HELENE UPDATE

Board of Commissioners | August 19, 2025

Topics for Today

PRESENTATIONS:

- **Debris** – Dane Pedersen
- **Landslides** – Burnett Walz
- **Helene Recovery Plan** – Kathleen Blackney

APPENDIX:

- **Data Updates by Recovery Support Function**

Closeout Status of Direct Federal Assistance Missions: Debris Removal Total: 3,333,900 CY





- **Right of Way Debris Removal: Mission Complete!**
  - **1,557,232 total cubic yards of debris removed**
- **PPDR (Private and Commercial Debris Removal): Mission Close to Completion**
  - **>170,000 cubic yards of debris removed. 4,789 Parcels completed**
  - Remaining properties receiving debris removal
  - FEMA ineligibility letters mailed out to Unincorporated Buncombe County properties (Majority do not meet imminent threat or hazards per FEMA guidelines, such as vacant lots, unmaintained areas, walking trails or are out of the program's jurisdiction)
    - Additional ineligibility letters are in FEMA review currently
  - PPDR complaints and concerns: debrismanagement@helene@buncombenc.gov
- **Waterway Debris Removal: Mission Complete! 1,606,668 CY debris removed**
- **Demolition has started**

Temporary Debris Site Completions

- Beacon TDMS Complete and Closed Out
- Old Landfill TDMS Complete and Closed Out
- Cane Creek TDMS receiving final stabilization
- Enka TDMS remains open through August





Old Landfill Temporary Debris Site Complete and Closed

Questions?

Landslides

- Overview of the 55 landslides we deemed most risky, the status of the assessments, our remediation plans

Landslides – The Path Forward

County / Public Property

FEMA Public Assistance

Individual Properties / Sides

State Hazard Mitigation Grant Program

Multiple Properties / Large, Complex Sides

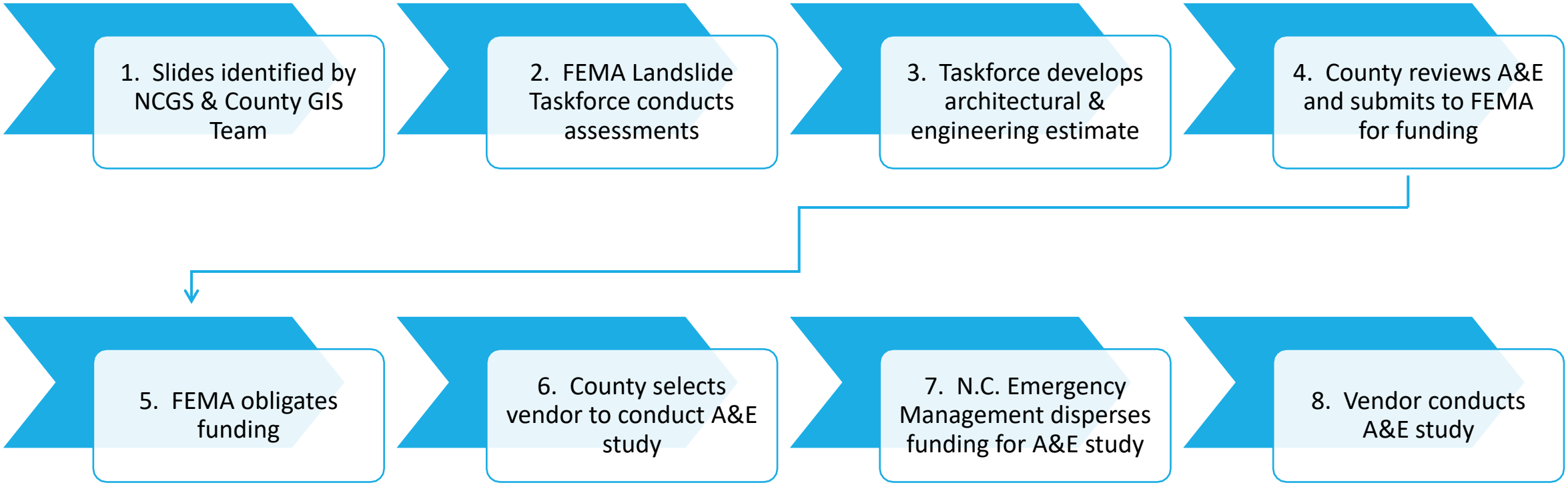
Strategy In Development



Next Steps for Large Slides:

