIC SAFETY

- **Objective 2:** Increase hazard mitigation and disaster preparedness to support a climate resilient community.

Purpose

Critical county services must have continuous operations during emergencies, including Emergency Services, General Services, Information Technology, Public Health, and Public Safety Communications. A variety of hazards threaten to disrupt essential services at critical county facilities including natural disasters, utility outages, security breaches, communication disruption, or access issues. Reducing vulnerabilities to these threats is essential in providing critical services to residents when need for support is elevated.

FEMA reports that, on average, every $1 invested in hazard mitigation provides the nation with about $4 in future benefits, including avoided losses and reduced recovery costs.

Benefits & Outcomes

These upgrades will enhance resilience to disruptions ensuring continuous operation while reducing energy consumption and associated greenhouse gas emissions and operating costs, resulting in ehanced public trust in County's commitment to providing critical services.



Activities & Deliverables

- Hazard assessment including hydrological studies, evaluation of structural wind loads, and critical power load calculations.
- Internal audience engagement.
- Concept design: Explore multiple adaptation strategies and cost analysis.
- Develop funding strategy.
- Final design: Construction and installation.
- Develop operations and maintenance plan.
- Data collection and analytics to measure facility performance and inform future decision making.

Implementation Considerations

While conducting upgrades to critical facilities, it will be necessary to ensure continuity of operations of essential government functions throughout the construction process. Implementation is dependent on staff capacity and funding sources, such as FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program.



Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County Office of Sustainability

Partners:

- Buncombe County Emergency Services
- Buncombe County General Services
- Buncombe County Information Technology
- Contracted Sustainability, Design, and Construction Firms

Cultural Asset Restoration

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

Complexity	Cost	Timing
Medium	$$$ High	Medium

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

COMMUNITY HEALTH

- **Objective 2:** Increase outcomes in physical, mental, and behavioral health, and increase social connectedness.

Purpose

As a result of Tropical Storm Helene, Buncombe County sustained damages to more than 28 locations for county-operated cultural and recreational amenities, including 20 parks, 5 libraries, and 2 community centers. Charles D. Owen Park in Swannanoa was the most extensively damaged, along with the county's 7 river parks along Hominy Creek and the French Broad River. Many trails and greenways were also impacted. In Barnardsville, the Big Ivy Community Center experienced massive flood damage, impacting both the building and the grounds.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

Buncombe County intends to repair, replace and/or restore each of these parks, libraries, and community centers. Some can be restored to their pre-disaster condition, yet some were so severely damaged or destroyed that they will need to be re-envisioned. Mitigation and resiliency measures will be prioritized in order to enhance readiness to withstand future risks.

> ***"Please, please, please rebuild Charles D. Owen Park and all the public places that brought people close to nature!"***
>
> *– Envision Buncombe Survey Response*

Activities & Deliverables

- Procure contracts for professional services to support redesign.
- Engage the public in reimagining these public spaces.
- Navigate insurance recovery process for insured property.
- Maximize FEMA Public Assistance and other funding sources.
- Consult hazard mitigation specialists to advise on design.
- Conduct design, permitting and reconstruction work.
- Reopen all amenities to the public.



Implementation Considerations

While restoration of community centers and libraries is well underway, County Parks will require significant redevelopment—most notably Owen Park. These activities will be carried out in alignment with the Parks Master Plan, which is in progress. Project specifications and schedule will be dependent on the funding sources for these expenses, likely to include insurance recovery, FEMA Public Assistance, FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grants, and/or USDA Emergency Watershed Protection Program. Additional interdependencies include staff capacity, regulatory reviews such as environmental and historic preservation, as well as coordination with utility service providers and easement holders.



Owen Park View: Former walking trail and ponds

Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County Parks and Recreation

Partners:

- FEMA
- Buncombe County General Services
- Buncombe County Parks & Recreation
- Buncombe County Public Libraries
- Nonprofit Community Center Partners
- Contracted Design & Construction Firms

Disaster Response Heavy Equipment

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

Complexity	Cost	Timing
Medium	$$$ Low	Short-term

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

PUBLIC SAFETY

- **Objective 2:** Increase hazard mitigation and disaster preparedness to support a climate resilient community.

Purpose

Tropical Storm Helene demonstrated the complexities of emergency response the dynamic environment of Buncombe County, which is comprised of a variety rural, urban, and largely undeveloped communities. Proactively identifying and securing access to equipment necessary to navigate complex settings and disaster conditions will not only enhance Buncombe County's ability to effectively perform search & rescue operations in all areas of the county, but also in response to a wide range of potential emergency situations including flooding, wildfires, landslides, and more.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

Buncombe County will evaluate all disaster response equipment needs to effectively reach all areas of the county under a multitude of conditions. This will result in a list of useful equipment and evaluation of the best fit for procuring these goods. Ultimately, this work will result in quicker response times and improved life safety outcomes in emergency rescue situations.

Multiple organizations like Team Rubicon and Rise Disaster Relief supported response through equipment sharing during Tropical Storm Helene.

Activities & Deliverables

- Form an interdepartmental team to evaluate options and confirm equipment needs to achieve project outcomes.
- Evaluate best fit procurement source for all equipment identified, in alignment with the County's capital improvement and procurement policies and procedures.
- Identify funding sources.
- Implement contracting and/or purchasing of all identified equipment.

Implementation Considerations

Effectively filling all heavy equipment needs for disaster response will require thorough assessment of:

- Types of heavy equipment needed.
- Staging requirements for effective deployment.
- Human, financial, and capital resources required for maintenance and storage.
- Availability of equipment through contracting, mutual aid, or other non-ownership agreements.
- Funding sources and availability.



Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County Emergency Services

Partners:

- N.C. Emergency Management
- Buncombe County Budget & Finance
- Buncombe County General Services
- Fire Districts

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.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
Low	$$$ Medium	Short-Term

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

- **Objective 2:** Encourage a diversity of housing as a foundation for affordable, healthy, and thriving communities, particularly for the most vulnerable residents.

Purpose

Naturally occurring affordable housing in Buncombe County was significantly impacted by Tropical Storm Helene due to proximity to or location in special flood hazard areas. Down payment assistance would provide loans to income-eligible homebuyers who have been permanently displaced because of the storm through its well-established Affordable Housing Services Program (AHSP).

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

Down payment assistance will help families get back into homes and stabilize local communities as they recover from the impacts of Helene. The program is designed to serve low- and moderate-income households (households at less than 80% Area Median Income), which generally have inequitable access to safe, affordable housing in Buncombe County, as evidenced by recent Housing Needs Assessments.

According to recent FEMA data, 247 housing units in Buncombe County occupied by households earning 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI) or less were destroyed.

Activities & Deliverables

1. Commissioners approve the project and associated budget.
2. Staff recommend revisions to the AHSP Guidelines to reflect the specific use of downpayment assistance for households impacted by the storm.
3. The Affordable Housing Subcommittee reviews revisions and recommends to the full Board of Commissioners for approval.
4. Staff publishes application or request for proposals.
5. The Affordable Housing Subcommittee reviews applications and recommends funding to the full Board of Commissioners for approval.
6. Staff executes contracts with funded organizations, monitors work, and manages dibursement of funds.

