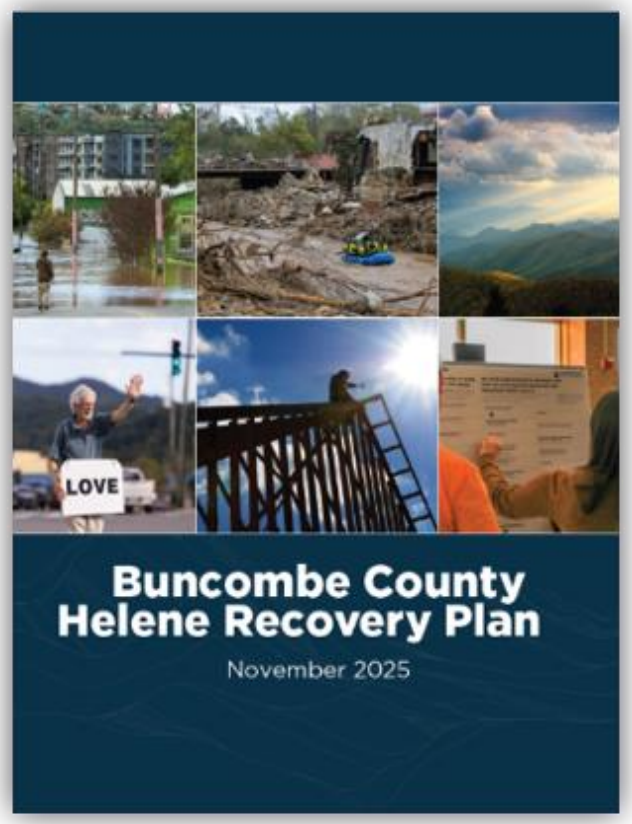
# Helene Recovery Update

Kevin Madsen

Helene Recovery Office

# Agenda

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



Community Health

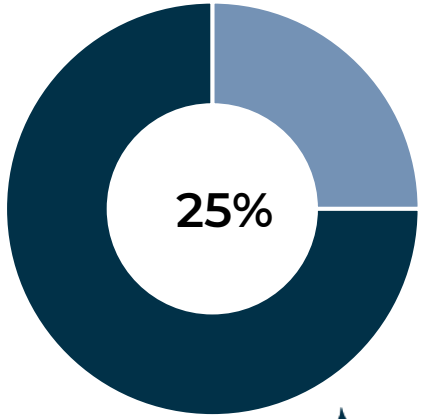
# Cultural Asset Restoration

Complexity: Medium | Cost: High | Timing: Medium

Focus on restoration of county parks, libraries, and community centers to address storm damages while enhancing and expanding cultural and recreational amenities

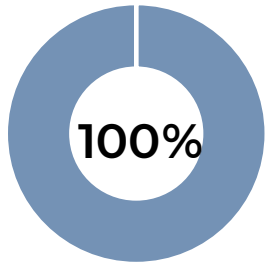
**Recent Activity:**

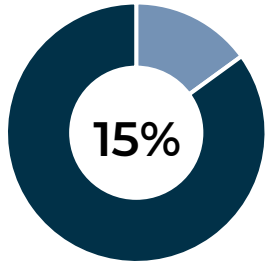
- Owen Park Rebuild
  - Second community meeting today, June 16th
  - Initial round of funding FEMA Public Assistance
- Initial planning of boat launches/access improvements at river parks
- Infrastructure and Resiliency Improvements at Lake Julian

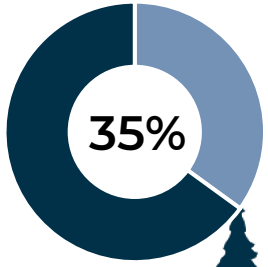


# Project Activity

- Completion of the **Community Memory** project
- Continued planning efforts and grant research for the **Food Security** project identifying warehouse space and community partners
- **Mental Health Training and Support**
  - Mental Health Summit held on May 12th to collaborate with other providers regarding services, assess needs and assets and identify gaps in service
  - Currently organizing a comprehensive directory of mental health providers
  - Planning team is developing a Mental Health Disaster Response Plan and designing a community partner engagement strategy