- Partnering with FEMA and NCEM to conduct pilot for engineering study of Grovemont slide
- Model to serve as best practice for all other counties in Western N.C. impacted by slides

Large, Complex Landslides – The Process



*Currently at step 6 with the Grovemont pilot slide

**Steps 5 through 8 repeat for the stabilization component of the project lifecycle

Landslides – Current Status

County / Public Property

- 2 slides identified at 40 McCormick Place & Landfill (Riverside Drive)
  - 40 McCormick Place - vendor has been selected to conduct architectural & engineering study at 40 McCormick and is estimated to take approximately 3 months
  - Landfill - vendor request for qualifications (RFQ) process to commence early fall

Individual Properties / Slides

- Currently 31 applicants to State's Hazard Mitigation Program for slope stabilization / mitigation

Multiple Properties / Large, Complex Slides

- FEMA Landslide Taskforce has conducted assessments on 55 slides impacting multiple residential properties
- FEMA Taskforce has developed architectural & engineering cost estimates for 39 of the slides totaling $9.2M
- Vendor has been selected to conduct Grovemont architectural & engineering study – working to finalize contract
- Funding process & agreement has been reached with FEMA and N.C. Emergency Management
- If test case is successful we will move forward with architectural & engineering studies for remaining slides

Landslide Resources

- HMGP State Site - https://www.ncdps.gov/HMGP
- Helene Resource Center – 94 Coxe Ave. 8am – 5pm Monday through Friday
- County's HMGP help desk – hmgp@buncombenc.gov
- County's infrastructure / land slide help desk – infrastructure@buncombenc.gov
- North Carolina Geological Survey Landslide Site - https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/b55c8497d115400aa09d9cb7a27f5dc8/page/Home

Questions?