Implementation Considerations

The program will require adherence to standards, including:

- Sold as affordable (not to exceed 30% of the buyer's income).
- Sold to an eligible homebuyer (a household income at or below 80% of AMI adjusted for household size as described in U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's [HUD] Income Limits Summary Table.)
- Have a maximum sales price as described in HUD's Homeownership Sales Price Limits Table or sell at a higher price but only the first mortgage is affordable to the buyer based on their income.

The capacity of existing and future staff to guarantee these standards may impact the pace of implementation.



Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County Planning & Development

Partners:

- N.C. Department of Commerce
- Asheville Regional Housing Consortium
- Long-Term Recovery Group
- Municipalities
- Downpayment Assistance Nonprofit Service Providers

Emergency Operations Center

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

Complexity	Cost	Timing
Medium	$$$ High	Medium

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

PUBLIC SAFETY

- **Objective 2:** Increase hazard mitigation and disaster preparedness to support a climate resilient community.

Purpose

Tropical Storm Helene demonstrated the insufficiency of existing County infrastructure to house the human resources, technological infrastructure, life safety utilities, and other functions required to respond, manage, and maintain continuity of government operations to effectively meet community needs during a disaster event.

Insufficient facility space resulted in Buncombe County managing its Emergency Operation Center from 4 separate locations during Tropical Storm Helene.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

Construction of a new EOC, designed with an emphasis on resiliency to support continuity of operations under a variety of emergency circumstances, will significantly unify response efforts across emergency management functions by facilitating more effective information sharing, resource allocation, and efficient deployment of support for field operations.

Activities & Deliverables

- Design physical and operational requirements for the facility.
- Evaluate and identify appropriate locations to meet requirements.
- Identify funding sources/financing mechanisms, in compliance with Buncombe County's capital improvement policy.
- Conduct design, engineering, permitting, and construction.

Implementation Considerations

EOC planning will need to be done in coordination with Buncombe County's preparedness action planning process. Identifying a suitable building location and evaluating opportunities to upgrade an existing facility should be assessed compared to the construction of a new building. Considerations in this process will include staff capacity, security, parking, utility access, and technological requirements, as well as confirmation of all emergency management functions to be located at this facility. Confirming funding sources for this effort will also be integral to success, as ensuring that the facility is constructed to ensure weather resiliency and utility redundancy is integral to achieving the project's desired outcomes.





Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County General Services

Partners:

- N.C. Emergency Management
- Buncombe County Emergency Services
- Buncombe County Public Safety Communications
- Public Safety Partners Including Municipalities & Fire Districts

Emergency Shelter Facility

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

Complexity	Cost	Timing
Medium	$$$ High	Medium

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

PUBLIC SAFETY

- **Objective 2:** Increase hazard mitigation and disaster preparedness to support a climate resilient community.

Purpose

During Tropical Storm Helene response efforts, Buncombe County was challenged to find available locations adequate to meet the community's needs for emergency shelter. Several transitions between various locations caused disruption in services, and it became clear that Buncombe County could benefit from owning a facility to meet this need. One opportunity to meet this need would be to expand a previously planned construction of a modest facility to house recreation services into a larger scale facility also capable of meeting community sheltering needs. In the aftermath of the storm, the project was reenvisioned to potentially be a large-scale facility that serves as a recreation center during times of normal operations and converts to a mass care shelter during times of emergency.



Across the United States, the American Red Cross opens an average of 500 emergency shelters annually in response to disasters, housing more than 50,000 people each year.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

The new recreation and emergency shelter facility will increase Buncombe County's portfolio of recreational assets and contribute to community health and wellness. During times of emergency, it will serve as Buncombe County's primary shelter location. The facility will be outfitted with resiliency measures for access during times of emergency. These would potentially include flood mitigation measures, renewable energy installation, battery energy storage, natural gas backup generation, and water storage among others.



Activities & Deliverables

- Study feasibility and determine location.
- Engage the community for input on facility design.
- Identify financing mechanisms in compliance with Buncombe County's capital improvement policy.
- Conduct design, engineering, permitting, and construction.

Implementation Considerations

Shelter planning will need to be done in coordination with Buncombe County's preparedness action planning process. Considerations in this process will include staff capacity, security, parking, utility access, and technological requirements, as well as confirmation of all "blue skies" and emergency functions to be located at this facility. Confirming funding sources for this effort will also be integral to success, as ensuring that the facility is constructed to ensure weather resiliency and utility redundancy is integral to achieving the project's desired outcomes.

Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County General Services

Partners:

- N.C. Emergency Management
- Buncombe County Emergency Services
- Buncombe County Parks & Recreation
- Buncombe Health & Human Services

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.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
High	$$$ High	Medium

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

- **Objective 2:** Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect air quality.

Purpose

As a result of Tropical Storm Helene, Buncombe County sustained extensive damages to county-owned roads, buildings and equipment. This includes: multiple service roads (e.g. public safety communication tower access roads); nearly 100 county-owned vehicles damaged or destroyed by flood waters (e.g. ambulances and law enforcement patrol cars); and building damages from wind and water (e.g. the county garage and public safety communications center).

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

Buncombe County intends to repair, replace, and/or restore each of these roads, buildings, and equipment. This includes not only to their condition before the storm but also with mitigation and resiliency measures where feasible in order to enhance readiness to withstand future risks. Building repairs will be completed in line with the county goal to achieve 100% renewable energy, and fleet replacements will be completed in line with the county goal that 25% of county vehicles will be zero emission, as identified in the strategic plan.

Mountain Mule Packers played a significant role in providing aid to communities in Western North Carolina after Tropical Storm Helene rendered many roads impassable. Each mule could carry about 200 pounds.

Activities & Deliverables

- Maintain an inventory of Tropical Storm Helene-related damages to County fleet and facilities.
- Navigate insurance recovery processes for insured property.
- Maximize FEMA Public Assistance and other funding sources.
- Consult hazard mitigation specialists to advise on design.
- Conduct design, permitting, and reconstruction work for facilities, including in-house repairs where feasible.
- Procure contracts for professional services as well as vehicle and equipment replacements where needed.

Implementation Considerations

Project specifications and schedules will be dependent on a combination of insurance recovery, FEMA Public Assistance, and other potential funding sources for these expenses, as well as staff capacity for the implementation.



Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County General Services

Partners:

- FEMA
- N.C. Emergency Management
- Buncombe County Budget & Finance
- Buncombe County Legal & Risk Management
- Buncombe County Office of Sustainability

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.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
High	$$$ High	Medium

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

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

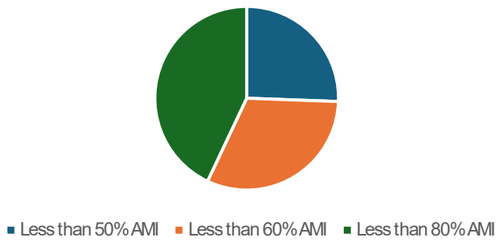
Purpose

Repaired homes are more resilient to future disasters where homes in disrepair face risk of further and greater damage in future events. Currently, there are 426 survivor homeowner households with incomes less than 80% Area Median Income (AMI) that need home repairs but experience a repair cost gap after FEMA payments. For those households, the FEMA repair cost gap averages $29,500 per residence.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

This project will provide safe, healthy, and habitable housing while reducing further financial harm to low- and moderate-income households using a unique model that addresses work already completed (Post-Repair) as well as work to be completed (Pre-Repair).