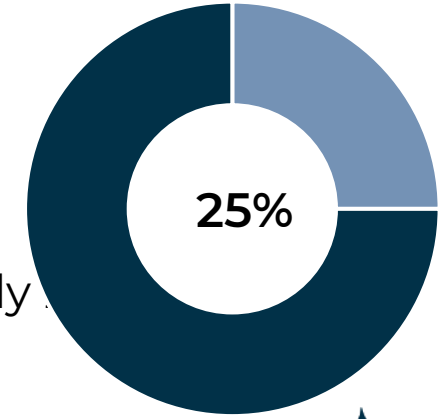



# Commercial District Revitalization

Complexity: High | Cost: High | Timing: Medium

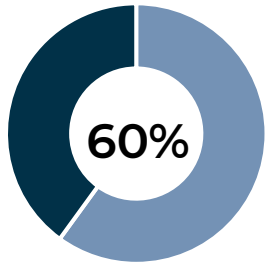
Project focused on revitalization of commercial districts damaged by Helene in unincorporated areas such as Barnardsville, Fairview, and Swannanoa to support commercial recovery, encourage economic opportunities, and support jobs

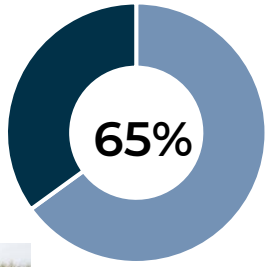
- Sidewalks in Swannanoa
  - Planning team working on multiple funding opportunities
  - CDBG-DR application in progress for nearly $10M; public hearing July 21st
- Commercial District Remediation & Revitalization
  - Another CDBG-DR application in progress for nearly $10M; public hearing July
- Projects in development
  - HMGP Activation addressing acquired properties



# Project Activity

- **More than a Job** (formerly STEP), in partnership with AB-Tech, is continuing to provide continuing education and job search assistance
- **Public Art Projects**
  - Pack Library murals in partnership with Paint NC for of 100 Murals in 100 Counties initiative
  - Echoes of the Forest Soccer Bear at Cane Creek Park
  - Keep Buncombe Green mural at Transfer Station



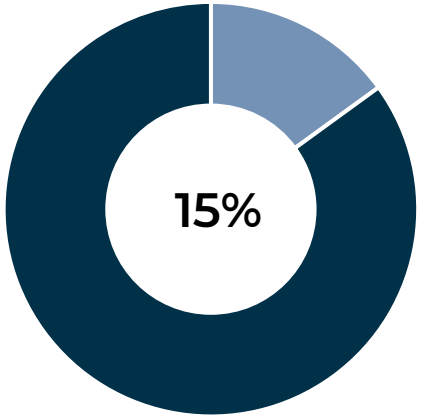



# Open Space

Complexity: High | Cost: High | Timing: Medium

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

- Hazard Mitigation Grant Program | Acquisitions
  - 38 private properties in progress for acquisition; 12 have closed
  - 204 properties in the 3rd and 4th batches awarded; 25 still in review
- Strategic Planning Process
  - Coordination with federal, state, and local partners for best practices
  - Multidisciplinary team developing approaches to land use in line with existing plans

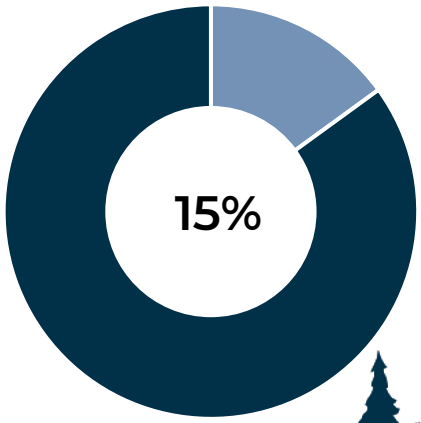


# Home Repair | RenewNC

Complexity: High | Cost: High | Timing: Medium

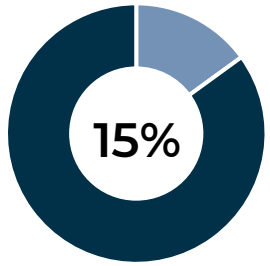
- Program managed by NC Department of Commerce; funded by HUD CDBG-DR
- Buncombe County residents submitted 2,151 applications; 832 of those are currently active (*approx. 39%)*
  - Applications from county residents accounts for nearly 30% of all applications
- Participants complete 7 steps prior to construction beginning