Helene Recovery Plan

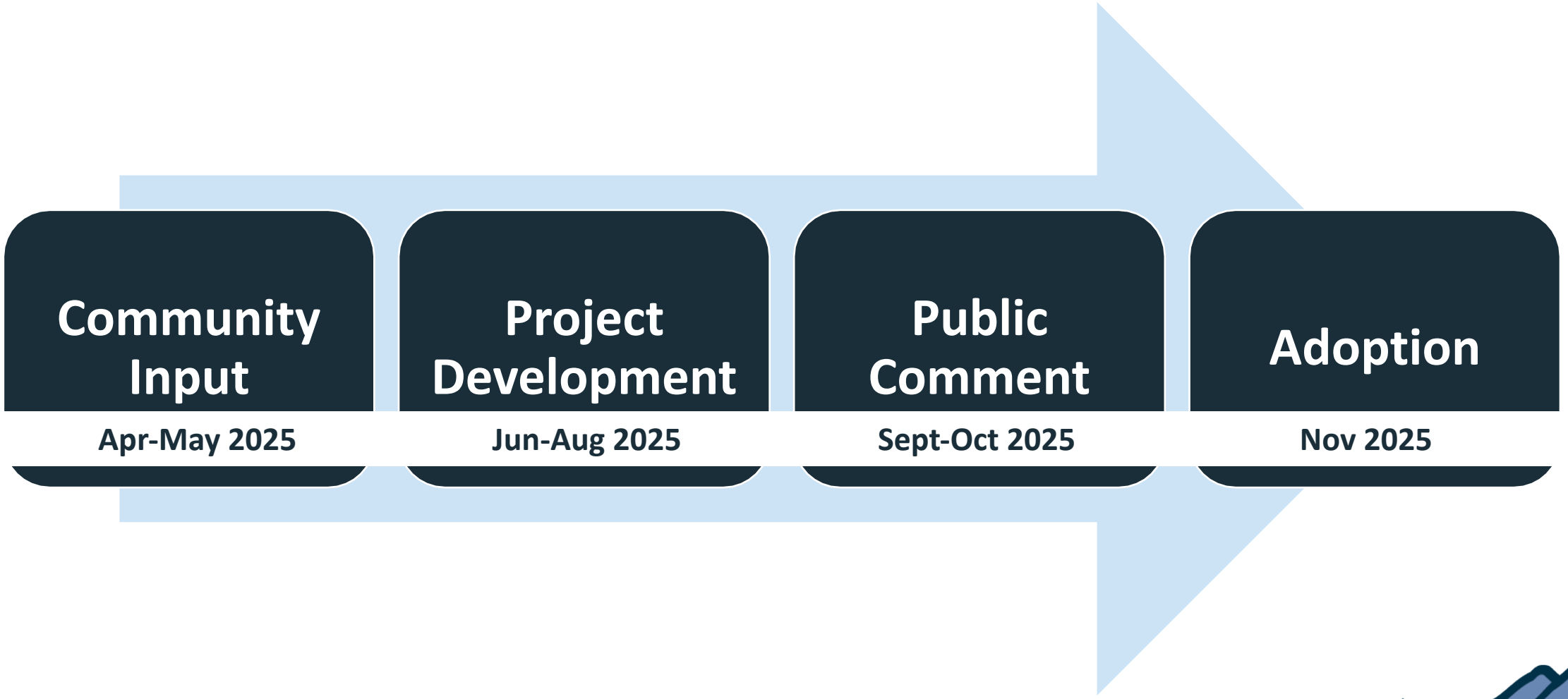
*What the plan **IS:***

- Created in collaboration with the City of Asheville & the 5 towns
- Tailored to each local government's organizational scope
- Reflective of community voice
- Grounded in impact & needs data
- Aligned to strategic organizational objectives
- A list of projects we can reasonably plan to deliver on

*What the plan **IS NOT:***

- An overall community plan
- A funding plan
- An implementation plan
- A guarantee that these projects will come to fruition
- Set in stone (as circumstances change, the plan can be updated)

Timeline


Community Input
Apr-May 2025
Project Development
Jun-Aug 2025
Public Comment
Sept-Oct 2025
Adoption
Nov 2025

ENVISION BUNCOMBE

VISUALIZA BUNCOMBE

2,622
Survey Responses Received

Planning Recovery, Building Resilience, Creating a Better Buncombe.

Planificando la Recuperación, Fortaleciendo la Resiliencia, Construyendo un Buncombe Mejor.

BUNCOMBE COUNTY
PEOPLE TO MATCH OUR MOUNTAINS
NORTH CAROLINA



The Community's Top 10 Recovery Priorities

1. Investing in infrastructure: water, roads, bridges, telecommunications
2. Disaster preparedness and resiliency investments
3. Wildfire prevention
4. Floodplain management
5. Restoring streambanks
6. Rebuilding parks
7. Preserving flood-prone property from development
8. Landslide stabilization
9. Building more affordable housing
10. Funding to promote food security in food deserts or vulnerable areas in the community

Community/Commissioner Priorities & Strategic Objectives

Project ideas from Recovery Support Function Teams & County Departments

Interdisciplinary review committee

Recommended Projects

Evaluation Criteria

- **Organizational Alignment:** Aligns with organizational scope
- **Strategic Alignment:** Aligns with goals from county-adopted plans (comprehensive land use plan, strategic plan, hazard mitigation plan, emergency operation plan, and/or other)
- **Community Alignment:** Aligns with community priorities (Envision Buncombe engagement survey & input from elected Board of Commissioners)
- **Necessity:** Necessary to recover environmentally, financially, and/or socially from the disaster
- **Community Impact:** Addresses the disaster's most impacted populations and/or places without exacerbating previously existing disparate community outcomes
- **Resiliency & Risk Reduction:** Reduces vulnerability to future disasters or enhances redundancy/robustness of key systems (public safety, core services, water, energy, communications, etc.).
- **Cost & Funding:** Has a reasonable potential cost relative to benefits/return on investment (economic, social, and environmental) and aligns with known possible funding sources
- **Feasibility:** Is technically and logistically feasible, project sponsor has capacity to carry it out, and any major implementation obstacles are identified and addressed