'Proposed Household Income Served'



More than 9,200 homes in Buncombe County were damaged by Helene, including 489 with major damage.

The Post-Repair option allows eligible applicants to receive compensation for recovery-related work completed prior to the launch of formal assistance programs and paid for with personal funds or private loans. Through the Pre-Repair option, homeowners with more limited resources can provide written construction estimates for Helene related, necessary and reasonable, habitability repairs to be completed and then reimbursed with payment directly to the contractor. This approach allows a shorter period of carrying debt or using limited cash funds for the homeowner.

Activities & Deliverables

- Identify program funding sources.
- Establish program guidelines, and determine model for program management.
- Deliver financial assistance to reimburse low- and moderate-income survivor households for home repairs.

Implementation Considerations

The project could be outsourced to an external management entity as selected through a competitive bidding process or managed internally. Partnerships with non-profits, grant-making organizations, and other philanthropic groups may increase the capacity and success of the program. This project is scalable to specified income levels, funding support caps, and other resources.



Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County Planning & Development

Partners:

- North Carolina Department of Commerce
- Asheville Regional Housing Consortium
- Long-Term Recovery Group
- Municipalities
- Affordable Housing Repair Program Nonprofit Service Providers

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.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
High	$$$ High	Long-term

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

PUBLIC SAFETY

- **Objective 2:** Increase hazard mitigation and disaster preparedness to support a climate resilient community.

Purpose

It is estimated that Tropical Storm Helene caused approximately 1,000 landslides in Buncombe County, which far exceeds the number of historically recorded landslides in the Madison/ Buncombe County region (213). It is estimated that there are still about 145 landslides that could threaten residentials structures in Buncombe County. Of those 145 landslides, 55 of those slides potentially impact multiple residential structures. An additional small number of landslides occurred on county-owned properties. The emphasis of this project is landslides that threaten life safety and infrastructure.

The Blue Ridge Parkway suffered massive damage, with over 30 landslides reported within Buncombe County alone, including 10 categorized as "catastrophic." Repairs are expected to take years.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

This project will reduce the risk and potential severity of future damage from landslides on identified eligible slopes. Garren Creek, within the unincorporated town of Fairview southeast of Asheville, suffered 13 lost lives during Helene due to landslides. This project seeks to reduce/eliminate the number of lives lost in the future due to landslides.



Activities & Deliverables

- Conduct engineering assessments on slides determined to pose imminent future threats. The engineering assessments will include proposed mitigation strategies and related costs.
- Work with state and federal partners to support implementation of the most reasonable mitigation strategy, such as slope stabilization and/or acquisition of properties for where stabilization is not reasonable.

Implementation Considerations

The primary consideration and challenge for this project will be funding and cost reasonableness. The costs associated with engineering and stabilizing slopes are substantial, particularly given the extensive complexity of many of these slopes. Funding for this project may come from FEMA Public Assistance (PA), but eligibility for PA funding will vary for different slopes and the timing of that funding will impact the project duration and scope. There are a limited number of firms capable of performing this specialized work, posing capacity challenges. The County lacks subject-matter experts in this area, potentially complicating the implementation process. This project is highly dependent on federal funding and staff capacity.

Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County General Services

Partners:

- FEMA
- U.S. Geological Service
- N.C. Department of Environmental Quality
- N.C. Emergency Management
- Buncombe County Agriculture & Land Resources
- Buncombe County Emergency Services
- Buncombe County Planning & Development
- Contracted Enginering & Construction Firms

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 a series of trauma-informed mental health support trainings for community members, first responders, educators, social service providers, and local businesses across the county.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
Medium	$$$ Low	Medium

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

COMMUNITY HEALTH

- **Objective 1:** Increase coordination and resilience of community health services to create a healthier and safer community.

Purpose

There is a critical need to increase trauma literacy across the community to effectively support the well-being of those at high risk of vicarious trauma and burnout in the wake of Tropical Storm Helene. This project will cultivate a more resilient and supportive community by enhancing the understanding of trauma and equipping individuals and organizations with the tools necessary to respond effectively to trauma, prevent burnout among helpers, and prepare for community-wide disasters. This enhanced understanding is vital to mitigate the impact of trauma, support the well-being of those at high risk of vicarious trauma and burnout, and ensure a coordinated and compassionate community response to emergencies and disasters.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

- Increased community trauma literacy.
- Improved well-being and resilience for community and helping professionals.
- Strengthened community resilience.
- Improved support systems.
- Coordinated disaster response.

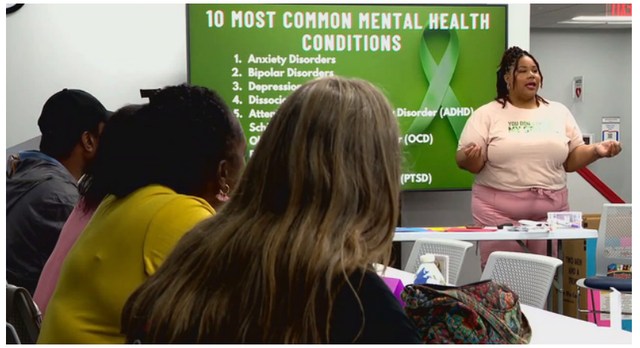
According to findings of the Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response (CASPER) conducted in June 2025, 45.7% of households reported at least one member experiencing new or worsening behavioral health symptoms since Helene.

Activities & Deliverables

- Assess needs and assets.
- Design and implement a community partner engagement strategy.
- Train for program design & curriculum development.
- Develop project evaluation framework.
- Research and secure project funding & resource requirements.
- Training delivery.
- Community resource identification and dissemination.
- Community Mental Health Disaster Response Plan development.
- Integrate Community Mental Health Response plan into existing emergency response plans.

Implementation Considerations

Consideration of the county's role in behavioral health programming under state governance structures will be relevant to this project's implementation. Accordingly, confirming funding sources, staff capacity, and close coordination with community partners to effectively perform all key activities will be integral to effective delivery of this training program and disaster response plan.





Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County Health & Human Services

Partners:
- N.C. Department of Health & Human Services
- Mental Health & Healthcare Providers
- Education System Partners
- Social Service Providers & Community Organizations

Natural Hazard Monitoring

Implement environmental data tracking technology such as weather & air quality monitors, river gauges, and landslide monitors to improve emergency notifications, prevent loss of life, and support public health.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
Medium	$$$ High	Short-term

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

PUBLIC SAFETY

- **Objective 2:** Increase hazard mitigation and disaster preparedness to support a climate resilient community.

Purpose

The core purpose of this project is to increase situational awareness and readiness to communicate potential threats to people and property as a result of natural disasters in Buncombe County. Tropical Storm Helene demonstrated vulnerability both to geographic areas and weather-related dangers traditionally considered low-risk in Buncombe County. These projects will improve the county's ability to monitor, mitigate, and communicate risk to reduce threats to personal wellbeing and property in this emerging landscape of increased risks from natural disasters.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

This project will improve the county's ability to monitor and proactively respond to natural threats to people and property through increased situational awareness. It will further enhance overall community awareness of natural hazards through community outreach and education.

The Envision Buncombe community survey results ranked Community Health, Public Safety, and Disaster Preparedness as top priorities, including repeated calls for emergency alert systems.