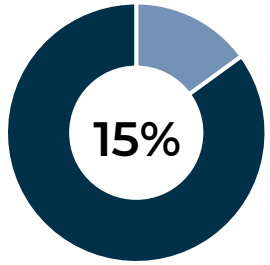
| Program Types and Timelines | |
|---|---|
| **Rehabilitation** including move-out and move-in | 66 Days |
| **Replacement** including move-out and move-in | 81 Days |
| **Reconstruction** including move-out and move-in | 171 Days |

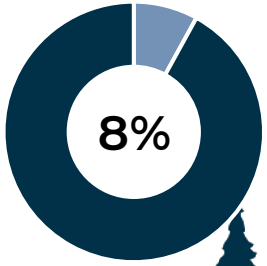


# Project Activity

- **Affordable Housing Development**
  - Coxe Avenue and Ferry Road projects submitted
- **Code of Ordinance Amendments**
  - April 21st, the ordinance was approved to amend the Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance (*Chapter 34, Article II*)
- **Sewer Extension & Septic Mitigation**
  - Buncombe County and the Metropolitan Sewerage District have submitted a Letter of Interest (LOI) for the initial application for the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant
  - Final BRIC submission due in July



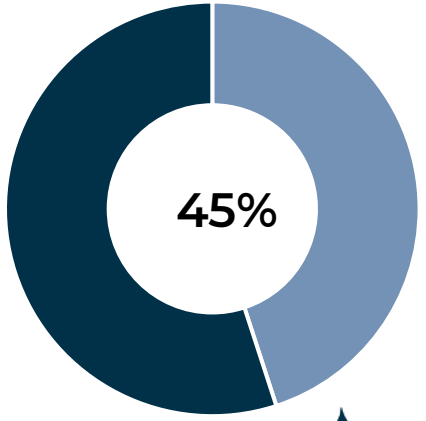
Public Safety

# Community Organization Support

Complexity: Medium | Cost: Low | Timing: Medium

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

- **Community Organizations Active in Disasters (COAD)**
  - Planning team developed the COAD Charter and framework
  - WebEOC resource management boards developed
  - Kickoff meeting held on June 3rd with over 90 participants
  - Contact lists and community resources/services shared
  - Developing frequency of meetings and events



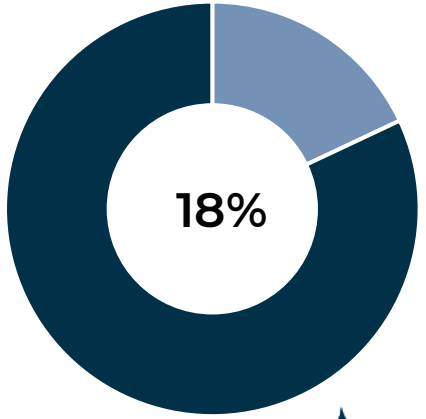
Public Safety

# Landslide Mitigation

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

Conduct assessments of landslides on county-owned and private property to identify imminent threats to life, property, and infrastructure

- Multiple landslides have been funded for architectural and engineering (A&E) design through FEMA Public Assistance
- Active Projects
  - **Grovemont** (9) - Work began in December 2025
  - **Garren Creek** (8) contract on tonight's meeting agenda for approval
  - **Multi-slide Project** (20) RFQ completed and vendor selected
    - Beaverdam (4)
    - Black Mountain (1)
    - Fairview (5)
    - Garren Creek (1)
    - Lakey Gap (4)
    - Reynolds (1)
    - Riceville (1)
    - Swannanoa (2)
    - Upper Hominy (1)

