# Buncombe County Strategic Plan 2020-2025

POWERED BY FORESIGHT

DRAFT

# Contents

# Letter from Commissioners

Dear Buncombe County Residents,

Growth. It's all around us. By 2040, our five-county region is expected to grow 40%, to over 640,000 people. Henderson and Buncombe counties will absorb most of the growth, which means we have to be proactive, responsive, and clear about how we'll manage our resources and priorities.

The strategic plan you're reading is a critical step toward our future. It lays out our vision, values, focus areas, and goals for the next five years. Our strategy will be used to set priorities, make decisions, and assign budgets. And at the foundation are the elements we have to get right, day in and day out, to enable our county to reach its vision.

When we began this planning process, no one could have fathomed the challenges our community and our globe would encounter as a result of Coronavirus/COVID-19. The virus has exacerbated many of the issues in our community and clearly underscored the need to move forward strategically on a set of focus areas identified in this plan.

Thanks to all of you who gave us feedback on this plan and made strong suggestions. We hope you see your voice in these pages. Moving forward, we ask you to hold us accountable and make sure we're making decisions in alignment with this plan. And over the long term, we hope that our children and grandchildren will look back on this strategy and see the seeds that helped Buncombe County become an even more remarkable place to live.

We would also like to acknowledge the recently deceased Commissioner Mike Fryar. His tireless work was driven by the desire to serve the people of Buncombe County. This plan seeks to accomplish that goal.

We dedicate this plan to our current and future residents,

Signed,

| | |
|---|---|
| Commissioner Brownie Newman, *Chair* | Commissioner Edwards |
| Commissioner Pressley, *Vice Chair* | Commissioner Belcher |
| Commissioner Beach Ferrera | Commissioner Penland |
| Commissioner Whitesides | |

# Letter from County Manager

Upon arriving in Buncombe County in 2019, it was immediately impressed upon me what a cherished and unique place this corner of Western North Carolina is. That notion is constantly reaffirmed as I discover new places, meet different people, and hear about how much our County means to all of you during my day-to-day business. It's with that in mind that I wanted to help orchestrate a meaningful and tangible plan to maintain our excellence while striving for improvement in key areas.

The new strategic plan you're reading is a critical step. As the Commissioners noted in their letter on the previous page, Buncombe County is growing. Our challenges are changing. We must adapt and evolve to meet those challenges and lead our state. This plan maps that journey from where we are today to where we want to be by 2025.

During the course of establishing this strategic plan, Buncombe County turned our attention to COVID-19 response. This public health emergency and its aftermath will no doubt impact us for months and years to come, yet we remain steadfast. Our tactics and strategies might change, but our vision mission, values, priorities and goals for a thriving community will remain true.

You have my commitment Buncombe County's staff will work hard to execute these strategies in ways to earn and keep your trust. We want you to be proud to call Buncombe County home, and we want to leave a legacy worth inheriting,

Avril Pinder
County Manager

# Buncombe County, Today & Tomorrow

Leading and managing a fast-growing County like Buncombe requires agility — to balance today's urgent demands and the predicted needs of future residents.



The 2025 Strategic Plan includes some of the work started by previous commissions that remains relevant, e.g. eliminating deaths as a result of opioid and other substance abuse, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The plan also goes several steps farther in anticipation of the region's growth. For example, the Commission recognizes it must preserve farmland and implement land use strategies.

> "It's not a matter of whether our County will grow. We will grow. The question is, where are we going to put people?"
> *– Commissioner Brownie Newman*

The 2025 Strategic Plan was initiated by the Board and developed over the course of 4 public workshops beginning in July 2019. Additionally, the Board valued the input of the broader community and employees and requested that staff seek this input.

This plan is influenced by the input of hundreds of residents who attended 13 meetings across the County in late 2019. Residents' input resulted in the addition of "Equity" both as a Value and a Foundational Goal, and in several important refinements to the 16 goals included in the plan. See "2025 Strategic Plan At-A-Glance" on page 9.) Additionally, the County hosted 15 employee engagement sessions that refined goals and defined potential action steps to move the plan forward.

This plan also acknowledges additional work that must be done. Specifically, there are actions that the Board and Staff must take to define baseline performance metrics that may not have been previously measured. Before we can define the right measure for a Jail population, or kindergarten readiness, we must establish a baseline. From these baseline measures, county staff across all functions will continue defining "Tier 2" goals, each nesting under one of the 16 goals. Tier 2 goals are designed to be actionable, easy to understand and results-focused. For example, supporting the broad goal of increasing total employment we might find as a Tier 2 goal, "increase small or startup business jobs by net 10% between 2020 and 2025." Expressed in this manner, Tier 2 goals provide the basis for accountability.

Additionally, this plan is dependent on certain actions by the Board of Commissioners and staff. Key actions include the initiation of a Comprehensive Planning Process that addresses land use and zoning. This level of detail is outside the scope of a strategic plan, but is a necessity to manage the exponential growth seen in Buncombe County.

# Guided by Vision, Mission, & Values

Our vision tells us where we're going. Our mission imparts our purpose. Our values tell us how we'll make decisions that serve the public good. Buncombe County Commissioners agree:

## Our Vision

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

## Our Mission

We promote a healthy, safe, well-educated, and thriving community with a sustainable quality of life. We provide effective and efficient government our citizens can trust. We deliver needed service through a responsive workforce committed to excellence, integrity, and teamwork.

## Our Values

Respect • Integrity • Collaboration • Honesty • Equity

# 2025 Strategic Plan At-A-Glance

The graphic on the following page summarizes the work of the Strategic Plan process. However additional details are available in the appendix related to the process for public and employee engagement, as well as the community trends that were analyzed during this process. For even more details, please go to **buncombecounty.org/2025** where the materials from all sessions have been stored.

## VISION
A caring community in harmony with its environment where citizens succeed, thrive, and realize their potential.

## VALUES
Respect – Integrity – Collaboration – Honesty – Equity

## COMMUNITY FOCUS AREAS

**Educated & Capable Community**
*Vision: A county where all residents thrive and demonstrate resilience throughout their lives.*

**Environmental & Energy Stewardship**
*Vision: High quality air, water, farmland and renewable energy for future generations.*

**Resident Well-Being**
*Vision: Our residents are safe, healthy, and engaged in their community.*

**Vibrant Economy**
*Vision: A robust and sustainable regional economy that builds on our homegrown industries and talent and provides economic mobility for residents.*

## 2025 GOALS

| Educated & Capable Community | Environmental & Energy Stewardship | Resident Well-Being | Vibrant Economy |
|---|---|---|---|
| Increase third grade literacy rates especially among underperforming students | Reduce greenhouse gas emissions | Expand and maintain cultural and recreational assets | Increase median household income to North Carolina benchmark |
| Increase kindergarten readiness | Preserve farmland and environmentally sensitive tracts | Increase access to public transportation, including public transit and paratransit services | Increase total employment in region's targeted industries |
| Improve college and career readiness | | Reduce jail population and enhance public safety | Implement land use strategies that encourage affordable housing near transportation and jobs |
| Protect older residents' ability to age in place | | Eliminate deaths as a result of substance abuse | |

## FOUNDATIONAL FOCUS AREAS

**Equity:** Systems, policies, and practices that support equity for all people and an organizational culture that embraces diversity and inclusion.

**Operational Excellence:** Proactively managing an infrastructure that contributes to best-in-class performance.

**Resources:** Ensuring funding, talent, and partnerships that enable high quality delivery of services and information.

# Overview of the 2025 Commissioner Goals

This section provides a summary of the 2025 goals, including 13 goals supporting the community focus and 7 goals supporting the foundations. Each summary includes a description of the goal, rationale, definition, primary objectives and examples of current work underway. This is meant to provide clarity to the public and staff on the intent of the goals, but is not considered to be comprehensive (i.e., this plan is dynamic and will evolve as Buncombe County does).

**Vision:** *A county where all residents thrive and demonstrate resilience throughout their lives.*

**Goal: Increase third grade literacy rates, especially among underperforming students**

**Rationale:** Early literacy has been proven to have a significant relationship with graduation rates. Third-grade students receive extra attention in North Carolina because of the state's Read to Achieve legislative initiative, a part of the Excellent Public Schools Act. Buncombe County Schools reports growing achievement gaps between various subgroups of students (Hispanic compared to White, Economically Disadvantaged compared to Non-Economically Disadvantaged, etc.). For example, between 2014 and 2018, the achievement gap among black and white students grew from 31% to 33%. In comparison, the minority achievement gap grew even more dramatically across Asheville City Schools – from 52% to 62%. This gap is second highest among North Carolina school districts and fifth highest in the country.[1]

**Definitions:** "Student proficiency" is measured as grade level proficiency (level III, IV, or V) on NC standardized tests. "Growth" is a measure of student learning over time. "Achievement Gap" is any significant and persistent disparity in academic performance or educational attainment between different groups of students. This is measured for white and minority students, as well as those who are economically disadvantaged, English learners, or disabled.

**Objectives:**

➜ Strengthen relationships among educational partners.

➜ Reduce racial disparities in student achievement.

**Example Initiatives, Programs, and Policies:**

➜ Public Schools: funding to Buncombe County & Asheville City School systems to support student success.