Activities & Deliverables

- Assessment of geographic vulnerabilities to determine key locations for each category of monitoring.
- Project scoping & identification of funding sources.
- Installation of river gauges, weather and air quality monitoring, & warning systems in key areas.
- Integration with public safety communications and community notification technology.
- Delivery of community awareness programs to support effective use of updated systems.

Implementation Considerations

This project is multi-jurisdictional, requiring collaboration with state & municipal partners for maintenance & use of river gauge/sirens systems and locations where non-regulatory air quality monitors or sensors can be utilized. Successful project implementation will also require coordination with private property owners and intergovernmental partners to secure right of way access to areas outside of county property. Staff capacity may impact the pace of project implementation.

Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County Emergency Services

Partners:

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- N.C. Department of Environmental Quality
- N.C. Emergency Management
- N.C. Forest Service
- N.C. Department of Transportation
- Buncombe County Communications & Public Engagement
- Buncombe County Information Technology
- Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality Agency
- Fire Districts
- Municipalities & Public Safety Partners

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.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
High	High	Medium

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

- **Objective 1:** Preserve the agricultural heritage of Buncombe County & prioritize the conservation of natural resources.

Purpose

Long-term recovery requires sound land management principles for public and privately owned properties that address repetitive losses to flood hazards and mitigation of streambank erosion across miles of waterways throughout Buncombe County. Through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) property acquisition (buy-out) program, Buncombe County will come into ownership of large amounts of new property to be preserved from future development. This necessitates a structured and measured approach that incudes future uses for lands, land management & maintenance, staffing, and funding resources.



Studies have shown that flood buyouts can be a wise investment, with some estimates suggesting a savings of $5.10 for every $1 spent.

– Environmental Law Institute, 2018

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

This project plans for the implementation of a county-wide flood buy-out program. Potential uses for these open space properties include recreational and agricultural. The outcomes of such a program are intended to address issues of water quality, streambank erosion, repetitive losses to flood hazards, and loss of access to critical infrastructure. Ancillary benefits may address nuisance issues, protect endangered species and critical habitat, and guard against invasive species.

Activities & Deliverables

- Carry out acquisition activites in accordance with HMGP guidance.
- Analyze properties for potential future open space uses.
- Engage public input to inform the plan.
- Develop a funding and staffing model for land management, including maintenance and public access.

Implementation Considerations

Additional staffing may be required to oversee the financial and legal aspects of the buyouts and to manage the land long term. In addition, demolition and new use may require floodplain permits and deed restrictions. All properties, once acquired, will convert to open space, flood storage, and/or passive recreational use, per standards, which will require the development of a long-term maintenance plan and will remain under public ownership in perpetuity.

Properties acquired through HMGP are restricted to open space uses, such as:

OPEN SPACE
parks, greenways, nature preserves

RECREATION
trails, picnic areas, ball fields

WETLANDS MANAGEMENT
natural floodplain, wildlife habitat

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT
retention basins, rain gardens, natural drainage

AGRICULTURE
community gardens, farming, grazing

FORESTRY
tree planting, managed forests

LIMITED PARKING
unpaved, permeable public use

Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
County Manager's Office

Partners:
- FEMA
- N.C. Emergency Services
- Buncombe County Parks & Recreation
- Buncombe County Planning & Development

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.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
High	$$$ Low	Short-term

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

PUBLIC SAFETY

- **Objective 2:** Increase hazard mitigation and disaster preparedness to support a climate resilient community.

Purpose

The purpose of the Preparedness Action Plan is to implement Tropical Storm Helene's After-Action Report to mitigate risk and enhance emergency preparedness throughout Buncombe County government. The need to broaden emergency response capacity beyond typical Emergency Management roles and functions was identified immediately following the disaster. The Report will address these systemic gaps by updating the County's disaster preparedness policies, procedures, and resources to reflect the needs highlighted during this event.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

Implementation will result in improved preparedness, communication, coordination, and overall effectiveness of Buncombe County's disaster response systems. These outcomes aim to reduce vulnerability to disaster events community-wide and result in more efficient emergency response, resource distribution, and continuity of core county functions in future situations.

The Action Plan recommends that residents make family emergency plans and kits. It identifies resources for home repair, other recovery efforts, and mental health support.



Activities & Deliverables

- Review & update Buncombe County Standard Operating Guidelines, job aides, and tools for the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) operations.
- Establish Standard Operating Guidelines, tools, and job aids for all Emergency Support Functions and Operations.
- Pre-position contracts for necessary emergency operations & logistics.
- Update the County's Crisis Communication Plan.
- Conduct a vulnerability assessment of Buncombe County.
- Establish emergency expectations with Buncombe County. Municipalities and Fire Departments.
- Develop a Comprehensive Staffing Plan for all EOC Positions.
- Provide Emergency Operations Procedure training to Staff.
- Enhance Public Safety Communications by Creating a Primary, Alternate, Contingent, Emergency (PACE) Model Plan to ensure continuity of 911 operations during a disaster.
- Establish a Comprehensive Commodities Redistribution and Distribution Point (CRDP) Operation Plan.

Implementation Considerations

The primary consideration and challenge for this project will be funding and staffing capacity constraints. Effective implementation will require dynamic oversight to track progress and ensure updated policies, procedures, and information are substantively disseminated to all impacted personnel.

Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County Emergency Services

Partners:

- Buncombe County Human Resources
- Buncombe County Finance
- N.C. Emergency Management
- Municipal & Regional Governments
- Fire Districts and other Public Safety Partners

Public Art

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

Complexity	Cost	Timing
Medium	$$$ Low	Short-term

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- **Objective 2:** Increase economic and business opportunities in Buncombe County.

Purpose

Public art strengthens community cohesion and emotional resilience, particularly during and after crises. It transforms shared spaces into places of healing, and provides platforms for storytelling and collective reflection. This project addresses the need for economic recovery in the creative economy. Before Tropical Storm Helene, many local artists lacked sustainable sources of income or support for public commissions. Additionally, many neighborhoods in Buncombe County lacked investment in public cultural assets, resulting in underutilized and disconnected public spaces.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

- Public art installations across multiple locations, such as sidewalks, plazas, parks, and building facades.
- Local artists gain paid opportunities, visibility, and professional development, while small businesses and commercial corridors benefit from increased foot traffic and enhanced public spaces that attract visitors and shoppers.
- Community members in underserved neighborhoods gain new access to cultural experiences and public spaces that reflect their stories and identities.
- Residents and tourists benefit from improved aesthetics, walkability, and cultural richness throughout the county.

Activities & Deliverables

- Identify and secure funding.
- Establish project parameters including budget, theme, and media.
- Identify locations for art work.
- Select works of public art in compliance with County procurement policy.
- Install and maintain works of art.

Implementation Considerations

Art selection and implementation should include the whole community, through communication, participation, investments, and participation to ensure community voices and stories are reflected in the art. This project may be improved through coordination with ArtsAVL and the development of their Asheville Arts Recovery Plan.

According to Arts AVL, Buncombe County's dedicated arts agency, Tropical Storm Helene significantly impacted over 570 arts businesses and cultural assets in Buncombe County.



Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County
Strategic Partnerships

Partners:

- Buncombe County Economic Development
- Buncombe County General Services
- Buncombe Couty Parks & Recreation
- Designated Arts Agency
- Artists & Arts Organizations

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.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
Medium	$$$ Medium	Short-term

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

PUBLIC SAFETY

- **Objective 2:** Increase hazard mitigation and disaster preparedness to support a climate resilient community.