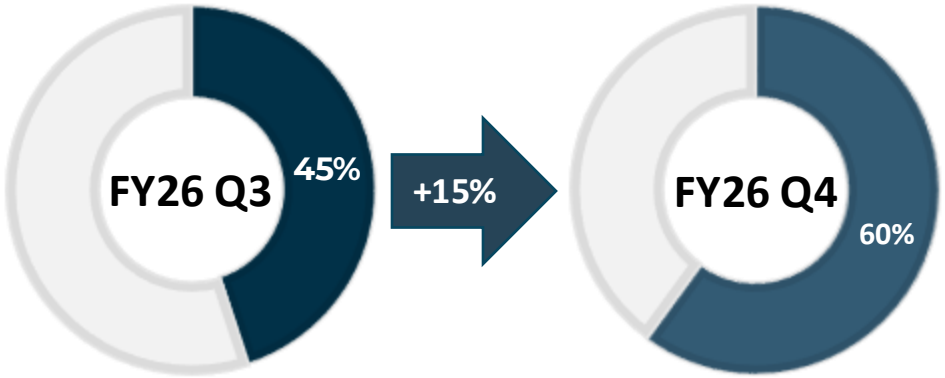


# Preparedness Action Plan

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

Public Safety

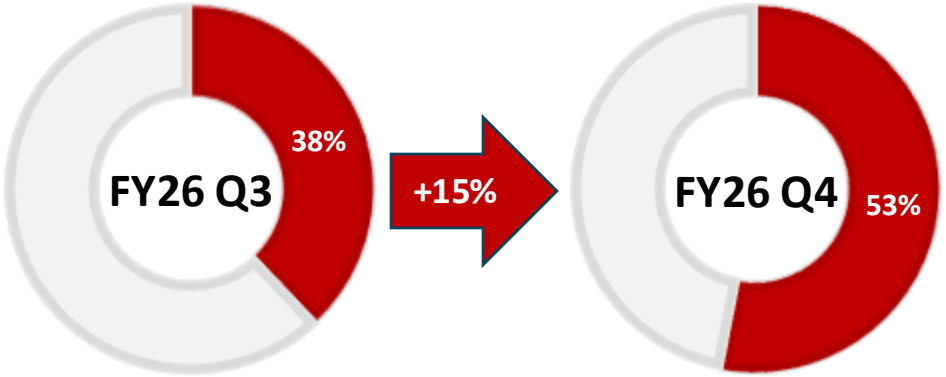
## Emergency Operations



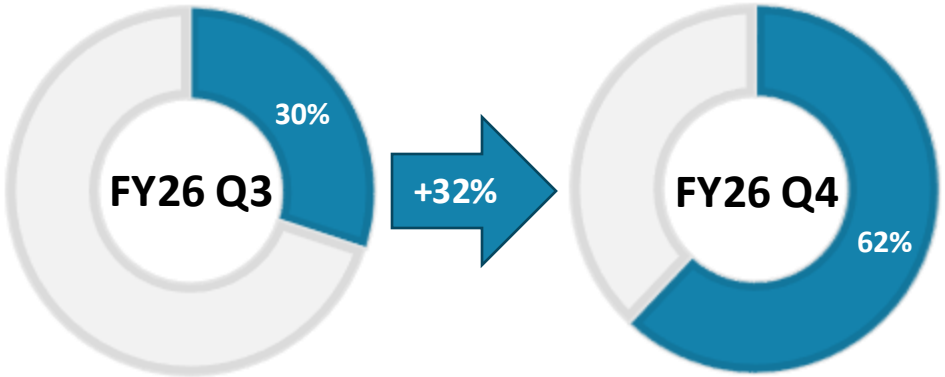

## Emergency Staffing




## 911 Communications

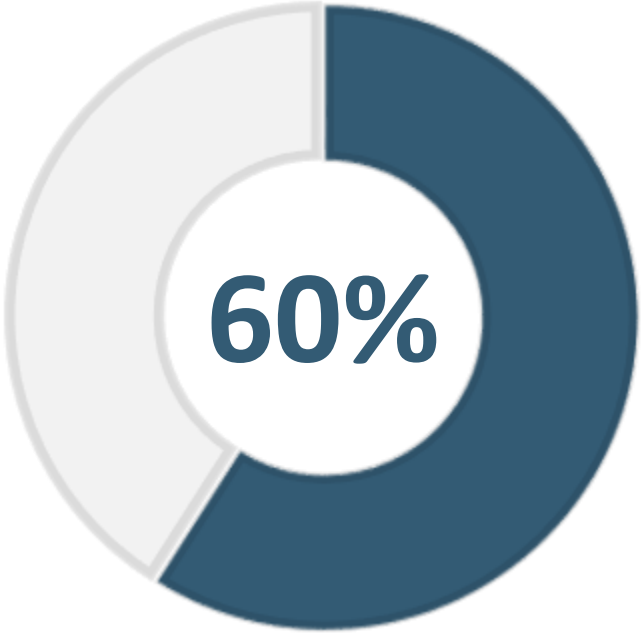



## Community Resource Support



# Category 1: Emergency Operations

Preparedness Action Plan




This category focuses on building the core systems that support coordinated emergency response.

