Buncombe County Recovery Operations
Draft Helene Recovery Plan Project Descriptions
August 2025

Overview

Buncombe County's Helene Recovery projects have been developed in alignment with the 2030 Strategic Plan. Based on this alignment, **in the final Helene Recovery Plan these projects will be organized by the Strategic Plan Focus Area** to which they most closely align and are displayed in draft form based on that alignment in this document accordingly.

In addition to alignment with the 2030 Strategic Plan, the Recovery Coordination team worked to ensure that the community priorities gathered through the "Envision Buncombe" community input survey were represented in the proposed recovery projects. A summary of alignment to the Envision Buncombe results can be seen below. **The icons listed next to each priority are used throughout this document to identify which community priority that project supports.**

Community Priorities	# of Projects
 Infrastructure Investments	4
 Disaster Preparedness & Resiliency	13
 Wildfire Prevention	2
 Floodplain Management	2
 Restoring Streambanks	1
 Rebuilding Parks	1
 Preserving Flood-Prone Property	2
 Landslide Stabilization	2

Affordable Housing	3
Food Security	1
Other	5

Draft Recovery Projects

Focus Area: Growth & Development

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

Project Name: Affordable Housing Development

- **Brief Description:** Work with selected developers to build affordable housing on county-owned property, including parcels on Coxe Avenue, Ferry Road and Valley Street.
- **Benefits & Intended Outcomes:** In addition to replacing affordable housing that was impacted by Helene, this contributes to economic revitalization by incorporating mixed use options, outdoor public recreation, and other amenities for healthy and thriving communities.
    - Coxe Avenue- Provide 100% affordable housing units with redesigned streetscapes, green roofs, interconnected transportation, pedestrian amenities, and mixed-use development
    - 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
    - Valley Street- develop 2.44 acres of county-owned property to create 196 housing units for households between 20-80% area median income

Project Name: Code of Ordinance Amendments

- **Brief Description:** 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).
- **Benefits & Intended Outcomes:** Addresses and cultivates recovery, while building resilience in areas of environmental sensitivity, by 1) recovering and expanding the housing stock; 2) supporting economic development; and 3) promoting environmental recovery and resilience.

Project Name: Commercial District Revitalization 

- **Brief Description:** 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.
- **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.

Project Name: Down Payment Assistance 

Brief Description: 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.
Benefits & Intended Outcomes: Down payment assistance will help families get back into homes and stabilize local communities as they recover from the impacts of Tropical Storm Helene. The program is designed to serve low- and moderate-income households (households at <80% AMI), which generally have inequitable access to safe, affordable housing in Buncombe County, as evidenced by recent Housing Needs Assessments.

Project Name: Home Repair 

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

Project Name: Sewer Extension & Septic Mitigation 

Brief Description: 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.
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 county are vulnerable to leaks, and not resilient to disaster flooding as seen during Helene.

Project Name: Swannanoa Small Area & Resilience Plan 

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

Focus Area: Economic Development

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



Project Name: Public Art

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

Project Name: Skills, Training, and Employment Program (STEP)

Brief Description: 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. Buncombe County's unemployment rate continues to be impacted by Helene, particularly in the hospitality sector. Reskilling can help Helene-impacted residents find employment opportunities in new fields.
Benefits & Intended Outcomes: This project is intended to increase community awareness, enrollment, graduation and employment rates for STEP program participants, elevating their ability to earn a living wage and uplifting them from poverty while contributing to overall economic revitalization.

Project Name: Small Business Grants

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

Focus Area: Community Health

Focus Area Description: This focus area is dedicated to promoting the health and wellbeing of Buncombe County community members. Community health encompasses the physical,

emotional, behavioral, and social dimensions of wellness, seeking to cultivate a community where all residents can thrive.

Project Name: Buncombe County Food Security 

Brief Description: Develop and implement a countywide initiative aimed at improving food security through strategic planning, local food system development, community partnerships, and emergency preparedness.
Benefits & Intended Outcomes: 1. Improve equitable access to nutritious food; 2. Build sustainable, hyperlocal food systems; 3. Strengthen community and emergency food response systems; 4. Establish countywide food policy and planning framework

Project Name: Community Memory Project 

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

Project Name: Cultural Asset Restoration 

Brief Description: Restore county parks, libraries and community centers to address storm damage while enhancing and expanding cultural and recreational amenities
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 to enhance readiness to withstand future risks.