Projects by Envision Buncombe Priority

Top 10 Priorities	# of Projects*	Percent
Infrastructure Investments	4	11%
Disaster Preparedness & Resiliency	13	42%
Wildfire Prevention	2	6%
Floodplain Management	2	6%
Restoring Streambanks	1	3%
Rebuilding Parks	1	3%
Preserving Flood-Prone Property	2	6%
Landslide Stabilization	2	6%
Affordable Housing	3	9%
Food Security	1	3%
Other	5	14%

*Note – 1 project may indicate multiple activities. For example, a single project to "rebuild parks" could include efforts to restore damage at all impacted County parks.

Projects by Strategic Plan Focus Area

Strategic Plan Focus Area	# of Projects	Percent
Growth & Development	7	22%
Economic Development	3	9%
Education	0	0%
Community Health	5	16%
Public Safety	13	44%
Energy & Environment	3	9%
Grand Total	**31**	**100%**

Growth & Development Projects

- **Affordable Housing Development** – construction of rental & ownership units on county-owned property
- **Code of Ordinance Amendments** – supports joining the Community Rating System for the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)
- **Commercial District Revitalization** – support economic recovery in impacted areas such as Barnardsville, Fairview, and Swannanoa
- **Down Payment Assistance** – financial assistance to income-eligible homebuyers permanently displaced by T.S. Helene
- **Home Repair** – financial assistance for income-eligible households to support T.S. Helene-related home repairs
- **Sewer Extension & Septic Mitigation** – develop plans for sewer system expansions to support economic development in unincorporated areas of Buncombe County
- **Swannanoa Small Area & Resilience Plan** – engage Swannanoa community in needs/priority assessment and development of a framework to guide future development in this area

Economic Development Projects

- **Public Art** – commission & install public art pieces in key public and storm-affected spaces
- **Skills, Training, and Employment Program (STEP)** – increase STEP enrollment & graduation rates to serve Helene-impacted SNAP recipients
- **Small Business Grants** – financial support for small businesses impacted by T.S. Helene

Community Health

- **Buncombe County Food Security** – develop & implement a countywide initiative aimed at improving food security
- **Community Memory Project** – “Come Hell of High Water” project to collect, index, preserve, and present records of T.S. Helene’s impact
- **Cultural Asset Restoration** – repairs & enhancements to county parks, libraries, and community centers
- **Mental Health Trainings & Support** – develop & implement a comprehensive plan for community mental health support during and effort disaster events
- **Social Services Emergency Response Plan** – develop & implement a framework for ensuring effective delivery of all social services before, during, and after disaster events

Public Safety

- **Community Organization Support** – partner with community-based organizations to enhance disaster preparedness, response, and recovery capacity
- **Community Risk Reduction Campaign** – trainings and resources for community members to increase readiness and mitigate future disaster risks
- **Critical Facility Upgrades** – resiliency upfits including floodproofing, wind hardening, backup power sources for critical public facilities
- **Disaster Response Heavy Equipment** – evaluate need & identify best procurement approach to secure equipment to enhance disaster rescue and response capacity
- **Emergency Operations Center** – construct a weather resilient Emergency Operations Center
- **Emergency Shelter Facility** – construct a multi-purpose facility with year-round use and capacity to serve as a shelter in disaster events