➜ Educational support grants: funding to community based programs delivering tutoring, mentoring and other educational support services.

➜ Isaac Coleman grants: funding to community based groups working toward equity and pipelines to education.

➜ Community dialog: system approaches to addressing disparities, such as the Equity Roundtable.

**Vision:** *A county where all residents thrive and demonstrate resilience throughout their lives.*

**Goal: Increase kindergarten readiness**

**Rationale:** The years prior to kindergarten are critical in shaping a child's foundation for later school success. Research demonstrates that learning begins at birth and that high-quality early learning programs help children arrive in kindergarten ready to succeed. Yet in Buncombe County, gaps in access to affordable high-quality child care options are expected to persist due to limited availability. Currently less than 1/3 of children ages birth through five in Buncombe County are enrolled in licensed programs (4,087 out of 14,319). In NC, the average annual cost of center-based care for an infant is $9,254; $8,386 for a toddler; and $7,920 for a four-year-old.[2]

**Definitions:** "Early care and education," "early childhood education," and "child care" are terms describing services to children ages birth to kindergarten. This includes infants and toddlers (ages 6 weeks to 3 years old), preschoolers (ages 3 to 5 years old) and pre-kindergarteners (4 year old rising kindergarteners). Program licensure is provided through the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Child Development and Early Education.

**Objectives:**

➜ Attract, develop, and retain early childhood teachers.

➜ Increase percentage of kindergarteners entering public school who demonstrate proficiency.

➜ Increase the percent of children ages 0-5 served by high-quality licensed care.

**Example Initiatives, Programs, and Policies:**

➜ Early Childhood Education and Development Fund: grant program investing in expanding, enhancing and sustaining early care and education.

➜ Child Care Subsidy: program that assists parents with the cost of child care.

➜ Asheville Buncombe Preschool Planning Collaborative: community based coalition working to increase availability of affordable, quality preschool.

➜ Family forward practices: supporting County employees through policies such as paid leave, dependent care, and flexible schedules.

**Vision:** *A county where all residents thrive and demonstrate resilience throughout their lives.*

Goal: **Improve college and career readiness**

**Rationale:** Readiness for college and/or careers after high school graduation is critical for students' future success. High school graduation rates have risen over the years. Both Buncombe and Asheville City schools reported higher four-year graduation rates than the state's average of 86.5% in 2018-19.[3] Yet not all students are prepared with the skills and experience for postsecondary education or living wage jobs.

**Definitions:** "Standards" are goals for what students should know and be able to do while learning academic content. The U.S. Department of Education establishes standards via the Common Core State Standards Initiative. "Curricula" provide educators with an outline for what should be taught in classrooms. "Assessments" determine how much a student has learned and whether he or she has performed to a level of proficiency set by academic standards.[4] Accountability metrics include student achievement on state tests, student growth on tests, four-year graduation rate, performance on college entry exams, and career preparedness performance (credentials, certificates, and grades in career and technical education courses).

**Objectives:**
→ Increase digital resource training to area educators and students.
→ Increase vocational and technical training for high school aged students.
→ Support initiatives that promote full option graduation (workforce, vocational, or college/ university readiness).

**Example Initiatives, Programs, and Policies:**
→ Public Schools: funding to Buncombe County & Asheville City School systems to support student success.
→ Community College: funding to Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College to support academic, workforce & personal development.
→ Workforce & Economic Development: partnerships and incentives to create successful businesses and citizens.
→ Education support grants: funding to community based programs delivering tutoring, mentoring and other educational support services.

3 Data source: Asheville Citizen-Times, Grades are in: See how Buncombe and Asheville schools rank on an annual NC report card, https://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/local/2019/09/04/nc-report-card-ranks-buncombe-and-asheville-schools/2207955001/
4 Definitions from US Department of Education, College- and Career-Ready Standards, https://www.ed.gov/k-12reforms/standards

**Vision:** *A county where all residents thrive and demonstrate resilience throughout their lives.*

Goal: **Protect older residents' ability to age in place**

**Rationale:** The median age in Buncombe County is on the rise. Between 2017 and 2037, each age group of Buncombe County residents is expected to grow in number but some more than others. Therefore, their relative proportions are expected to change. The number of older adults age 65+ is projected to grow by 28,330 and increase by 5% to 24% of the population. Older adults can experience disproportionate impacts from community barriers such as lack of access to affordable housing, transportation, health care, and wellness options.[5]

**Definitions:** "Older adults" are defined by age demographic and generally include people who are age 60 or 65 years or older. "Aging in place" is the ability to live in one's own home and community safely, independently and comfortably, regardless of age, income or ability level.[6] An "age-friendly community" has policies, services and structures that facilitate older adults staying healthy, participating in economic growth, remaining socially active, and living in security.[7]

**Objectives:**
→ Expand intergenerational programming and services for older adults.
→ Commit to an affordable, age-friendly community where older adults are safe, well and engaged.

**Example Initiatives, Programs, and Policies:**
→ Aging Plan: goals and strategies in support of a community where older adults are safe, well and engaged.
→ Aging Services: Health and Human Services social work resources as well as Mountain Mobility transportation programs to assist older adults.
→ Aging Funding: including federal block grants and local funding to support community based programs serving older adults.
→ Tax Relief: program proving property tax relief for citizens who are 65 years or older with limited incomes.

5 For data sources, refer to Trend Card 3 in Appendix III.
6 Definition from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Healthy Places Terminology, https://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/terminology.htm
7 Definition from Buncombe County Aging Plan, 2018-2022, http://www.landofsky.org/pdf/Aging/BuncombeCounty_AgingPlan_2018.pdf

COMMUNITY FOCUS AREA
# Environmental & Energy Stewardship

Community Focus Area | **Environmental & Energy Stewardship**

**Vision:** *High quality air, water, farmland and renewable energy for future generations.*

**Goal: Reduce greenhouse gas emissions**

**Rationale:** In order to address climate change, Buncombe County adopted resolutions targeted at reducing the County's carbon emissions by 2% annually; as well as implementing the most fiscally and environmentally responsible solutions to reach the goal of 100% renewable energy sources for its operations as well as the community as a whole.

**Definitions:** "Greenhouse Gas" or "GHG" is generally defined as any gas that absorbs and emits radiant energy and contributes to the warming of the planet. The most common GHG having a negative impact on global temperatures is carbon dioxide ($CO_2$), which is generally measured in metric tons (MT).

## Objectives:

➡ Continue commitment to renewable energy plan.
➡ Continue commitment to energy efficiency efforts.

## Example Initiatives, Programs, and Policies:

➡ Facility assessment: conduct assessment and footprint rightsizing in an effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from County facilities.
➡ Facility improvements: aggregated procurement of Solar Photovoltaic (PV) systems on public facilities.
➡ Solar farm: construction of 5MW utility solar farm at retired County landfill site.
➡ Residential energy efficiency: investments in residential energy efficiency and weatherization for low income community members.

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**Vision:** *High quality air, water, farmland and renewable energy for future generations.*

## Goal: **Preserve farmland and environmentally sensitive tracts of land**

**Rationale:** As development continues, and with natural and regulatory restrictions on steep slopes, the pressure to develop prime farmland and environmentally sensitive tracts of land increases. Farmland and environmentally sensitive tracts in the County are important to both the economy as well as the quality of life of our citizens. Currently Buncombe County has 1,073 farms, covering a total of 72,284 acres, up just slightly from the previous agricultural census. However, both the count and the number of acres dedicated to agriculture have trended downward since 2006. Losses total approximately 100 farms and 20,000 acres during this timespan.[8]

**Definitions:** "Environmentally sensitive tracts" is a type of designation for land needing special protection because of its landscape, wildlife or historical value. An "Agricultural District" consists of at least 50 acres of qualifying farmland, individually or separately owned, which are located within one mile of each other. In order to be considered qualifying farmland, the land must meet a short list of requirements that almost all farms in the County meet.

## Objectives:

➜ Encourage growth and development activities in areas where appropriate infrastructure is available.

➜ Increase education initiatives for farmers.

➜ Increase market opportunities for farms.

➜ Increase conservation efforts.

## Example Initiatives, Programs and Policies:

➜ Farmland Preservation Program: program that allows farmers to voluntarily enroll their farm property in an agricultural district. The purpose of the program is to slow the decline of farmlands in the County and offer operators of farms some protection from encroachment of development.

➜ Farm Heritage Trail: scenic driving route through the rural agricultural communities of Alexander, Leicester, Newfound and Sandy Mush in northwest Buncombe County.

➜ Farmland Preservation Ordinance: ordinance that allows the County to hold permanent conservation easements on farms in the County. These easements are designed to protect rural lands, particularly in the vicinity of urban growth, near high priority waterways and other environmentally sensitive areas. This gives landowners another option when faced with the pressures of development. Conservation Easements typically take two to three years to complete.

8  For data sources, refer to Trend Card 16 in Appendix III.

**Vision:** *Our residents are safe, healthy, and engaged in their community.*

**Goal: Expand and maintain cultural and recreational assets**

**Rationale:** As the region grows, Buncombe County must develop a well-balanced system of infrastructure that serves residents and supports communities. Buncombe County seeks to improve the quality of life within our community by providing high quality recreational and cultural facilities, opportunities for social interaction, as well as programming and resources that encourage health and wellness.