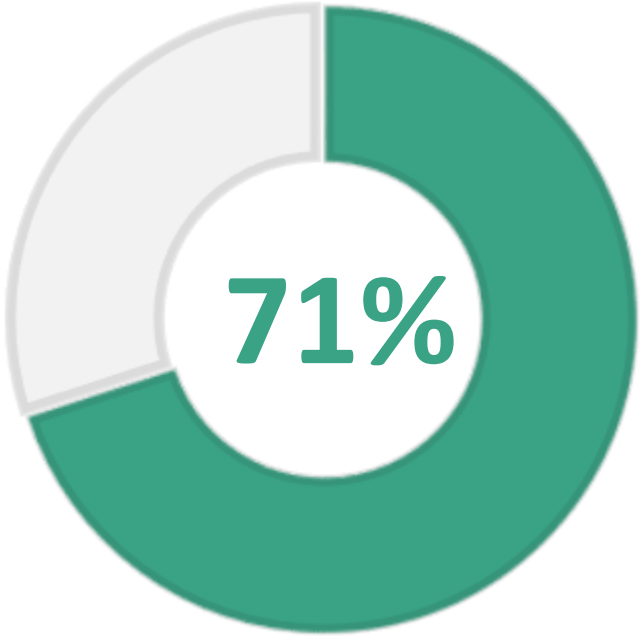
**+15% Increase from FY26 Q3**

**Progress Made:**

- New Emergency Operations Center purchased
- Emergency operations plan updates, job aids, and operating guidelines are nearly complete
- Some pre-positioned contracts in place
- Updated the County's Crisis Communication Plan
- Emergency backup planning for County buildings

# Category 2: Emergency Staffing

Preparedness Action Plan




This category strengthens our ability to staff and sustain emergency operations in an emergency.

**+10% Increase from FY26 Q3**

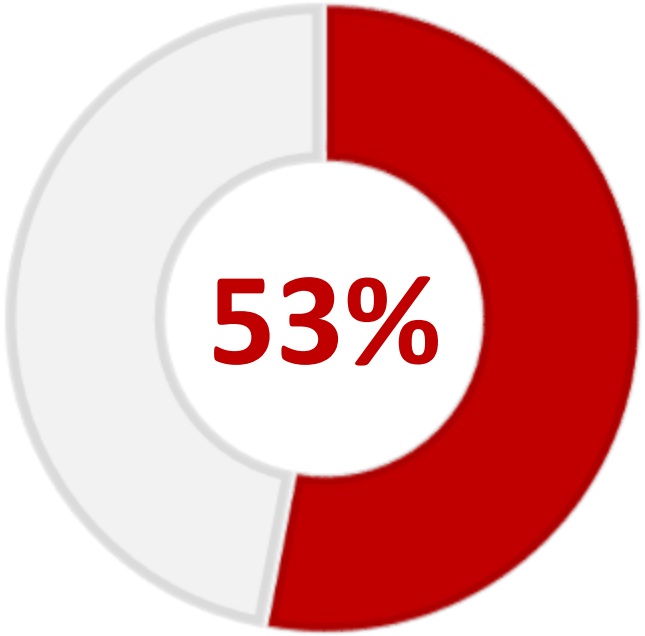
**Progress Made:**

- Staffing plans for emergency operations are finalized
- Training is underway for internal staff and external stakeholders
- Contact lists and communication methods for emergency activation are established

# Category 4: Public Safety Communications (911)

Preparedness Action Plan

Public Safety




This category strengthens the resilience of the County's 911 operations.

**+15% Increase from FY26 Q3**

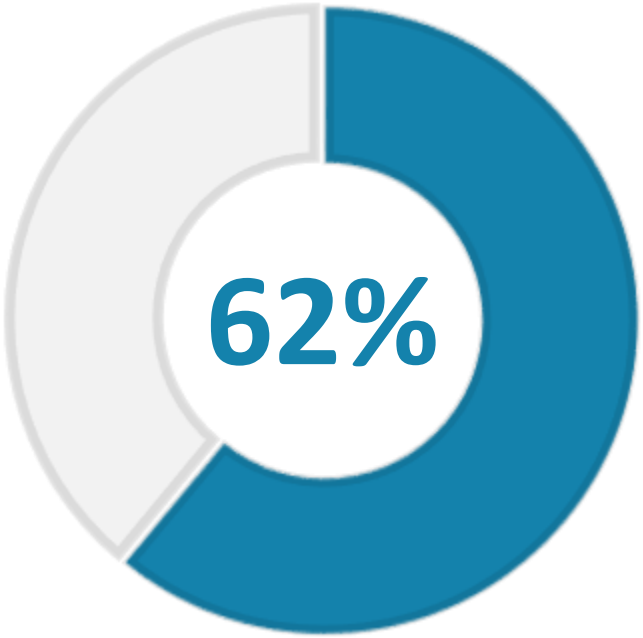
**Progress Made:**

- Operating guidelines are documented
- Several backup agreements are now in place to support continuity of operations

Public Safety

# Category 7: Community Resource Support

Preparedness Action Plan




This category strengthens the County's ability to coordinate community resource support through commodity distribution planning, warehouse and donation management, and volunteer coordination.