Purpose

Tropical Storm Helene demonstrated the vulnerabilities of existing public safety communications infrastructure in Buncombe County when systems damaged in the storm did not have redundant backups in place. Existing capacity was insufficient for the amount of radio traffic and public communications needs that arose during the emergency response phase. This project will enhance the capacity and functionality of systems, tools, and procedures through a renewed emphasis on resiliency and redundancy in the design of local public safety communications infrastructure.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

In addition to improving capacity and redundancy, this project will improve interoperability between Buncombe County's public safety communications systems and that of public safety partners such as Fire Districts. These improvements will bolster the efficiency of emergency response services during everyday and disaster emergency response events alike.

Buncombe County operates 17 public safety radio communication towers that broadcast using specific frequency bands to enable first responders to communicate during emergencies.

Activities & Deliverables

- Evaluate capacity and limitations of existing public safety communications systems (including alerting technology) to identify enhancement and backup opportunities.
- Identify critical facilities and providers for reduncdancies to enhance efficacy of community-wide warning systems.
- Design, procure, and implement systems and install equipment that can be deployed to service locations during outages to provide phone, internet, and radio access.

Implementation Considerations

Producing the key deliverables for this project will require:

- Identifying and securing funding for all identified equipment.
- Coordination with private property owners and intergovernmental partners to secure Right-of-Way access to areas containing critical communication infrastructure outside of county property.
- Learning and development requirements to ensure all Public Safety Communications employees are provided the necessary training and tools to achieve the intended outcomes of this work.
- Staff capacity for full implementation.



Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County Information Technology

Partners:

- Buncombe County Emergency Services
- Buncombe County Public Safety Communications
- Law Enforcement & Fire Districts Within Buncombe County

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.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
Medium	$$$ High	Medium

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

- **Objective 2:** Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect air quality.

Purpose

Evidence suggests that the frequency and intensity of exposure to environmental hazards is increasing. Socioeconomic factors including income, race, age, and underlying health issues make certain Buncombe County residents more vulnerable to these threats. Power, communication, and water systems are vulnerable during natural disasters yet are essential to offering resident support, necessitating redundancies for these services. To build resilience, there is a need for hubs that include physical spaces operable during emergencies paired with programming and services to meet community needs.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

- Offer centralized resource distribution during and after an emergency including food, water, basic medical, and information.
- Foster year-round social cohesion/ connection, promote disaster preparedness, and enhance well-being through workshops, classes, recreational opportunities, and cultural events.
- Enhance personal adaptive capacity for County residents by offering year-round programs that address root causes of vulnerability and proactively build healthier communities including job training, mental health services, and disaster preparedness education.
- Employ building upgrades to address the root causes and symptoms of climate change including energy efficiency, renewable energy, and relief from extreme temperatures or poor air quality.
- Prioritize access for traditionally underserved residents.



Activities & Deliverables

- Needs assessment.
- Community engagement and partnership development.
- Site selections.
- Concept design and cost feasibility.
- Funding strategy.
- Final design, construction, and installation.
- Staff training and operations plan.
- Ongoing programming and partnerships.

Implementation Considerations

This project to establish resilence hubs is interdependent with several other Helene Recovery Projects, including: Cultural Asset Restoration; Emergency Shelter Facility; Community Risk Reduction Campaign; Mental Health Trainings. Implementation may be dependent on staff capacity.

By creating spaces for gathering, events, and skill-building activities, resiliency hubs strengthen community ties and build social capital.

Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County Office of Sustainability

Partners:

- Buncombe County Emergency Services
- Buncombe County General Services
- Buncombe County Health & Human Services
- Buncombe County Office of Equity & Human Rights
- Buncombe County Parks & Recreation
- Buncombe County Public Libraries
- Local School Systems
- Asheville-Buncombe Air Quality
- Contracted Design & Construction Firms
- Area Nonprofits and Community-Based Organizations

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.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
High	$$$ High	Long-term

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

- **Objective 2:** Maximize the use of land, guiding development to targeted growth areas that lead to resilient communities.

Purpose

Sewer infrastructure impacts public health and water quality as well as the type and pattern of development in the county. Septic complaints, repairs, and notices of violation have increased in recent years, exacerbated by flooding during tropical storm Helene. Issues with these systems can impact environmental health in many areas of the county such as French Broad River or other recreational spaces. Extending water and sewer will create economic opportunity by enabling commercial and industrial growth. Disaster recovery presents an opportunity to expand the sewer system, remove unreliable septic systems and package plants in the county, and increase economic growth.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

Expansion of sewer infrastructure provides environmental, health, and economic benefits to the community. Expansion provides new opportunities for economic development as areas can support higher densities of residents and businesses without relying on individual septic systems and package plants. Septic systems and package plants in the county are vulnerable to leaks and are not resilient to disaster flooding as seen during Helene.

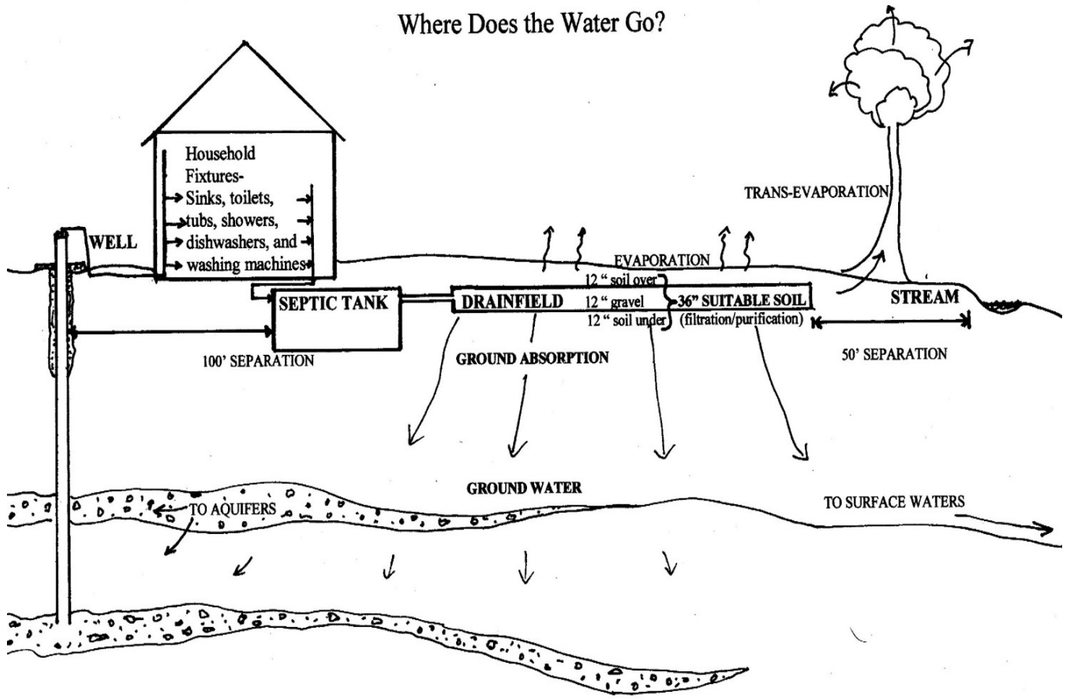
The MSD wastewater treatment plant currently processes an average of 20 million gallons per day yet has the capacity to treat twice that volume if expanded.