**Definitions:** "Recreational facilities" may include greenways and walking trails, sports fields and courts, playgrounds, and others. Cultural facilities may include public library branches and related resources.

**Objectives:**

➜ Increase safe, easy access and proximity for residents to a recreation space and/or public library within their own neighborhood.

➜ Expand, diversify and champion vibrant, creative activities and programming guided by practices of cultural equity.

➜ Increase availability of library resources through community outreach and electronic offerings.

**Example Initiatives, Programs and Policies:**

➜ Greenway Master Plan: plan for linking existing and proposed greenways together for a cohesive network for recreation and active transportation.

➜ Library System: including 12 branch libraries offering a variety of educational programming, and featuring East Asheville Library, a state-of-the-art facility projected to open in June 2021.

➜ Recreational Facilities: offering a range of facilities which offer free or low cost access to fishing, picnic areas, disc golf, outdoor games, playgrounds, sports, and other inclusive recreational experiences. Featuring Buncombe County Sports Park, which will include major enhancements over the next two years.

➜ North Carolina Room: a premier local history resource for Buncombe County and the region, including a variety of books, photos, family histories, oral histories, newspapers, special materials and collections.

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**Vision:** *Our residents are safe, healthy, and engaged in their community.*

**Goal: Increase access to public transportation, including public transit and paratransit services**

**Rationale:** Public transportation is a critical component of thriving communities, and provides connectivity in both rural and urban areas for residents, commuters, and visitors. An accessible and efficient public transit network offers convenient and affordable service for people to travel to home, work, school, recreational opportunities, and more. Public transportation reduces annual vehicle miles traveled, which helps lower air pollution and energy consumption.

**Definitions:** "Public transit," is a system that transports passengers by group, is available to the general public, and typically operates on a schedule with fixed routes, and set fares. "Paratransit" describes public transportation services that offer point to point scheduled trips for individuals, and often is used to supplement fixed-route public transit – particularly for special groups or in rural or lower populated areas.

**Objectives:**

➜ Increase ridership through community outreach campaigns.

➜ Include a public transportation analysis as part of the comprehensive plan.

**Example Initiatives, Programs, and Policies:**

➜ Mountain Mobility: community transportation system providing public transportation including complementary paratransit services to Asheville Rides Transit (ART).

➜ Comprehensive Land Use Plan, 2013 Update: establishes a broad and long-range plan to guide future growth, development and services.

➜ 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan: a regional transportation plan that provides guidance as it relates to road improvements, public transit, multi-modal needs and forecasting.

➜ Planning partnerships: coordination through groups such as the French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), Land-of-Sky Regional Planning Organization (RPO), and other public transportation providers in the region (i.e. City of Asheville, Haywood County, Madison County, Henderson County, etc.).

➜ Bus passes: removing barriers to public participation through the provision of no-cost access to public transit for Seniors and those attending public meetings.

**Vision:** *Our residents are safe, healthy, and engaged in their community.*

## Goal: **Reduce jail population and enhance public safety**

**Rationale:** Buncombe County's jail houses inmates for local, state and federal criminal justice agencies. There are 604 beds in 13 housing units. Of the 604 beds, 96 are designated as female beds.Between 2015 and 2018, the number of people awaiting case disposition in the detention facility has increased by 13%, from 309 to 352. A primary driver of this increase is the growing length of stay experienced by pre-trial defendants. Approximately 70% of the jail population is state pre-trial defendants. Additionally, staff projections suggest the female population will regularly exceed capacity by November 2020.[9]

**Definitions:** "Detention centers" or "detention facilities," commonly known as "jails," are places of confinement for inmates. Typically, jails are local facilities under the jurisdiction of a city, local district or county. In North Carolina, counties are responsible for operating jails. "Diversion" programs in the criminal justice system are options to avoid sentencing, typically with a rehabilitative component. Diversion programs can occur at various phases or "intercepts" within the process, through a referral by law enforcement or the courts. "Treatment courts" are a type of diversion program sometimes known as "specialty courts" or "recovery courts" that serve specific populations such as people with substance use disorders.

## Objectives:

→ Reduce average length of stay for pretrial population.

→ Reduce annual bookings for failure to appear and technical violations.

→ Increase the number of successful graduates from diversion programs and treatment courts.

→ Reduce crime rate, including violent and property crimes, within the County's jurisdiction.

## Example Initiatives, Programs, and Policies:

→ Justice Resource Advisory Council: planning and coordination for the local justice system.

→ Safety and Justice Challenge: strategies to reduce jail population with a focus on data integration, racial equity, and community engagement.

→ Justice Resource Center: one-stop center serving justice-involved people with diversion options and programming to support wellness.

→ Medically Assisted Treatment Program: a detention center program that provides patients with an addiction disorder receive controlled doses of medication in conjunction with counseling and therapy to help them avoid returning to more dangerous substances.

9  For data sources, refer to Trend Card 9 in Appendix III.

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**Vision:** *Our residents are safe, healthy, and engaged in their community.*

## Goal: **Eliminate deaths as a result of substance abuse**

**Rationale:** North Carolina has been significantly impacted by the opioid epidemic. In 2017, the state had a rate of 19.8 opioid overdose deaths per 100,000 persons. This is 5.2 deaths per 100,000 persons higher than the national average.[10] Buncombe County is no exception with an opioid overdose death rate almost twice that of North Carolina. Between 2015 and 2017, the number of opiate-related deaths in Buncombe County tripled – growing from 32 to 113. Beyond fatal overdoses, substance use disorders take a community toll in other ways. For example, communicable diseases associated with injection drug use have been on the rise.[11]

**Definitions:** "Opioids" are a class of drugs that include the illegal drug heroin, synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, and pain relievers available legally by prescription, such as oxycodone (OxyContin®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®), codeine, morphine, and many others.[12] "Substance Use Disorders" are generally defined as addiction to drugs or alcohol. One type of substance use disorder is "opioid use disorder." Medical professionals can provide diagnosis, and there are various modalities of "treatment" available, such as Medication Assisted Treatment as well as inpatient and outpatient counseling, and peer support. Research finds that Medication Assisted Treatment has the highest efficacy rate, keeping a full 50% from chaotic, illicit use.[13] "Harm reduction" is an approach that involves reducing negative consequences. Examples of harm reduction related to opioid use disorder include overdose reversals (using the medication Naloxone) and syringe services programs that provide access to safe injection supplies as well as treatment linkages.

## Objectives:

→ Increase prevention and treatment programs.

→ Equip County professionals and partners with appropriate and adequate tools and training.

→ Reduce the total number of children coming into foster care related to parental substance use disorders.

## Example Initiatives, Programs, and Policies:

→ CARE Team: community coalition working to improve prevention, treatment and harm reduction through a substance use response plan.

→ Opioid grants: funding to Buncombe County in support of services such as Medicaid Assisted Treatment, transitional housing, and more.

→ Opioid services: programs in Health and Human Services, Emergency Management, and the Detention Facility for treatment and harm reduction.

→ Overdose mapping: utilizing public record and EMS data to perform cross-departmental analysis of death records and overdose patterns between to inform prevention efforts.

10  North Carolina Opioid Summary, Opioid-Involved Overdose Deaths, National Institute on Drug Abuse, https://www.drugabuse.gov/opioid-summaries-by-state/north-carolina-opioid-summary

11  For data sources, refer to Trend Card 10 in Appendix III.

12  Definition from National Institute on Drug Abuse, https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/opioids

13  Kane, C., Ostrach, B., Leiner, K. et. al. (2019). Introduction to Medication Assisted Treatment & Communication Strategies to Reduce Stigma, Bias and Harm when working with Substance Users. UNC Health Sciences at MAHEC, 2019.

# Vibrant Economy

**Vision:** *A robust and sustainable regional economy that builds on our homegrown industries and talent and provides economic mobility for residents.*

## Goal: **Increase median household income to North Carolina benchmark**

**Rationale:** Buncombe County has a thriving economy that demonstrates job growth, low unemployment and thriving industry clusters. Even with these positive attributes, annual median household income ($50,668) continues to lag behind 2018 North Carolina state benchmarks ($52,413)[14] while costs of living increase.

**Definitions:** "Household Income" includes income of the householder and all other people 15 years and older in the household, whether or not they are related to the householder. "Median" refers to the point that divides the household income distribution into halves, one-half with income above the median and the other with income below the median. The median is based on the income distribution of all households, including those with no income.[15]

## Objectives:

→ Increase average wage for incentivized projects by Buncombe County.

→ Set standard for community by supporting $15 minimum wage.

→ Increase number of certified apprenticeship slots offered throughout Buncombe County.

## Example Initiatives, Programs and Policies:

→ Economic Development Incentive Program: targeted incentives for high wage jobs.

→ Mountain Community Capital Fund: small business loan guarantee program for historically disadvantaged communities.

→ County Policy: Buncombe County $15 Minimum Wage for all full-time employees.

14  Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) and Puerto Rico Community Survey (PRCS), 5-Year Estimates. The PRCS is part of the Census Bureau's ACS, customized for Puerto Rico. Both Surveys are updated every year.