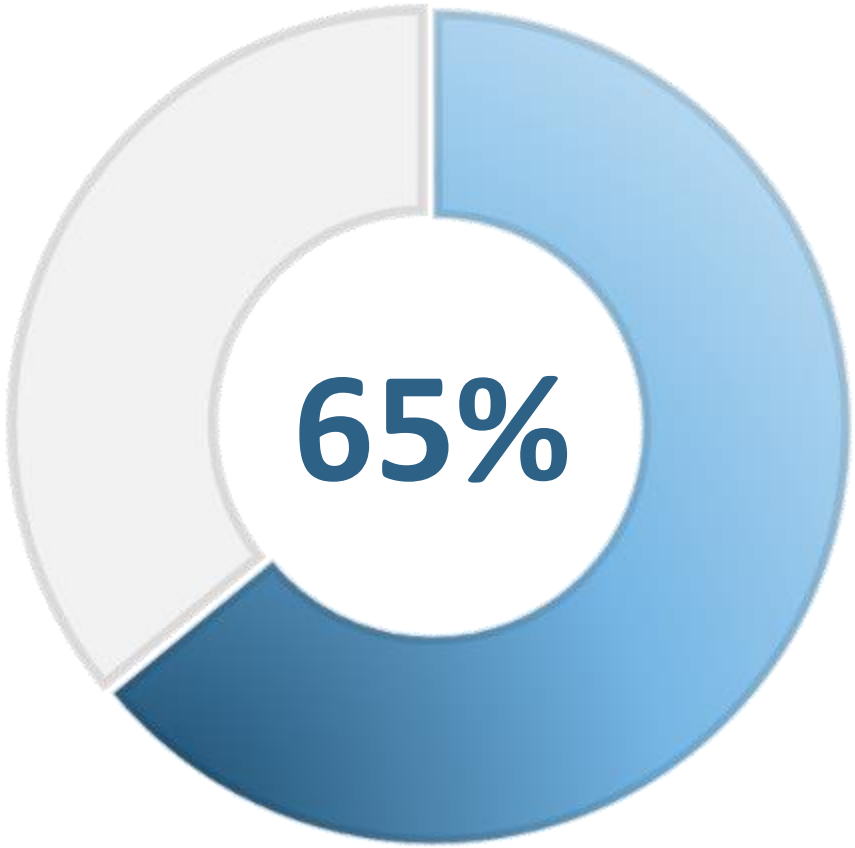
**+32% Increase from FY26 Q3**

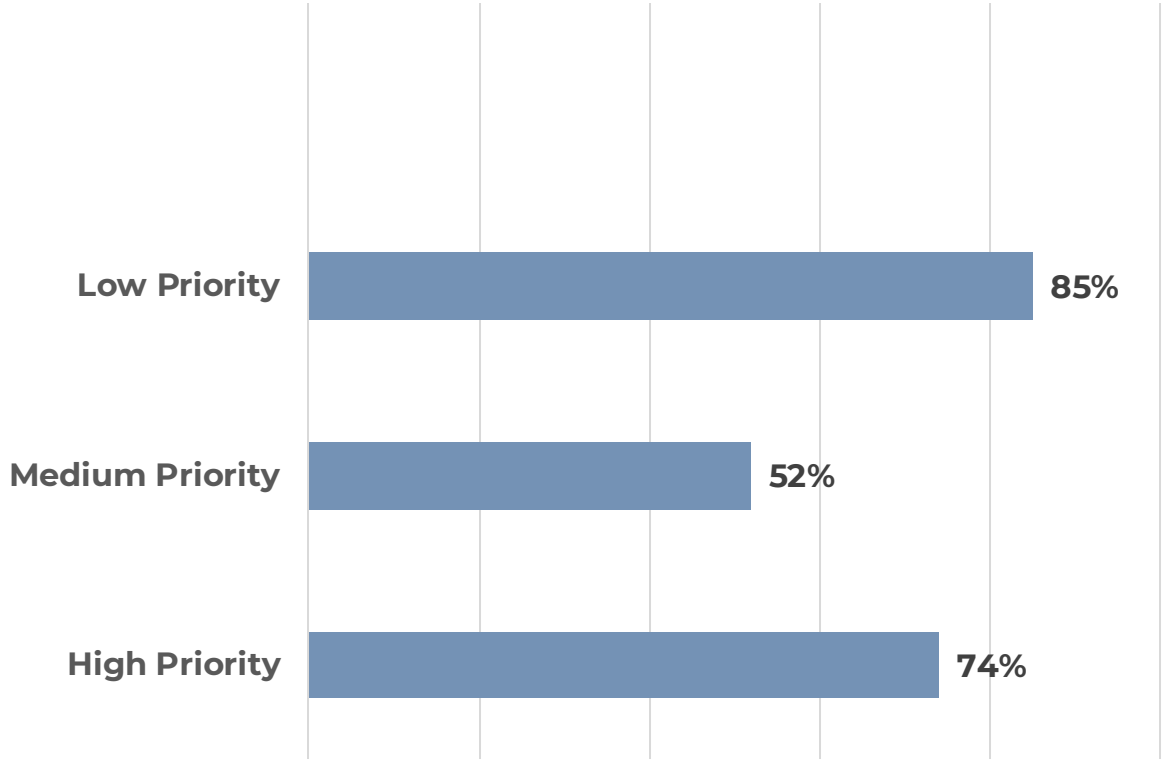
**Progress Made:**

- Point of distribution and community care station plans documented
- Donations plan and guidelines created
- Volunteer Operations Active in Disaster (VOAD) plan created

# Overall Completion of Preparedness Action Plan

Preparedness Action Plan




Public Safety

# FEMA Public Assistance

- 57 projects submitted to FEMA for Public Assistance
  - 50 obligated projects at $38.34 million

    (*$19.72M reimbursements*)
  - $22.85M received by the County
- Finalizing last group of projects to submit to FEMA
- Some obligated projects will have a second phase
- Recent Activity
  - 5 projects are in the Close Out Process including EOC Operations, PPDR, and Employee Labor

| PA Obligations | Amount |
|---|---|
| A - Debris Removal | $7.42M |
| B- Emergency Protective Measures | $26.66M |
| C - Roads & Bridges | $1.32M |
| E - Building & Equip | $712K |
| G - Parks, Rec, Other | $1.32M |
| Z - Mgmt Costs | $904.5K |
| **Total Obligations** | **$38.34M** |

# Notices of Funding

N.C. Department of Commerce, Division of Community Revitalization (NC DCR) Administration

**Infrastructure and Commercial District Revitalization**

- Developing projects aligned with the Helene Recovery Plan and CDBG-DR eligibility
  - Commercial District Revitalization opened in May
  - Infrastructure will open in July
- Applications will be a two-step process
  - Pre-screening tool (voluntary) to review projects with DCR
  - Second stage is full HUD application (required)
- Working with Technical Assistance providers to assess and prioritize grant applications
- Public comment for CDR closed on June 5th
- Second public hearing is July 21st

# Questions

Thank you

**Affordable Housing Development**

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

**Buncombe County Food Security**

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

**Code of Ordinance Amendments**

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

**Commercial District Revitalization**

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

**Community Memory Project**

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

**Community Organization Support**

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

**Community Risk Reduction Campaign**

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

**Critical Facility Upgrades**

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

**Cultural Asset Restoration**

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

**Disaster Response Heavy Equipment**

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

**Down Payment Assistance**

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

**Emergency Operations Center**

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

**Emergency Shelter Facility**

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

**Fleet & Facilities Restoration**

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

**Home Repair**

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

**Landslide Mitigation**

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

**Mental Health Trainings & Support**

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

**Natural Hazard Monitoring**

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

**Open Space Property**

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

**Preparedness Action Plan**

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

**Public Art**

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

**Public Safety Communications Resilience**

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

**Resilience Hubs**

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

**Sewer Extension & Septic Mitigation**

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

**Skills, Training, & Employment Program (STEP)**

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

**Small Business Grants**

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

**Social Services Emergency Response Plan**

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

**Stream Stabilization**

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

**Swannanoa Small Area & Resilience Plan**

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

**Vehicle Resilience**

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

**Wildfire Protection Plans**

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