

Harnett County's Legislative Priorities Fiscal Year 2020



strong roots • new growth

1. Assist Counties in Expanding Broadband Access to Underserved Areas (State/Federal)

Lack of access to high speed Broadband is a significant barrier to economic growth, and limits educational opportunities and outcomes for residents. We ask for assistance in developing infrastructure and providing broadband to underserved areas within the Harnett County, either through legislation or funding opportunities. Harnett County completed a Broadband Survey in 2019 and hopes to use the data to encourage providers to expand service within the county. We ask for continued support in assistance as we work to expand access to Broadband for our residents.

2. Grant County Boards of Commissioners the Ability to Construct Schools (State)

The Harnett County Board of Commissioners asks for the authority to construct schools, to allow the County to strategically plan for growth and reduce existing and future issues with school overcrowding.

3. Appropriate full funding for the Federal Impact Aid Program (Federal)

The Federal Impact Aid Program reimburses school districts for the loss of local tax revenue due to the presence of the Federal Government. The program is administered by the U.S. Department of Education and funding is approved each year by Congress through the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education Appropriations Subcommittee bill. Because the Impact Aid Program is not fully funded (and hasn't been since 1969), funds are distributed using a needs-based funding formula, which results in Harnett County Schools receiving less funding per student than surrounding counties. In 2017, Harnett County Schools received \$750,533 in Impact Aid Funding, but would have received \$4,271,484 had the program been fully funded, a difference of \$3,520,921. We request that Congress fully fund the Impact Aid Program to address the impact of military-connected students on local school systems.

4. Support County Efforts to Expand Natural Gas Capacity (State)

Access to natural gas is a basic requirement for many businesses and industries. Despite population growth in portions of Harnett County, the absence of natural gas has prevented the commercial and industrial development that would normally accompany this growth. We ask for assistance in identifying ways to expand natural gas capacity throughout the county through public-private partnerships.

5. Support the County's efforts to Enhance the Harnett Regional Jetport (State)

Harnett Regional Jetport is an economic engine for Harnett County. In the past decade, the County has rehabilitated runways and taxiways, and improved the apron, taxiways and runways to accommodate larger aircraft to expand the airport's aviation and economic capabilities. Harnett County is preparing to make additional investments in the jetport in the form of additional and improved lighting, apron expansion and a badly needed new terminal and site improvements. We ask for any assistance that may be available to offset these costs or to make additional enhancements in the future.

6. Continue Support of Construction of Four Lane Highway into Wake County (State)

Harnett County does not currently have a four-lane highway into Wake County, which is a significant barrier to growth and economic development. U.S. 401 is a natural candidate to be widened to four lanes; however other options may be more feasible. The County has sought funding for this project with little success, and asks for any assistance that may be available.

Allow Counties to Enact Impact Fees to Support Public Education (State)

Harnett County is among the fastest growing counties in North Carolina, and with that growth comes additional demand for public services. The County's median home value in 2017 was \$144,700, which does not generate enough tax revenue to pay for the services the home's occupants will need. At present, approximately 5,200 new homes are at some stage of development in Northwest Harnett County, which will create a significant burden on our school system. We request legislation that would allow the County to enact a fee on new development to assist in funding public education in the county.

Give School Systems Flexibility in Establishing their K-12 Calendars (State)

Allowing flexibility in establishing their K-12 calendars would give school systems the ability to align the K-12 calendar with local community colleges, which would allow for more opportunities for high school students to take advantage of opportunities for higher education.

Provide Funding to Help Counties Implement School Security Measures (State/Federal)

Few schools across the state were built with modern security needs in mind. The cost to modify schools to address present-day threats is substantial. Harnett County Emergency Services has surveyed each of the County's schools and presented recommendations for safety priorities. Harnett County Schools included nearly \$2.5 million for school security measures in their FY 2020 budget request. We ask for additional funding to help make our schools safer places for teachers to teach and students to learn.