15  Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) and Puerto Rico Community Survey (PRCS), 5-Year Estimates. The PRCS is part of the Census Bureau's ACS, customized for Puerto Rico. Both Surveys are updated every year.

**Vision:** *A robust and sustainable regional economy that builds on our homegrown industries and talent and provides economic mobility for residents.*

**Goal**: **Increase total employment in region's targeted industries**

**Rationale:** Buncombe County is home to several industries that were born here and grew up here. These industries give us a competitive advantage – from attracting new business to developing our workforce. Continued growth in our strong sectors will promote opportunities in high wage sectors for job seekers with a variety of skill and education level.

**Definitions:** "Targeted industries" are representative of high value opportunities unique to our region and include: advanced manufacturing; life science; climate technology; outdoor products; professional office and information technology. These are growing industries that offer above-average salaries.

| Target Industry Group | 2018 Jobs | 2013-2018 % Change | Average Earnings Per Job |
|---|---|---|---|
| Advanced Manufacturing (e.g. Automotive, Aerospace, Food, Beverage, etc.) | 18,088 | 25% | $68.8K |
| Life Science (Biotech and Medical Devices) | 645 | 71% | $63.6K |
| Climate Technology | 1,171 | 22% | $73.6K |
| Outdoor Products | 624 | 3% | $56.5K |
| Professional Office and Information Technology | 11,708 | 15% | $73.2K |

**Objectives:**

➜ Increase total employment in targeted Professional Office and Information Technology jobs.

➜ Increase total employment in targeted advanced manufacturing jobs.

➜ Increase small business and "startup" jobs.

**Example Initiatives, Programs and Policies:**

➜ Venture Asheville: high-growth entrepreneurship initiative.

➜ Buncombe County Site Selection Study: analysis of parcels for potential economic development use.

➜ Mountain Community Capital Fund: small business loan guarantee program for historically disadvantaged communities.

**Vision:** *A robust and sustainable regional economy that builds on our homegrown industries and talent and provides economic mobility for residents.*

**Goal: Implement land use strategies that encourage affordable housing near transportation and jobs**

**Rationale:** Land use strategies guide the future actions of a community. These strategies help to support a vision for the future by identifying long-range goals and objectives for all activities that affect the community. These strategies account for changes in Buncombe County's growth patterns, development scenarios, land use demands, and demographic composition. Robust land use strategies will help to identify the "best use" of our scarce developable land resources and encourage development that meets the community needs for affordability and accessibility.

**Definitions:** The "comprehensive plan", also known as a long-range plan, general plan or master plan is a principal planning tool often used by local governments to represent a vision for the future designed to guide growth, community needs and identified goals through a series of objectives, initiatives and goals. The plan (while not a set of regulations) will influence revisions to, or facilitate the creation of, new standards and policies to promote said objectives, initiatives and goals.

**Objectives:**

➜ Evaluate existing and potential programs and incentives that encourage affordable housing along transportation corridors and in areas where adequate public infrastructure exists.

➜ Initiate a robust, citizen engaged and policy-focused comprehensive planning process.

**Example Initiatives, Programs and Policies:**

➜ Comprehensive Plan: the County will develop a new Comprehensive Plan, which will replace the currently used Land Use Plan Update 2013, based on the County's original 1998 plan.

➜ Audit, evaluate and improve upon all historic plans completed by Buncombe County and regional partners like the NCDOT, Land of Sky, to fully assess previously identified goals and strategies and evaluate current relevancy.

Operational Excellence
Resources

**Vision:** *Systems, policies, and practices that support equity for all people and an organizational culture that embraces diversity and inclusion.*

### Goals:

1. **Ensure that policies and practices eliminate barriers to allow for equitable opportunity**
2. **Ensure representative and inclusive practices are reflected in decision making**

**Rationale:** Equity is one of Buncombe County's values as expressed in this strategic plan. Inequality and lack of inclusion exist across all areas, whether looking at geography, race, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, and many other traits. However racial equity is defined as a starting place because of pronounced racial disparities at a community level. Buncombe County is experiencing significant and in some cases growing racial gaps across broad domains, including: birth outcomes; health outcomes; educational attainment; income; business success; criminal justice involvement; and life expectancy. Buncombe County as an organization has policies and practices that impact equity, such as: employee recruitment and development; benefits and compensation; service delivery; purchasing; communications; and community engagement.

**Definitions:** "Equity" is defined as the state of being just, impartial and fair. "Inclusion" is the action or state of including or being included within a group or structure. More than simply diversity or numerical representation, inclusion often involves authentic and empowered participation and a true sense of belonging. "Racial justice" is the systematic fair treatment of people of all races that results in equitable opportunities and outcomes for everyone. "Racial Equity" is achieved when race can no longer be used to predict life outcomes, and outcomes for all groups are improved.[16]

### Objectives:

➜ Develop a countywide equity plan and strategies.
➜ Provide opportunities for employee input and feedback.

### Example Initiatives, Programs, and Policies:

➜ Equity and Inclusion Workgroup: internal cross-departmental committee formed to oversee the creation and implementation of an equity action plan.
➜ Safety and Justice Challenge: examining practices and working to decrease racial and ethnic disparities in the local justice system.
➜ Minority Business Plan: practices designed to provide minorities with equal opportunity to participate in contracting and procurement.

16 Definitions from Race Equity Action and Inclusion Action Guide by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, January 8, 2015 https://www.aecf. org/resources/race-equity-and-inclusion-action-guide/

**Vision:** *Proactively managing an infrastructure that contributes to best-in-class performance.*

### Goals:

1. **Foster an internal business culture focused on continuous improvement**
2. **Assure that policies reflect ethical principles**
3. **Ensure all decisions promote the County's financial health and long term interests**
4. **Leverage and maximize technologies, plans, and studies to enhance the safety and capabilities of infrastructure**

**Rationale:** Often unseen by the public, the functional operations within government are the central driver for enhancing performance and generating change. A high performing government is more capable of delivering high quality, timely, and meaningful services to residents. The impacts of government operations go far beyond the "public-facing" realm of social workers and tax collectors. These impacts can be indirectly felt through the ethics of procurement processes, efficient use of budgeted resources, and transparency of information technology.

**Definitions:** "Operational Excellence" is the recurring execution of public processes and services on a consistent, equitable and efficient basis.

### Objectives:

→ Develop departmental business plans that include relevant measures.

→ Review and improve business processes.

→ Standardize and maintain policies and practices.

→ Support initiatives to ensure integrity of data and physical assets.

### Example Initiatives, Programs and Policies:

→ Policy Review Process: recurring review of County-wide policies for consistency and applicability.

→ Departmental Business Planning: development of Departmental business plans aligned to the Buncombe County Strategic Plan.

→ IT Governance and Capital Planning: annual process for review of requests and identification of solutions that meet County-wide needs.

**Vision:** *Ensuring funding, talent, and partnerships that enable high quality delivery of services and information.*

### Goals:

1. **Ensure that Buncombe County is an employer of choice in the region**
2. **Optimize funding and partnerships**
3. **Increase public engagement opportunities for input on County programs, projects and initiatives**

**Rationale:** In order to meet the pressing needs of our community, Buncombe County requires talented staff and partners that can deliver high quality programs and services. We must be able to hire and retain the most talented staff, partner with the most innovative and experienced partners, and proactively engage our residents to understand how we are meeting, or failing to meet, expectations.

**Definitions:** "Funding" refers to the budgeted revenues and grant resources available to the county. "Partnerships" refers to organizations in the government, nonprofit and private sector that are stakeholders in the community.

### Objectives:

→ Establish a robust training and development program.

→ Ensure a sustainable compensation, recruitment and retention program.

→ Leverage public and other funding.

### Example Initiatives, Programs and Policies:

→ Employee Talent Development: dedicated program for assessing current and desired employee knowledge, skills and abilities.

→ Community Engagement: dedicated resources to engage communities across Buncombe County on County programs, services and initiatives.

→ IT Governance and Capital Planning: annual process for review of requests and identification of solutions that meet County-wide needs.

# Summary

All strategic plans are a leap of faith. The Buncombe County 2025 Strategic Plan sets a course based on what we value and what we believe will be true in the future, based on the best information and projections available to us.

If all goes well, in 2040, a future generation will look back on this work and recognize the residents', Commissioners', and staff's efforts to anticipate the future and consider the next generation's wellbeing. This is the definition of intergenerational equity: to honor current residents' needs without preventing future residents from meeting their own.

Of course, things don't always go according to plan. In that case, Buncombe County Commissioners can return to their values, to residents, and to staff who were instrumental in providing wise counsel, and who will be instrumental in the future.

Our future starts today.