Activities & Deliverables

- Work with the Metropolitan Sewerage District (MSD) to study extensions in identified expansion areas such as Enka-Candler, North Buncombe, and Cane Creek.
- Conduct engineering reviews to ensure alignment to MSD capital improvement plan.
- Develop plans and seek funding to extend and improve infrastructure.

Implementation Considerations

MSD has a detailed extension policy noting types, locations, and new connections of extensions. Extension reimbursements are available for affordable housing developments and economic development opportunities. MSD is ultimately responsible for sewer infrastructure and does not expand without strong identified need. High cost of sewer expansion lends itself to conservative planning and capital improvements and amplifies the importance of grant funding.



Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Partners:
- Metropolitan Sewerage District
- Buncombe Economic Development
- Municipalities

Project Lead:
Buncombe County
Planning & Development

Skills, Training, & Employment Program

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.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
Low	Low	Medium

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- **Objective 1:** Increase opportunities and support for local workforce.

Purpose

This program currently allows all food and nutrition service recipients (ages 16 and older) the opportunity to take continuing education courses at no cost. This project will address negative economic impacts from Tropical Storm Helene, such as unemployment in the tourism sector. The high cost of educational access coupled with a prime age working population (18–44) where 39.3% do not have a degree and 29.2% have a high school equivalent or less (myfuturenc.org), contribute to a mismatch between the skills employees have and the postitons employers seek to fill.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

This project is intended to increase community awareness, enrollment, graduation and employment rates for Skills, Training, and Employment Program (STEP) program participants, elevating their ability to earn a living wage and uplifting them from poverty while contributing to overall economic revitalization.

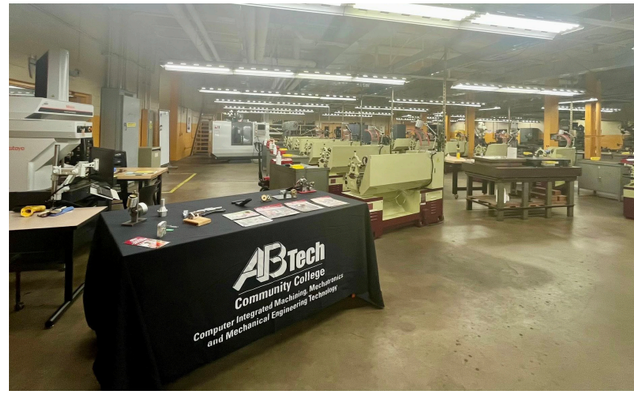
The estimated economic damage of Helene in Western North Carolina includes $251 million in lost wages, $2.5-3 billion in physical damage to commercial infrastructure, and $1.8 billion in lost revenue (WNC Business Loss Assessment, Development Partnership of North Carolina.)

Activities & Deliverables

- Rebrand the STEP program in alignment with More Than a Job NC.
- Establish and implement an engagment plan in collaboration with community partners to increase awareness about STEP and other workforce training programs.
- Work with education institution partners to develop course programming reflective of local workforce needs.
- Work with employers to promote career opportunities for STEP graduates.

Implementation Considerations

Buncombe County is currently executing an Economic Mobility Cohort grant from International City and County Management Association to support STEP and gather program feedback. The results of this work will be used as foundation for developing increased enrollment in STEP. Changes to SNAP or More Than a Job at the federal or state level would impact this program.





Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County Health & Human Services

Partners:

- N.C. Department of Health & Human Services
- Buncombe County Economic Development
- Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
- Local Educational Institutions
- Workforce Development Board
- Area Nonprofits & Business Partners
- International City & County Management Association

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.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
Low	$$$ Medium	Short-term

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- **Objective 2:** Increase economic and business opportunities in buncombe county.

Purpose

This project supports small business recovery and economic revitalization. Businesses with 150 employees or fewer account for a vast majority of businesses in Buncombe County and are a major employer. Small businesses were already burdened with additional debt as a result of the pandemic and cannot afford to take on additional loans. A significant loss of small businesses would exacerbate unemployment and further injure critical economic sectors, such as hospitality.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

Small business grants provide direct financial support to struggling small businesses, which make up a majority of firms in the county. Financial support of this type prevents business closures and resulting unemployment during a time of economic stress for the county. Grant programs of this type also support unique local industries like food and beverage, hospitality, and creative manufacturing.

FEMA estimates that up to 40% of small businesses in an area close after a major disaster, with a further 25% at risk in the following year.

Activities & Deliverables

- Seek funding from private, state and federal sources to support financial support for small businesses.
- Develop a pass-through funding system with Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) partners to distribute funds.
- Ensure access to ongoing technical support and business coaching.



Implementation Considerations

Mountain BizWorks, an area CDFI, estimates that the region's small businesses will need $100 million for recovery, yet only $65 million has been raised so far. This funding will ensure that small businesses will be able to cover about one-third of their Helene expenses with grants and the remaining amount with loans. Size and scope of small business support will depend on available funds. Staff capacity to assist with implementation may impact the pacing of the project.



Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County
Economic Development

Partners:

- Buncombe County Finance
- Dogwood Health Trust
- N.C. Department of Commerce
- U.S. Small Business Administration
- Community Development Financial Institution(s)
- Economic Development Coalition partners

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.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
Medium	$$$ Low	Short-term

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

COMMUNITY HEALTH

- **Objective 1:** Increase coordination and resilience of community health services to create a healthier and safer community.

Purpose

During response to Tropical Storm Helene, Buncombe County identified areas where advanced planning would have enhanced the delivery of human services. A post-disaster social services framework serves as a roadmap to guide comprehensive, coordinated, and compassionate support for survivors, helping them to stabilize, and recover. The scope is intended to be comprehensive, covering the full breadth of core human safety functions - including feeding, sheltering, and family reunification.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

- Enhances efficiency of communication and collaboration to prepare for and respond to disaster scenarios.
- Improves outcomes for survivors.
- Creates stronger community resilience.
- Provides better long-term disaster planning and mitigation.

After a disaster, social workers specializing in disaster management social work provide individuals and communities with immediate and long-term support to facilitate rebuilding and recovery.

Activities & Deliverables

- Engage in training and research around disaster response models.
- Establish a comprehensive response plan, including clear roles for County staff and community partners.
- Develop formal collaborative agreements with community-based organizations, including local resiliency hubs and mass-care providers, and mental health response agencies.
- Deliver employee training on comprehensive response plan.

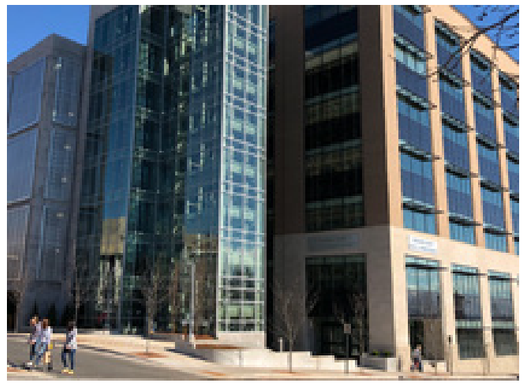


Implementation Considerations

Buncombe County lacks the staffing capacity to develop and implement this comprehensive framework. Close coordination through MOUs with community partners to ensure mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities under this framework will be integral to success. This includes the Continuum of Care and the Community Organizations Active in Disaster and Buncombe County Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster in development as a part of this Recovery Plan. See related projects, “Community Organization Support.”