Public Safety, continued

- **Landslide Mitigation** – conduct assessments and seek mitigation solutions for landslides in county boundaries
- **Natural Hazard Monitoring** – implement environmental data tracking including landslide/weather/air quality monitors and river gauges
- **Preparedness Action Plan** – implement After Action Report recommendations to enhance disaster response readiness and capacity
- **Public Safety Communications Resilience** – assess need & implement upgrades to critical public safety communications infrastructure
- **Vehicle Resilience** – assess & improve fuel & energy resilience for county vehicles during emergency situations
- **Wildfire Protection Plans-** develop & implement a Comprehensive Community Wildfire Protection Plan

Energy & Environment

- **Fleet and Facilities Restoration** – repair & replacement of county-owned fleet and facilities damaged by T.S. Helene
- **Open Space Property** – create a land use and management plan for properties acquired through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program
- **Resiliency Hubs** – add resilience features to public-facing facilities to support continuity of operations, emergency resource, and information distribution during disaster events
- **Stream Stabilization** – undertake activities to restore streambanks on both public and private properties (as identified and desired by property owners)

Commissioner Feedback

- Is anything missing or in need of clarification?
- Where does the board see the potential for most impact?
- Are there projects that we should lead with as we phase the implementation?

Next Steps

- Produce a draft plan including these projects
- Release the draft plan for public comment in September
- Modify the plan based on feedback
- Bring updated plan to Commissioners for adoption in November

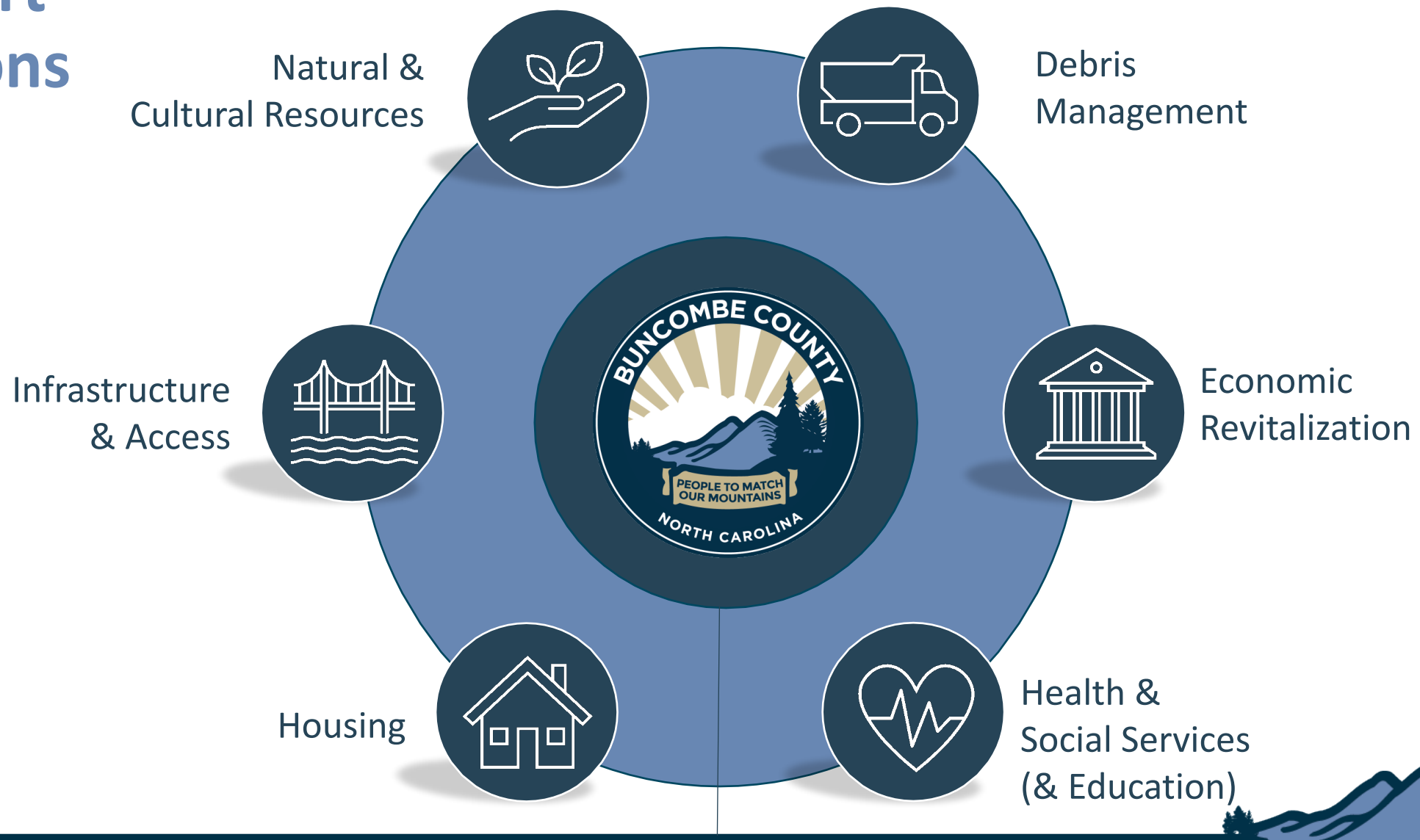
Questions?