# Appendix

## I. Methodologies

### A. Strategic Foresight

Strategic foresight is a professional, proven process used by the U.S. Military, NATO, the World Bank, Fortune 500 Companies, and others to anticipate the future. The Buncombe County Board used several steps of the strategic foresight process (see image below) to begin its discussion about the County's future.
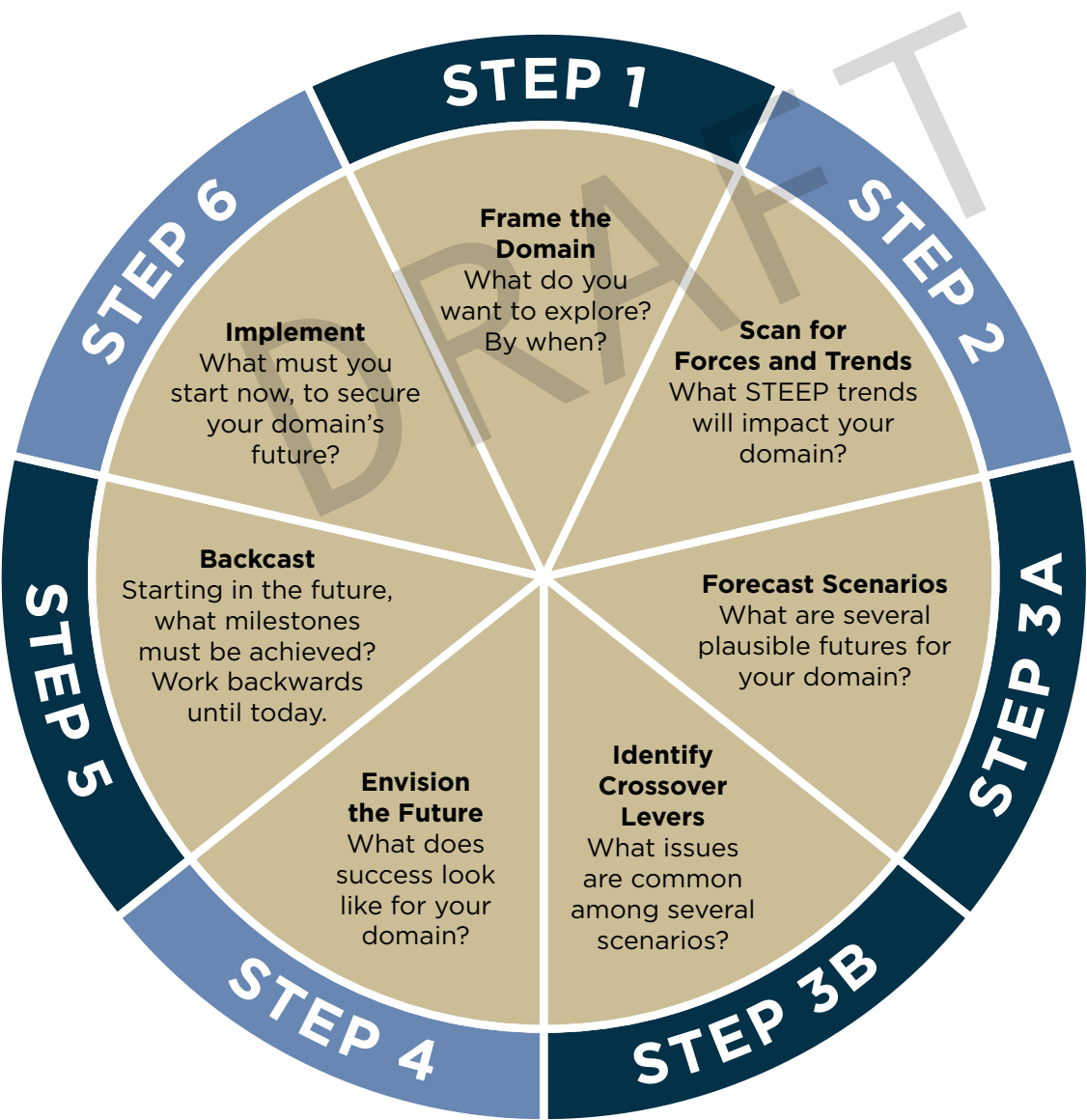


**Step 1: Frame the Domain**

The Board chose the domain: "The Future of Buncombe County through 2040." Although the Board knew that they wanted a 5-year plan (not a 20 year plan), they chose to think a generation into the future, so that the 5-year Strategic Plan would give them the best chance of long-term success.

**Step 2: Scan for Forces and Trends**

To ensure that the 2025 Strategic Plan is responsive to the trends facing the County, Commissioners and department heads gathered to identify and discuss the top trends. They considered dozens of "STEEP" trends (Society, Technology, Economy, Environment, and Politics) and ranked them high to low according to impact.
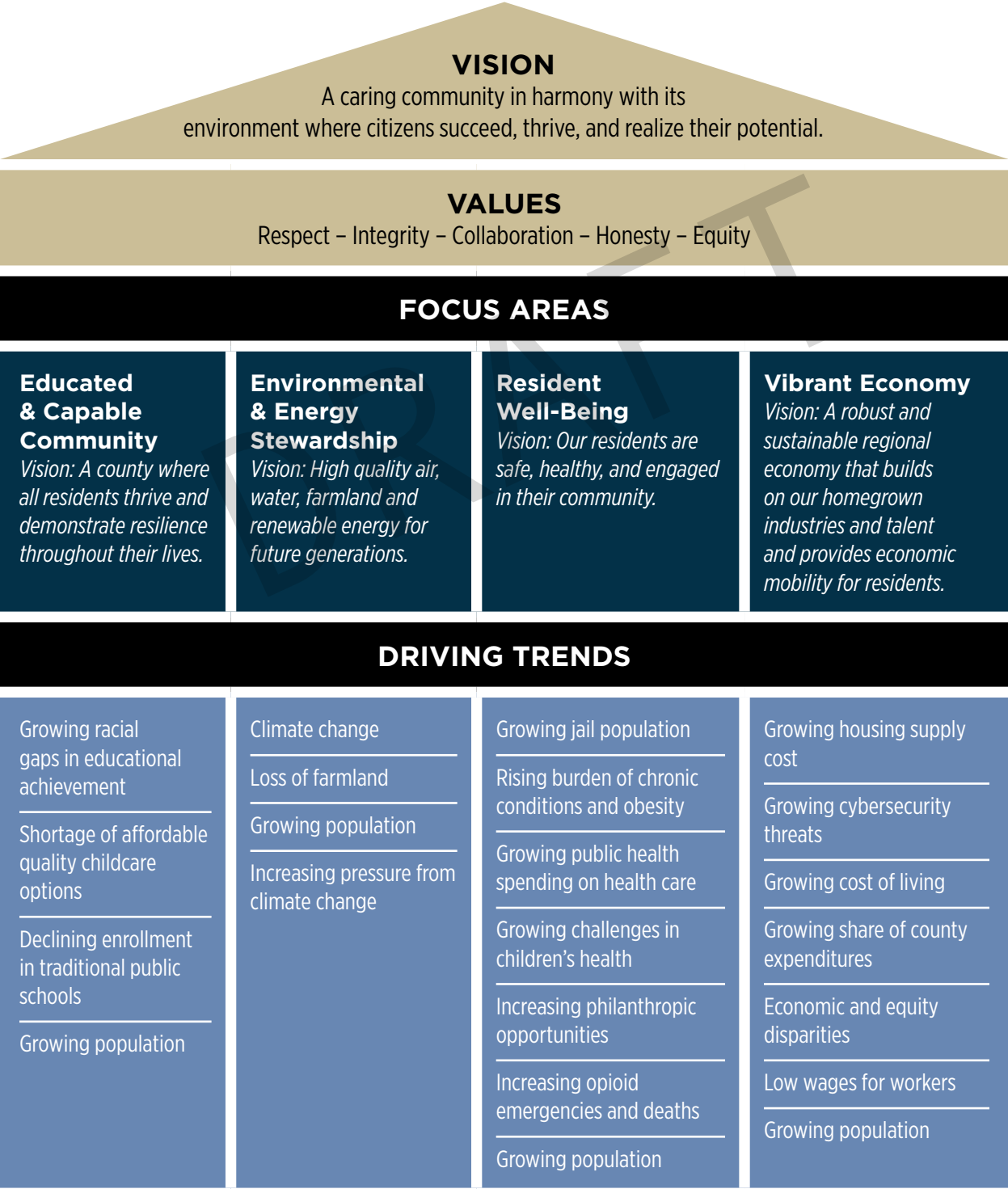
All Commissioners agreed on 10 trends that are highly certain to have a large impact on Buncombe County through 2040:[17]

1. Growing housing costs and supply
2. Growing jail population
3. Growing population
4. Growing racial gaps in education achievement
5. Growing public spending on health care
6. Rising burden of chronic conditions & obesity
7. Increasing opioid emergencies and deaths
8. Low wages for workers
9. Economic and equity disparities
10. Loss of farmland

17 For details on STEEP Trends, refer to Trend Cards in Appendix III.

**Step 4: Envision the Future**

The Commission began to draft the Focus Areas and visions that would be responsive to the top trends facing Buncombe County.

**VISION**
A caring community in harmony with its environment where citizens succeed, thrive, and realize their potential.