Project Name: Mental Health Trainings & Support 

Brief Description: Work with partners to develop and deliver a comprehensive plan for effective community mental health support during and after disaster events, including series of trauma-informed mental health support trainings for community members, first responders, educators, social service providers, and local businesses across the county.
Benefits & Intended Outcomes: Increased community trauma Literacy. Improved well-being and resilience for community members and helping professionals.

Strengthened community resilience through improved support systems. Enhanced coordination of mental health-related disaster response functions.

Project Name: Social Services Emergency Response Plan 

Brief Description: 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.
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.

Focus Area: Public Safety

Focus Area Description: The scope of the Public Safety focus area includes preventing and protecting residents from crime, emergencies, and natural disasters, as well as general county activities to promote safe environments for all community members.

Project Name: Community Organization Support 

Brief Description: 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.
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.

Project Name: Community Risk Reduction Campaign 

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

Project Name: Critical Facility Upgrades 

Brief Description: 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.
Benefits & Intended 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 enhanced public trust in County's commitment to providing critical services.

Project Name: Disaster Response Heavy Equipment 

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

Project Name: Emergency Operations Center 

Brief Description: Construct a new, resilient facility to house an Emergency Operations Center for unified management, command and control of all disasters and emergency events affecting Buncombe County.
Benefits & Intended Outcomes: Construction of a new Emergency Operations Center, 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.

Project Name: Emergency Shelter Facility 

Brief Description: 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.
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.

Project Name: Landslide Mitigation 

Brief Description: 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.
Benefits & Intended Outcomes: Reduce the risk and potential severity of future damage from landslides on identified eligible slopes. At least 13 lives were lost in Buncombe County during Helene due to landslides, and this project seeks to reduce/eliminate the number of lives lost in the future due to landslides.

Project Name: Natural Hazard Monitoring 

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

Project Name: Preparedness Action Plan 

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

Project Name: Public Safety Communications Resilience 

Brief Description: 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.

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.

Project Name: Vehicle Resilience 

Brief Description: 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.
Benefits & Intended Outcomes: 1. Protect County against fuel supply chain interruptions. 2. Minimize disruptions to EV charging caused by grid outages. 3. Align fuel preparedness with sustainable fleet initiatives. 4. Coordinate disaster vehicle fueling across departments. 5. Employ proactive planning and quick communication tools to ensure rapid deployment of emergency vehicle fueling procedures and adaptability.

Project Name: Wildfire Protection Plans 

Brief Description: Complete a comprehensive Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) for each fire of 19 fire districts to provide hazard and risk identification along with pre-planning for mitigation measures and response plans.
Benefits & Intended Outcomes: A CWPP is tailored to the unique characteristics of each community and outlines specific actions for wildfire preparedness, mitigation, response, and prevention. The goal is to have CWPPs in place for 100% of the fire districts within Buncombe County.

Focus Area: Energy and Environment

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

Project Name: Fleet and Facilities Restoration 

Brief Description: 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.
Benefits & Intended Outcomes: Buncombe County intends to repair, replace and/or restore each of these roads, buildings and equipment. This includes restoration not

only to their condition before the storm, but also with mitigation and resiliency measures where feasible 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.

Project Name: Open Space Property 

Brief Description: 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.
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.

Project Name: Resiliency hubs 

Brief Description: Add resilience features to public-facing facilities (such as libraries, community centers, and schools) to support community services before, during, and after emergencies. Features may include solar, battery energy storage, generators, microgrid controller systems, telecommunications access, wind hardening and floodproofing, hookups for external potable water sources, water storage, enhanced air filtration systems, accessibility, and adaptable multi-use spaces.
Benefits & Intended Outcomes: 1. Offer centralized resource distribution during and after an emergency including food, water, basic medical, and information. 2. Foster social cohesion/ connection. 3. Enhance personal adaptive capacity for County residents/ Offer year-round programs that address root causes of vulnerability and proactively build healthier communities including job training, mental health services, and disaster preparedness education. 4. Employ building upgrades to address the root causes of climate change including energy efficiency and renewable energy. 5. Prioritize access for traditionally underserved residents

Project Name: Stream Stabilization 

Brief Description: 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).

Benefits & Intended Outcomes: Streambank stabilization produces multiple outcomes: it removes debris from streams, it stabilizes streambanks against future disasters and floods, it 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.