End of Presentation

APPENDIX – DATA UPDATES

Reference Data by Recovery Support Function

Recovery Support Functions



DEBRIS MANAGEMENT



Focused on storm debris, including solutions for debris removal on public and private property and waterways, managing specialized debris types, evaluating hazardous materials considerations, coordinating disposal, and exploring sustainable re-use of debris.

DEBRIS MANAGEMENT

- Cubic yards of debris collected (right of way): 1,557,232 (no change compared to last update)
- Cubic yards of debris collected (waterway): 1,597,293 (3% increase over last update)
- PPDR applications received: 6,074 (no change compared to last update)
- PPDR applications submitted to USACE for action: 5,290 (8 additional app's over last update)
- PPDR Parcels completed & closed out by USACE: 4,647 (14% increase over last update)
- Number of title property cleared: 36 (31% increase over last update)
- Demolition applications received: 323 (no change compared to last update)
- Demolition applications verified, permitted, & sent to FEMA: 117 (2% increase over last update)

ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION



Focused on stimulating economic recovery, supporting local businesses, responding to workforce needs, and ensuring the long-term economic stability and prosperity of the area with a focus on revitalization of critical economic sectors

ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION

- Asheville-Buncombe "Rebuilding Together" Business Grant www.mountainbizworks.org/helene/fund/
  - 843 applications received totaling more than $18M (no change compared to prior update)
  - Buncombe County Only
    - 137 small businesses awarded grants, totaling $1,567,480 (no change compared to prior update)

ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION

Small Business Association Loans*				
	Home Loans	**For Profit Business Loans**	**Nonprofit Business Loans**	**Total**
Number of Applications	3,721 (7% increase)	7,365 (9% increase)	155 (33% decrease)	11,241 (7% increase)
Number of Loans Disbursed	685 (13% increase)	2,319 (19% increase)	7 (75% increase)	3,011 (18% increase)
$ Amount of Loans Disbursed	$34,31146 (20% increase)	$244,583,403 (96% increase)	$413,000 (153% increase)	$279,307,868 (7% increase)

ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION

Unemployment Data			
Month	**Unemployment Rank* - Buncombe County**	**Unemployment Rate – Buncombe County**	**Unemployment Rate – Asheville Metro****
September 2024	1	2.5%	NA
October 2024	100	10.4%	NA
February 2025	96	6.2%	5.5%
May 2025 *(reported in July)*	83	4.5%	4.10%

*A Rank of 1 indicates the county with the lowest unemployment rate in NC; a rank of 100 indicates the highest unemployment rate in NC

**Asheville Metro includes Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, and Madison counties

HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES



Focused on ensuring the health and well-being of residents with attention to the social determinants of health, including consideration of medical, behavioral, educational, and environmental health concerns and social service recovery needs

HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

- NC DHHS Disaster Energy Assistance: $2,340,610 (3% increase since last update)
- NC DHHS Disaster Adult Service Assistance: $136,223 (18% increase since last update)
- NC DHHS Disaster Child Welfare Assistance: $572,124 (15% increase since last update)
- NC DHHS Disaster Rental Assistance: $224,733 (13% increase since last update)
- Septic assessments complete – 132*
- Septic assessments - # found to be in “red zone” – 29*
- Septic assessments - # found to be in "yellow zone" – 50*

**all septic assessments are completed for properties visited by the permits & Inspections officials immediately following the storm*

EDUCATION*

**6/17 was the final update for the 2024-2025 School Year. No new data at this time*

- The number of homeless (unhoused) students identified under the McKinney-Vento Act:
  - Asheville City Schools – 294
    - 80 of these cases are due to Helene
  - Buncombe County School - 1476
    - 982 of these cases are due to Helene
- 100% of Buncombe County Schools sites have resumed normal water usage after receiving lead test results
- 100% of Asheville City Schools sites have resumed normal water usage after receiving lead test results

HOUSING



Focused on supporting people in moving toward housing permanence through home repair, removing barriers to temporary housing units, connecting survivors to short- and long-term rental, and coordinating rental and mortgage assistance for survivor households with economic impacts

HOUSING

- Households approved for rental assistance: 1568 (1% increasecompared to prior update)
- FEMA Direct Housing Units sold: 2 (no change compared to prior update)

INFRASTRUCTURE & ACCESS



Focused on restoring and enhancing essential public infrastructure and accessibility to private property, including comprehensive damage assessments, coordination of repairs/restoration, and mitigation of future hazards such as floods and landslides

INFRASTRUCTURE & ACCESS

- 344 Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) applications have been submitted to NCEM (no change compared to last update)
  - 232 for acquisition; 81 for elevation/reconstruction; 31 for slope stabilization
- State-operated private bridge and road program applicants: 892
- 93% of damaged private bridge & road assessments complete by state team
- 55 landslide inspections completed
- 406 Substantially Damaged Structures in the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA)

NATURAL & CULTURAL RESOURCES



Focused on the restoration and sustainable management of natural and cultural resources, including capabilities to maintain, conserve, renew, and rehabilitate resources such as parks, farmland, watersheds and streambanks in alignment with environmental and historical preservation laws

NATURAL & CULTURAL RESOURCES

- Emergency watershed protection potential applicants identified: 705 (6% increase compared to prior update)
- Emergency Watershed Protection Program:
  - Field Visits Completed: 477 (1% increase compared to prior update)
  - Applications submitted: 197 (3% increase compared to prior update)
  - Applications approved: 151 (18%+ increase compared to prior update)
  - $ Amount of funding approved: $23,650,000 ($19 increase compared to prior update)
- 7 County parks open to the public (no change compared to prior update)
- 12 County libraries open to the public (no change compared to prior update)

FOUNDATIONAL

Focused on coordinating the resources needed for an effective recovery for and linking recovery with organizational operations –such as grants & funding, data sharing, county property damage, staffing considerations, communications, funding, facilities, fleet, human capital and technology

FOUNDATIONAL

- $ 25.8 expended for Helene; $4.8 M committed
- FEMA Public Assistance:
  - Emergency work - claims submitted: $17.6 M (73% increase over prior update)
  - Emergency work - $ amount reimbursed: $1.4 M (compared to $0 at prior update)
  - Permanent work - claims submitted: $14.8 M (no change compared to prior update)
  - Permanent work - $ amount reimbursed: $7,487 (compared to $0 at prior update)
- Insurance claim for County-owned assets:
  - Claims submitted: $6.3 M (46% increase over prior update)
  - Claim received: $2.2 M (0% increase over prior update)
- Recovery-related grant funding:
  - Awarded: $6.4 M (no change compared to prior update)
- Helene Recovery Center:
  - Average visitors per day (8/4-8/8): 4 (69% decrease since prior update)
  - Total visitors since opening: 930 (17% increase since prior update)