**VALUES**
Respect – Integrity – Collaboration – Honesty – Equity

**FOCUS AREAS**

| **Educated & Capable Community** | **Environmental & Energy Stewardship** | **Resident Well-Being** | **Vibrant Economy** |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Vision: A county where all residents thrive and demonstrate resilience throughout their lives.* | *Vision: High quality air, water, farmland and renewable energy for future generations.* | *Vision: Our residents are safe, healthy, and engaged in their community.* | *Vision: A robust and sustainable regional economy that builds on our homegrown industries and talent and provides economic mobility for residents.* |

**DRIVING TRENDS**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Growing racial gaps in educational achievement | Climate change | Growing jail population | Growing housing supply cost |
| Shortage of affordable quality childcare options | Loss of farmland | Rising burden of chronic conditions and obesity | Growing cybersecurity threats |
| Declining enrollment in traditional public schools | Growing population | Growing public health spending on health care | Growing cost of living |
| Growing population | Increasing pressure from climate change | Growing challenges in children's health | Growing share of county expenditures |
| | | Increasing philanthropic opportunities | Economic and equity disparities |
| | | Increasing opioid emergencies and deaths | Low wages for workers |
| | | Growing population | Growing population |

## B. Identifying Values

**How did Commissioners identify their values?**
Donna Warner from the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Government facilitated the following process.

> Values are an enduring belief about the way things should be done and serve as guides for how decisions are made. Values guide actions and for commissioners, like other leaders, their credibility depends on it. As the board wrestles with what Buncombe County will look like in the future, it is important for fellow commissioners, staff and residents to understand what beliefs guide their decisions.

Commissioners explored and shared what was important to them, what they believe the board stands for and also what makes Buncombe County unique. Using a sheet with a list of 50 values, commissioners selected their top 3 personal values, those that were most important to them. They shared their choices with each other and discussed what they meant, why they were chosen and how it will impact their decision making. It was noted there were several values that commissioners shared in common but that no two commissioners selected the same three values and how important it was to know where each leader "was coming from."

Sharing of personal values was followed by a discussion of those values for which the board stands. Commissioners explored what they wanted to be known for as a board by selecting an image from 50 offered. They described how the image they selected characterized how they will work together and what the image meant to them. Working in two groups, commissioners decided they want to the board to known for **"restoring public trust through honest and ethical decision making, transparency, fiscal responsibility, impactful policy making and good governance."** One group described it simply as "we fixed it."

With an understanding for their personal values and what the board stands for, the commissioners worked in groups to brainstorm and determine those values most important to the county's work, what they held dear and want to preserve and build for future generations. They determined four values: respect, honesty/integrity and embracing a culture of collaboration. Later in the process after community input, equity was added as a value.

# II. Putting it to Work: Community and Staff Engagement

## Public Engagement

In October through December 2019, Buncombe County hosted a series of workshops to share updates about the strategic plan and gather public input. In order to maximize access, these sessions were held at locations throughout the community at various times of day and days of the week. Spanish language interpretation was available as well as bus tickets and parking passes. In addition, feedback was collected online through the County's "Let's Talk" public engagement platform.

> **In total, there were 271 attendees across 13 sessions at the following locations:**
> - **North** – Barnardsville Community Center
> - **South** – Skyland Fire Department
> - **East** – Black Mountain Town Hall
> - **West** – Enka-Candler Library
> - **Central** – Arthur R. Edington Center & Buncombe County Administrative Offices

A primary goal to was gather input on setting goals that will have the greatest impact for each of the four community focus areas. This was accomplished through visioning, small group exercises, and large group discussion. Various themes emerged:

> **What to focus on:**
> - Transportation
> - Education
> - Employment
> - Housing
> - Justice/Safety
> - Youth
> - Health/Mental Health/ Substance Use
> - Land Use & Natural Resources
> - Connectivity
>
> **How to govern:**
> - Equity
> - Inclusion
> - Partnerships
> - Funding
> - Investments
> - Collaboration
> - Public Engagement
> - Accountability
> - Performance Measurement

All information collected during public engagement was shared with the Board of Commissions in its entirety as well as published to the website. Commissioners reviewed the feedback during their December workshop and made a number of modifications to their draft plan as a result. For example, "equity" was added as a value as well as a foundational focus area. Several goals within the community focus areas were also added or changed as a result of the public input. For example, language was changed in one goal from "elderly" to "older adult," and a goal was added regarding "land use strategies to encourage affordable housing near transportation and jobs."
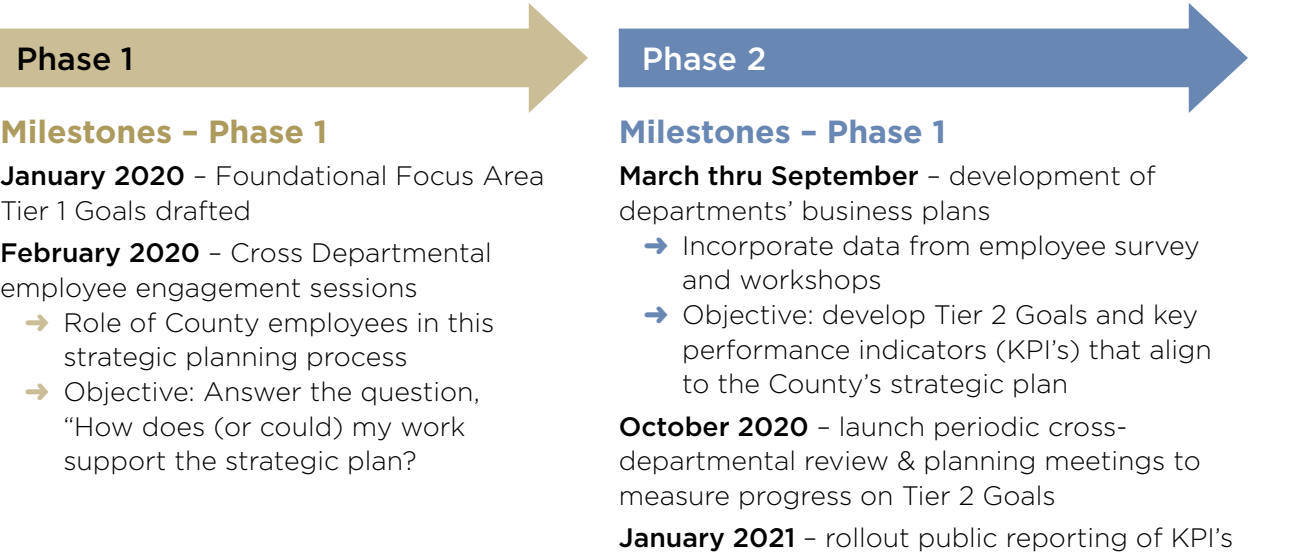
## Employee Engagement

In November 2019, County employees were invited to respond through a survey to two questions related to the Values articulated by the Board of Commissioners. These Values provide a bedrock for how the County operates, and the questions posed to employees were, "In your department do you see [Respect, Integrity, Collaboration, Honesty] being demonstrated?" and "As we work to define this value, what does [Respect, Integrity, Collaboration, Honesty] mean to you?" Responses to these questions provide a benchmark to measure change to the organizational culture over the subsequent years.

Employees were also asked through the survey to provide an initial reaction to the four draft community focus areas. The specific question asked was, "What can, or could, your department do additionally to improve or impact an [Educated and Capable Community, Environment and Energy Stewardship, Resident Well-Being, or Vibrant Economy]." Of the County's 1,500+ employees, 278 responded to the survey.

During the month of February, 2020, County employees were invited to attend 1 of 15 input workshops. In total, there were 182 attendees representing 26 departments. The workshops were designed with three purposes in mind:

1. To inform employees about the strategic planning process with an emphasis on the role of employees;
2. To generate ideas that may lead to initiatives addressing the goals of the plan;
3. To introduce cross-departmental collaboration that prompts innovative approaches to service delivery.

As with the employee survey, information gathered during the workshops were largely anonymous; that is, employees were asked only to identify their respective departments. All ideas and feedback will be returned to departmental leadership prior to the beginning of business planning in order to inform that phase of the strategic planning process, as depicted below:

**Phase 1**

**Milestones – Phase 1**

**January 2020** – Foundational Focus Area Tier 1 Goals drafted

**February 2020** – Cross Departmental employee engagement sessions
- Role of County employees in this strategic planning process
- Objective: Answer the question, "How does (or could) my work support the strategic plan?

**Phase 2**

**Milestones – Phase 1**

**March thru September** – development of departments' business plans
- Incorporate data from employee survey and workshops
- Objective: develop Tier 2 Goals and key performance indicators (KPI's) that align to the County's strategic plan

**October 2020** – launch periodic cross-departmental review & planning meetings to measure progress on Tier 2 Goals

**January 2021** – rollout public reporting of KPI's

# III. Trend Cards

The following trend cards are those that were originally created for Buncombe County. After the original workshop, Board members added a few additional trends which may not be reflected here.

## Society

### 1. Growing Population

By 2040, the GroWNC region (Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Madison and Transylvania Counties) will be home to over 630,000 people – nearly 40% more than in 2010. This is an increase of about 178,000 people or the addition of two cities the size of Asheville. This increase is expected to translate to a need for almost 75,000 additional housing units across the five counties. Most of this growth is expected to occur in Buncombe and Henderson Counties.

Source: 2015-2019 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Madison, and Transylvania Counties, 2015; Draft French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization SE Data Development Report, 2014

### 2. Increasing Hispanic & Decreasing Black Residents

Between 2017 and 2037, Buncombe County is projected to grow (in total number) the most in terms of White (by 54,400) and Hispanic (by 17,400) residents but lose about 440 Black Residents. Along the way, the proportion of various racial groups within the county population is expected to remain essentially consistent. In terms of ethnicity, however, the proportion of Hispanic residents is expected to grow from 8% to 11%.