North Carolina Disaster Case Management Program Help with Navigating Recovery Resources



Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County Health & Human Services

Partners:

- Buncombe County Emergency Services
- Buncombe County Planning & Development
- Asheville-Buncombe Continuum of Care
- Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster
- Buncombe County & Asheville City Schools
- Nonprofit partners

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).

Complexity	Cost	Timing
High	$$$ High	Medium

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

- **Objective 1:** Preserve the agriculture heritage of buncombe county & prioritize the conservation of natural resources.

Purpose

Nearly all waterways impacted by Helene are adjacent to some form of infrastructure. Historically, due to the topography of Buncombe County, infrastructure has been placed along waterways for access. In a post-Helene world, severe erosion and denuded stream banks are affecting water quality, tourism, and access to critical infrastructure, which impacts the County's ability to deploy emergency personnel. Streambank stabilization and long-term restoration strategies repair existing issues and reduce the likelihood of future deterioration.



This project will work to restore more than 1.3 million linear feet (250+ miles) of streambanks across 8 waterways.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

Streambank stabilization produces multiple outcomes: it removes debris from streams, stabilizes streambanks against future disasters and floods, and buffers and hardens water-adjacent properties and infrastructure critical for access to remote areas in the event of emergencies. Failing to stabilize stream banks after a flood allows continued erosion threatening homes, roads, bridges and safety of residents. The project includes 3 phases of stabilization to span immediate to long-term recovery needs: Revegetation; Stabilization; and Restoration of riparian corridors and wildlife habitat restoration. This project is intended to serve eight (8) waterways:

- Hominy Creek: 176,600 linear ft.
- Swannanoa River: 253,600 linear ft.
- Ivy Creek: 75,000 linear ft.
- Reems Creek: 168,000 linear ft.
- Garren Creek: 56,400 linear ft.
- Cane Creek: 165,000 linear ft.
- Dillingham Creek: 56,600 linear ft.
- French Broad River: 375,000 linear ft.

Activities & Deliverables

Identify funding and carry out a streambank stabilization program, including:

- Planning and assessment
- Design and permitting
- Construction
- Operation and maintenance

Implementation Considerations

Permits for work in water and floodplain will be required. Use of federal funding of any kind may require advanced environmental project review. This stream stabilization work will occur on both private and public properties, including County parks and greenways. Capacity of staff may impact the pace of implementation.



Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County Parks and Recreation

Partners:

- U.S. Department of Agriculture
- Natural Resource Conservation Service
- N.C Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services
- N.C. Department of Environmental Quality
- N.C. Cooperative Extension
- Buncombe County Soil and Water Conservation District
- Area Nonprofits

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.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
Medium	$$$ Low	Short-term

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

- **Objective 2:** Maximize the use of land, guiding development to targeted growth areas that lead to resilient communities.

Purpose

Small area plans in North Carolina are focused, community-driven planning initiatives that provide detailed strategies for specific geographic areas, supplementing comprehensive plans by addressing unique needs and priorities of smaller areas. Swannanoa is an unincoporated area of Buncombe County that was severely damaged in the storm, primarily by flooding, but also was impacted by wind and landslides. The small area plan was proposed before the storm, but took on added urgency given the current needs for rebuilding and recovery. The plan aims to guide future growth, development, conservation, and resilience in Swannanoa. It will serve as both a physical land use plan and a policy guide. It will address topics common in Small Area and Corridor Plans, such as housing, transportation, health, and recreation, while also focusing on resilience and disaster mitigation.

Buncombe County sponsored informal gatherings in the Swannanoa community, like "Pizza with a Planner" and "Coffee with a Planner" to encourage casual conversations about the plan.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

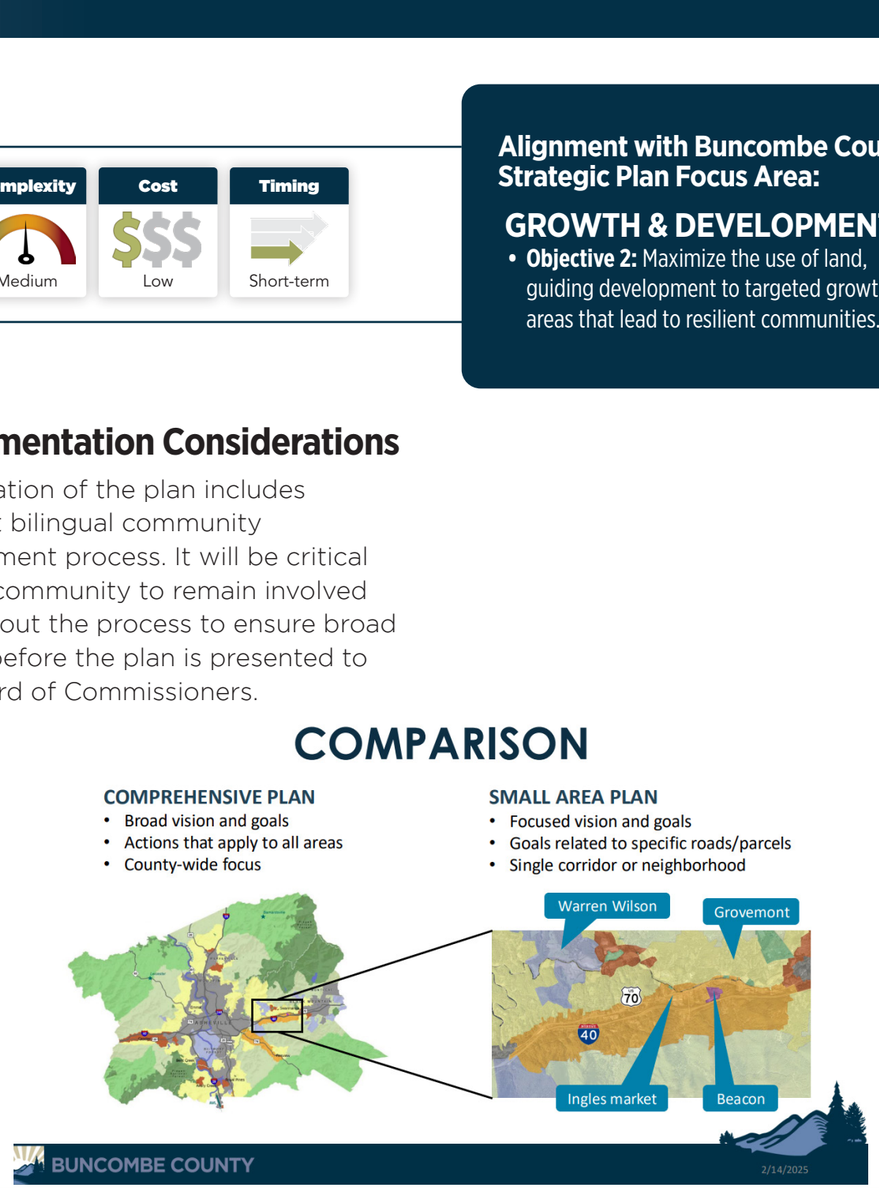
The plan will serve as a resource to collect community input on the future growth of Swannanoa. It will define a geographic boundary and outline a detailed plan for addressing future change in a way that responds to the unique characteristics and needs of the area.