Source: Population estimates for 2017 and projections for 2037 by the Demographer's Office at the NC Office of State Budget and Management; State of Black Asheville, Feb 2017

### 3. Rising Median Age

Between 2017 and 2037, each age group of Buncombe County residents is expected to grow in number but some more than others. Therefore, their relative proportions are expected to change.

| Age 0-17 | add 3,735 | decrease by 2% to 17% of the population |
| Age 18-24 | add 2,345 | decrease by 1% to 7% of the population |
| Age 25-44 | add 12,790 | decrease by 1% to 25% of the population |
| Age 45-64 | add 15,490 | decrease by 1% to 26% of the population |
| Age 65+ | add 28,330 | increase by 5% to 24% of the population |

As a result, the median age in Buncombe is expected to increase from age 42.1 to age 45.6.

Source: Population estimates for 2017 and projections for 2037 by the Demographer's Office at the North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management

### 4. Rising Burden of Chronic Conditions and Obesity

Chronic conditions are among the leading causes of death in Buncombe County – cancer, heart disease, chronic lower respiratory disease, cerebrovascular disease, and Alzheimer's disease.

If current trends continue, between 2016 and 2030 chronic disease could cost North Carolina $65.5 billion in medical costs and an extra $26.6 billion annually in lost employee productivity.

Source: NC State Center for Health Statistics, 2017; fact sheet from the Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease, accessed Aug 20 2018

## Society

### 5. Growing Challenges in Children's Health

In Buncombe County, the prevalence of overweight and obesity among students in K-5 grew from 33.17% in 2012 to 33.8% in 2015. Unhealthy weight increases the risk of many health problems.

Meanwhile, both nationally and locally, immunization rates are declining and preventable serious illnesses are increasing. In Buncombe County since 2000, the percentage of kindergarteners with religious exemptions to immunizations has increased from 0.62% to 5.70% in 2018.

Additionally, a national study suggests that rates of mental-health incidents among teens and young adults are growing. Between 2005 and 2017, the share of teens 12-17 who reported the symptoms of a major depressive episode within the last year rose from 8.7% to 13.2%.

Source: "Sustainability Annual Report for Buncombe County," 2016; "Schools Grapple With Student Depression as Data Show Problem Worsening," Education Week, Mar 14 2019; NC DHHS Immunization Branch, July 2019

### 6. Declining Enrollment in Traditional Public Schools

Between 2017 and 2025, Buncombe County Schools is projected to lose 2,230 students, falling to a total enrollment of about 21,300. More generally enrollment in traditional NC public schools has been falling, down to 81% as of 2018. Districts with declining enrollment face difficult budget decisions.

In part the decline in number is driven by an overall shrinking student population. Additionally, a growing share of students are switching to charter schools, home schools, and private schools. In Buncombe County, the share of public school students attending a charter school has grown from less than 3.9% in 2011 to 4-7.9% in 2017.

Source: "Nearly 1 in 5 NC Students Are Opting out of Traditional Public Schools," Newsobserver, Jul 13 2018; "2017-18 Enrollments & Facilities Report," Buncombe County Schools, 2018; "Change in North Carolina K-12 Population," NC Dept of Public Instruction, accessed Jul 22 2019

### 7. Growing Racial Gaps in Educational Achievement

Buncombe County Schools reports growing achievement gaps between various subgroups of students (Hispanic compared to White, Economically Disadvantaged compared to Non-Economically Disadvantaged, etc.). For example, between 2014 and 2018, the achievement gap among black and white students grew from 31% to 33%.

In comparison, the minority achievement gap grew even more dramatically across Asheville City Schools – from 52% to 62%. This gap is second highest among North Carolina school districts and fifth highest in the country.

Source: "Two NC school districts with major racial achievement gaps seek solutions," Carolina Public Press, Feb 21 2019; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, July 2019

### 8. Changing Rates of Violent Crime

Between 2015 and 2017, overall crime decreased in many areas of Buncombe County but the rate of violent crime increased by 26%, from 239 per 100,000 to 301 per 100,000. This increase is primarily driven by assault and motor vehicle theft, while other property crimes are declining. Furthermore, gun-related violent crime is growing by 55% (2016-19).

Sources: NC State Bureau of Investigation, 2017 Annual Report; Asheville PD Update on Gun Violence, Jun 25 2019

## Society

### 9.
### Growing
### Jail Population

Between 2015 and 2018, the number of people awaiting case disposition in the detention facility has increased by 13%, from 309 to 352. Driving this increase is the growing length of stay experienced by pre-trial defendants. Approximately 70% of the jail population is state pre-trial defendants. Additionally, staff projections suggest the female population will regularly exceed capacity by November 2020.

Sources: Staff presentation to Board of Commissioners, Oct 10 2017; staff presentation to Justice Resource Advisory Council, Jul 5 2019

### 10.
### Growing Opioid Addiction
### and Substance Abuse Disorders

Between 2015 and 2017, the number of opiate-related deaths in Buncombe County tripled – growing from 29 to 92. Meanwhile in 2016, there were over 17 million painkillers prescribed in the county. This equals almost 68 pills for every man, woman and child in the County. Communicable diseases associated with injection drug use are also expected to continue rising.

Source: "Buncombe County Strategic Priority: Opioid Addiction", Dec 2017; and "County-by-County Figures: The Opioid Crisis in North Carolina," NC Office of the Governor, May 16 2017; NC Opioid Action Plan Data Dashboard, accessed Jul 22 2019

## Technology

### 11.
### Increasing Demand for
### Digital Gov Services & Info

Demand for personalized and digital government services accessible by computer and especially mobile devices is expected to continue growing as more and more people access the internet on their own devices at all ages and spend significant time outside of school and work on the web. Already at least 42% of voting-age US citizens handle a majority of their government interactions through digital means. And 86% want to maintain or increase their digital interactions.

Source: "Digital Government: Your Citizens are Ready, Willing... and Waiting," Accenture Public Service Insights, Oct 14, 2015

### 12.
### Growing Artificial
### Intelligence in the Classroom

As AI and its supporting technologies continue to advance, their applications in areas like education are expected to increase exponentially. Depending on adoption rates, AI could completely transform education by as early as 2036, including helping students receive the additional support they need to complete their education, fill more jobs, and earn more and higher wages. AI could also improve the training provided to teachers while reducing costs over the same time horizon, releasing funds to be reinvested into the school system.

Source: "Value of data: Teaching the future with AI," Western Digital and Accenture, Apr 1 2019

### 13.
### Growing
### Job Automation

Automation and computing advances are expected to eliminate, redefine, and create new jobs through the 2020s and 2030s. Along the way, economic inequality and the number of un- or under-employed individuals is expected to grow.

An MIT study estimates that 54-69% of jobs in 15 North Carolina metro areas, including 65% of jobs in the Asheville metro area (Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Transylvania, and Madison Counties), may be impacted by automation. The impact is expected to focus particularly on routine clerical work, such as cashier and food service jobs, but also affect jobs with more cognitive and analytical tasks such as software development and financial analysis.

Source: "In Advanced and Emerging Economies Alike, Worries About Job Automation," Pew Research Center, Sept 13 2018; "Small cities face greater impact from automation," Frank, Sun, Cebrian, Youn, and Rahwan, J. R. Soc. Interface, Feb 7 2018

### 14.
### Growing Cyber Security
### Attacks on Local Gov

Targeted ransomware attacks on local US government entities – local governments, police stations, and schools – are on the rise, costing localities millions as some pay off the perpetrators in an effort to untangle themselves and restore vital systems. The cybersecurity firm Recorded Future estimates that at least 170 county, city, or state government systems have been attacked since 2013, including at least 45 police and sheriff's offices.

Source: "Crippling ransomware attacks targeting US cities on the rise," cnn.com, May 10 2019

### 15.
### Heavy Rains and Droughts Grow More Frequent

Precipitation is expected to grow less frequent but more intense when it arrives, increasing flooding and associated landslides. Already between 1958 and 2012, heavy precipitation events increased in the Southeast region by 27%. The average annual number of heavy rainfalls have been growing in Buncombe County, too.

Additionally, drought conditions are expected to increase and consequently stress on the forest and increased risk of wildfires. Fires in Eastern and Western NC suggest that wildfires are already a growing issue for the state and will become more severe as climate change progresses.

As a result, these trends are expected to increasingly impact state energy issues, water resources, land use, transportation and emergency response.

Source: "The Reality of Global Warming (Climate Change) and its Potential Impact on North Carolina: UNC Asheville Response," September, 2008; "Living Asheville: A Comprehensive Plan for our Future," adopted 2018

### 16.
### Increasing Loss of Farmland

North Carolina leads the nation in the rate of farmland lost to development, and Buncombe County figures show the same trend. Between 1997 and 2017, the county lost 193 farms and 22,784 acres of farmland operated, fall to a total of 1,073 farms that cover a total of 72,284 acres.

As development continues, and with natural and regulatory restrictions on steep slopes, the pressure to develop prime farmland soil increases. The agricultural sector contributes both directly to the county economy as well as income for several other sectors including the tourism industry.

Source: US Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2017; communications with Buncombe County, Jul 22 2019

### 17.
### Growing Urbanization

Like many communities across the nation, Buncombe County is growing increasingly more urban. Between 2000 and 2010, its urban population grew from 71% to 76%. And since the 2013/14 abolition of Extraterritorial jurisdiction/ involuntary annexation, the County has continued to urbanize on the outskirts of the Asheville/Weaverville jurisdiction.

Going forward urban growth is expected to significantly outpace rural growth. Along the way, citizen-demand for urban-level services and infrastructure is growing in unincorporated areas of the county, which are seeing increasing residential densities, employment centers, and commercial development. Requests include public transportation, sidewalks, curb/gutter requirements, stormwater, and bike/pedestrian friendly transportation options (e.g., greenways).

Source: BC Greenway Master Plan, 2012; BC Community Health Assessment, 2015; Pew Research Center, "What Unites and Divides Urban, Suburban and Rural Communities," May 22 2018

### 18.
### Growing Bike and Pedestrian Infrastructure

Since 2015, Buncombe County has raised $21.5M for greenway design and construction in order to meet the goals defined in the Greenway Master Plan adopted by the Board of Commissioners in 2012. The County continues to partner with municipalities and local organizations to continue financing, building-out, and maintaining the greenways defined in the master plan.

Source: Buncombe County Greenway Master Plan, 2012; communications with Buncombe County, Jul 22 2019

### 19.
### Growing Cost of Living

The annual income needed for a family of four in Buncombe County to make ends meet (afford housing, food, child care, healthcare, transportation, taxes, and other necessities) is expected to continue rising. Already between 2010 and 2019, is it estimated to have grown by 12% from $45,970 (or a combined hourly wage of $22.10) to $51,600 ($24.83/hr).

Source: North Carolina Justice Center, 2010 and 2019 Living Income Standard publications

### 20.
### Increasing Freelance and Unpaid Workers

Between 2017 and 2026, the Asheville Prosperity Zone Sub-Region (Buncombe, Henderson, Madison, Polk, Rutherford, and Transylvania Counties) is projected to grow to about 14,570 self-employed and unpaid family workers, a net positive change of about 673 (4.8%).

More broadly, freelancers in the U.S. could outnumber full timers within a decade. We might reach this milestone even faster as younger generations become a larger portion of the workforce. Almost half of working Millennials (47%) freelance, a participation rate higher than any other generation.

Source: "Freelanced: The Rise Of The Contract Workforce," NPR.org, accessed Aug 15 2018; employment projections by the NC Department of Commerce, accessed Jul 22 2019

### 21.
### Affordable Quality Child Care Options Falling Short

Programs that help children learn and grow in their earliest years can change the trajectories of their lives, especially for children in disadvantaged families. Yet in Buncombe County, gaps in access to affordable high-quality child care options are expected to persist due to limited availability. Currently less than 1/3 of children ages birth through five in Buncombe County are enrolled in licensed programs (4,087 out of 14,319). In NC, the average annual cost of center-based care for an infant is $9,254; $8,386 for a toddler; and $7,920 for a four-year-old.

Sources: Children in licensed care, NC Dept of Child Development and Early Education, Sept 2018; Total child population, NC Office of Management and Budget, 2018; "US and the High Cost of Child Care Appendices," Child Care Aware of America, 2018

### 22.
### Growing Total Employment, Esp. in Healthcare and Food Service

Between 2017 and 2026, employment in the Asheville Prosperity Zone Sub-Region (Buncombe, Henderson, Madison, Polk, Rutherford, and Transylvania Counties) is projected to increase by 8.7% or 19,370 jobs, reaching 241,180.

The fastest growing occupations are expected to be in:
- Healthcare Support (+1,980 jobs or 17.9%), especially Home Health Aides (850 jobs) and Nursing Assistants (495)
- Computer and Mathematical (+440 jobs or 16.5%), especially Software Developers (160) and Computer User Support Specialists (110)

The greatest number of jobs are expected to be added in:
- Food Preparation and Serving (+3,100 jobs)
- Healthcare Practitioners and Technical (+2,320 jobs), esp. Registered Nurses (900)

Source: Occupational Projections (Long-term) for Multiple Occupations in Asheville in 2017-2026, NCWorks.gov, accessed Jul 20 2019

### 23.
## Growing Opportunities for Better Wages

The list of industries below currently pay the highest average annual wages (26-90% higher than average among all industries) in the Asheville Prosperity Zone Sub-Region (Buncombe, Henderson, Madison, Polk, Rutherford, and Transylvania Counties) AND they are projected to grow.

Between 2017 and 2026, these industries are expected to add:
- Utilities (average $80k): +35 jobs
- Finance and Insurance (avg. $69k): +310 jobs
- Management of Companies and Enterprises (avg. $63k): +80 jobs
- Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (avg. $56k): +1,290 jobs
- Healthcare and Social Assistance (avg. $54k): +5,420 jobs
- Wholesale Trade (avg. $54k): +350 jobs
- Manufacturing (avg. $53k): +19 jobs

Source: Industry Projections (Long-term) for Multiple Industries in Asheville in 2017-2026, NCWorks.gov, accessed Jul 20 2019

### 24.
## Rising Entrepreneurship

Since the Great Recession, total startups in Buncombe County have been increasing and total business closings have been decreasing. In all, 100 companies have been in the Venture Asheville Elevate program since inception, and total capital since January 2017 is an estimated $8,288,100.

Source: "Living Asheville: A Comprehensive Plan for our Future," adopted 2018; Venture Asheville Program of the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce & Economic Development

### 25.
## Growing Housing Costs and Supply

Between 2015 and 2019, the median sale price and the median rent list price for housing in Buncombe County have been growing by an estimated 7% and 10% respectively per year on average. Meanwhile, as of 2015, 44.5% of renters and 26% of homeowners are housing cost-burdened, i.e., housing costs exceed 30% of their household income.

Additional development is anticipated as federal, state and local programs continue to incentivize investment in communities. For example, five underserved Buncombe County census tracts are subject to the Opportunity Zone program which is intended to spur investment in such neighborhoods.

Source: Buncombe County Home Prices & Values, Zillow.com, accessed Jul 20 2019; Buncombe County Housing Needs Assessment, 2014; "North Carolina's Opportunity Zones Certified," UNC School of Government blog, Jul 5 2018

### 26.
## Increasing Philanthropic Opportunities

In Buncombe County (and Western North Carolina communities), organizations are bracing for an opportunity to pitch grant projects to the Dogwood Health Trust (DHT). The DHT is expected to launch an annual cycle that could award up to $70 million to organizations in Western North Carolina for projects that address social, economic, and environmental community conditions that shape and underlie health and wellbeing, such as food insecurity, transportation, or poverty that impact health and healthcare needs.

Source: "The sale of Mission Health will create Dogwood Health Trust. Here's a Q&A on changes," Asheville Citizen Times, Sept 28 2018; "Dogwood Health chair Brumit: Trust favors 'bold' grant requests in WNC," Asheville Citizen Times, Mar 29 2019

### 27.
## Growing Share of County Expenditures

Buncombe County operating expenditures (less transfers, payments to escrow agents) have increased by approximately 2% each year since 2016. During that same time frame revenues have risen by approximately 4% annually, but tapered off in 2018 to 1.5%. The primary driver for this decrease is due to a $10M decrease in Federal and State revenues for Health and Human Services programming.

Going forward, Buncombe County anticipates increased revenues associated with the addition of HCA Healthcare Inc. properties to the tax base.

Source: "5 things to know about Mission Health's proposed HCA Healthcare deal," citizen-times.com, March 30, 2018; Buncombe County Budget Staff, July 22 2019

### 28.
## Growing Public Spending on Healthcare

Consistent with national projections, Buncombe County expects to see its healthcare spending increase. It has already seen them grow about 7.5% per year between 2013 and 2018 (approximately $10M cumulative over the same period). Meanwhile, the *national* average annual premium for employer-sponsored health insurance grew about 4% per year.

This trend is expected to continue and possibly worsen due to new and more expensive specialty drugs and treatments. The County has considered measures to control cost including modifying the drug formulary, condition care, consumerism, and changing the plan designs. According to Blue Cross and Blue Shield, County employees contribute approximately 5% of the total healthcare costs and the industry (i.e., government) average contribution is 14%.

Source: "2018 Employer Health Benefits Survey," Kaiser Family Foundation; communications with Buncombe County, Jul 22 2019

### 29.
## Growing Demand for Civic Engagement Opportunities

Demand for meaningful civic engagement opportunities is growing. For example, participatory budgeting (PB) is a democratic process that allows residents to help determine how public funds are spent. The process only came to the United States in 2009 and has been growing since – most recently counting at least 44 (2015), 59 (2016), 76 (2017), 79 (2018), and at least 83 in 2019 so far. In North Carolina, Greensboro and Durham leverage PB. In Durham, most projects on the ballot will address infrastructure needs, such as improving streets and sidewalks. The second largest category is parks and recreation projects, followed by projects related to safety and the environment.

Source: Map of PB Processes, The Participatory Budgeting Project, accessed Jul 22 2019; "Durham Begins Its $2.4 Million Experiment in Direct Democracy," Indy Week, Apr 30 2019

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