Activities & Deliverables

- Identify the unique needs, challenges, resilience, and growth and conservation demands of the area.
- Identify and evaluate the changed landscapes and development challenges related to Helene.
- Achieve the vision and goals outlined in the 2043 Comprehensive Plan.

Implementation Considerations

The creation of the plan includes a robust bilingual community engagement process. It will be critical for the community to remain involved throughout the process to ensure broad buy-in before the plan is presented to the Board of Commissioners.



Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County
Planning & Development

Partners:

- Buncombe County Communications & Public Engagement
- Black Mountain Swannanoa Chamber of Commerce
- Fairview Business Association
- Weaverville Business Association
- Swannanoa Area Nonprofits & Community Groups

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.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
Medium	$$$ Medium	Medium

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

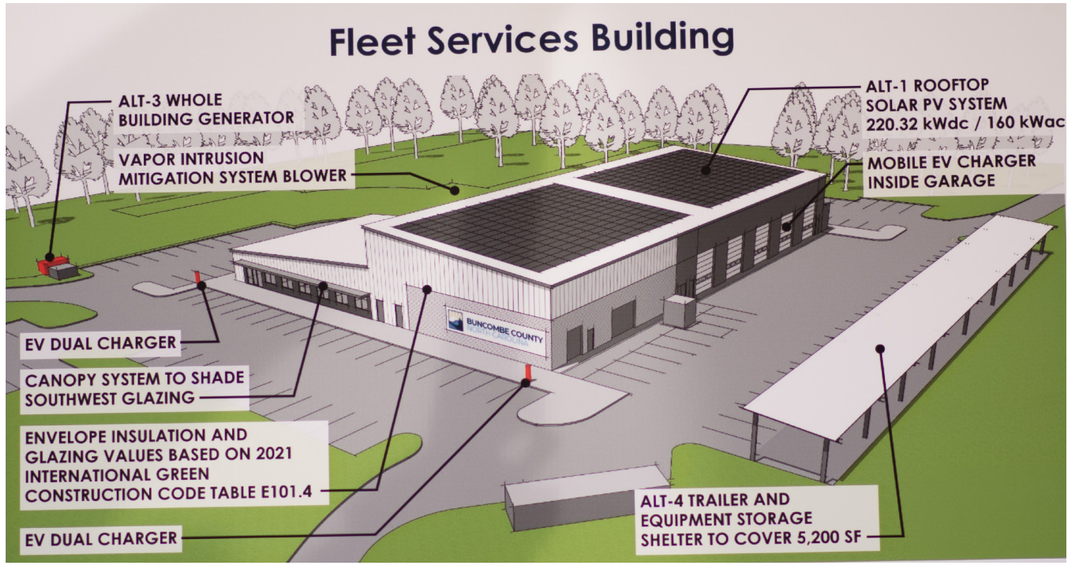
PUBLIC SAFETY

- **Objective 2:** Increase hazard mitigation and disaster preparedness to support a climate resilient community.

Purpose

Planning for emergency fleet operation is a complex issue requiring considerations for equipment, location of infrastructure, multiple fuel sources, adaptability for multiple scenarios, clear communication, supply contracts, and cross-department coordination. Emergencies can disrupt fuel supply chains, and electric vehicle charging infrastructure is vulnerable to electric grid outages, threatening the continuation of critical services. Certain stored fuels degrade over time, requiring planning to ensure quality. Fueling operations will shift during emergency operations, necessitating written procedures including, but not limited to refueling locations and fuel rationing. By proactively addressing these challenges with a disaster vehicle fueling and charging plan, Buncombe County can minimize disruptions to essential services.

During Tropical Storm Helene, Buncombe County faced fuel delivery delays, power outages, and road closures, forcing agencies to ration fuel for essential services.



Benefits & Intended Outcomes

- Protect Buncombe County against fuel supply chain interruptions.
- Minimize disruptions to Electric Vehicle (EV) charging caused by grid outages.
- Align fuel preparedness with sustainable fleet initiatives

Activities & Deliverables

- Assess risks and vulnerabilities to fuel supply and County-owned fueling/charging infrastructure.
- Develop a detailed plan outlining fueling/charging procedures for multiple emergency scenarios including communications protocol.
- Develop a funding strategy.
- Reexamine contracts with fuel suppliers.
- Calculate on-site fuel storage needs including battery storage for EV charging.
- Where necessary, ensure backup generators are sized to power EV chargers during grid outage.
- Update Fleet Policy as needed.
- Ensure ongoing testing, training, maintenance, and plan updates.

Implementation Considerations

Vehicle resilience activities should consider an all-hazards approach with consideration for how to maintain critical operations during various scenarios (e.g. fuel shortages, power outages, severe weather, transportation route disruptions). Staff capacity may impact the pace of implementation.

Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County General Services

Partners:

- Buncombe County Emergency Management
- Buncombe County Office of Sustainability
- Buncombe County Sheriff's Office
- Contracted Fuel & Energy Providers

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.

Complexity	Cost	Timing
Medium	$$$ Medium	Medium

Alignment with Buncombe County Strategic Plan Focus Area:

PUBLIC SAFETY

- **Objective 2:** Increase hazard mitigation and disaster preparedness to support a climate resilient community.

Purpose

As a severe wind event, Tropical Storm Helene had a catastrophic impact on forests in Western North Carolina. Following unprecedented rainfall (30+ inches in some areas) and extreme wind gusts (up to 106 mph), there was widespread blowdown across an approximately 822,000 acres in 17 counties. The results of these impacts have created a multi-year to multi-decade hazard that requires coordinated, proactive planning and sustained resources.

Wildfire risks include:

- **Immediate:** High ignition risk from fine fuels and debris; critical gaps in access and readiness.
- **Short-Term (2–5 years)**: Increased insect and disease outbreaks; heightened wildland-urban interface danger from increased fuel load and limited access for firefighting services.
- **Long-Term (5–15+ years):** Large fuels will persist on the forest floor, increasing the risk of long-burning, wildfires, and hampering suppression access unless mitigated.

According to the National Hurricane Center Tropical Cyclone Report on Hurricane Helene, tens of thousands of trees were knocked down across Buncombe County.

Benefits & Intended Outcomes

A CWPP is tailored to the unique characteristics of each fire district and outlines specific actions for wildfire preparedness, mitigation, response, and prevention. The goal is to have CWPPs in place for all of the fire districts in Buncombe County.

Activities & Deliverables

Activities include: secure funding; formalize roles through written agreements; conduct wildfire hazard assessments; map risk areas considering past fires; evaluate response capabilities; prioritize fuel reduction; address structural integrity; design mitigation measures; and create a detailed implementation strategy with timelines, responsible parties, and metrics for tracking progress.

Implementation Considerations

Effective wildfire preparedness and response will require:

- Cross-agency coordination among local, state, and federal wildfire response agencies, emergency managers, planners, and scientific partners.
- Public and partner communication to ensure residents understand evolving risks and how to prepare.
- Legislative engagement and resource allocation to secure support for suppression entities, equipment, staffing, landowner assistance, data and mapping tools, and long-term forest recovery programs.



Project Sponsor:
Buncombe County

Project Lead:
Buncombe County Emergency Services

Partners:

- U.S. Department of Agriculture
- U.S. Fire Administration
- N.C. Forest Service
- Buncombe County Agriculture & Land Resources
- Fire Districts & Public Safety Partners
- Municipalities