Address Issues with Motor Vehicle Gap Billing (State)

The Tax & Tag Together program dramatically increased counties' collection rates on motor vehicle property taxes, however drivers who are delinquent on their taxes are allowed to begin their new registration period upon payment, creating a gap between the initial expiration date and the new start date. County tax offices may bill for this gap, however it creates confusion for taxpayers and can be difficult to collect. The result is lost revenue for county governments. The Harnett County Tax Office requests requiring the new registration period to begin when the previous one ended, or finding another solution that will allow for the inclusion of this gap period within the Tax & Tag Together program to increase collections. (In 2018, the Tax Office sent out 1,685 gap bills, with 916 of those tax bills requiring force collection. The total taxes owed for the gap bills was \$53,630.88 with an unpaid total of \$39,074.96.)

Preserve Funding for Local Health Departments (State)

Over the last several years, county health departments have seen funding reductions from the state, which has made operation more difficult. We request preservation of funding levels for county departments of public health.

Provide Local Governments with Liaison for Utilities Providers (State)

There are times when County and municipal governments have had issues that required immediate assistance from some of our utility providers and have had difficulty getting a prompt response. This has negatively affected local businesses and residents. We request assistance, potentially in the form of a liaison who could assist local governments in working with these providers to address emergency issues as quickly as possible.

Lower NCDOT Road Takeover Threshold to 75 percent Buildout (State)

When a property is developed into a subdivision, the County requires the developer to build the roads to NCDOT specifications with the intent that NCDOT will assume maintenance of the roads soon after most of the building is done. As it stands, NCDOT requires that 75 percent of homes in a subdivision be occupied before the developer can petition to have the roads taken over. This sometimes results in the developer pulling out of the project before the roads can be taken over, which creates issues for homeowners in the subdivision. Harnett County currently has at least 30 subdivisions that would have been in better situations if the NCDOT takeover threshold were changed to 75 percent buildout.

Allow Counties to use E-911 Funds for E-911 Needs Other than Equipment (State)

Harnett County currently has E-911 funds, which can only be used to purchase equipment, however the county has fulfilled all existing equipment needs. Harnett County asks for the flexibility to use leftover E-911 funds for equipment, personnel, training and anything that has to do with taking the 911 call to communicating the call information to public safety officials. (For example: Dispatch hits a button to send a page signal to the radio towers and then equipment in the towers send the page signal to personnel to respond. Presently, 911 funds cover the “button,” but not the equipment in the tower.)

Reinstate Funding for Drug Treatment Courts and Mental Health Courts (State)

Harnett County has seen tremendous success from its Veterans Treatment Court. We believe similar success could be experienced by other residents who may not have served our nation’s military. We request legislation to reinstate funding for Drug Treatment Courts and Mental Health Courts.

Enhance Funding of Water and Wastewater Extensions for Counties (State)

Access to County Water and Wastewater is important for Economic Development, particularly in the County’s unincorporated areas. Extending these utilities to properties the County has identified for potential development opportunities can be cost prohibitive, particularly when the revenue generated from these projects will not be realized until years later. We seek assistance in accessing funding that will allow Harnett County to take a more proactive approach to this type of development.

Support Legislation to Assist Firefighters who Contract Disease Related to Service (State)

House Bill 466 (Firefighters’ Line of Duty Diseases/Funds) would expand the list of cancers covered as occupational diseases for firefighter’s death benefits and appropriate funds to cover the additional death benefits. House Bill 520 (Firefighters Fighting Cancer Act) expands the types of cancers that are considered occupational diseases for firefighters and covered by worker compensation act. The Harnett County Fire Marshal’s Office requests support of this legislation.

Expand Fire Prevention Grant Opportunities to include Counties (State/Federal)

Currently, Office of State Fire Marshals and Federal grant opportunities for fire prevention programs are available to fire departments, departments that provide rescue services, and local law enforcement agencies. The expansion of the grants program to include local fire marshals offices would allow for additional prevention programs to provide smoke detector installation in rural low income areas, purchase fire safety trailers/equipment and holding community-related fire prevention programs.

Require Licensing and Permitting for Fire Extinguisher and Suppression System Installation (State)

Senate Bill 519 would require licensing and permitting for individuals and firms that install and service portable fire extinguishers and fire suppression systems.

Require Accurate County Assignment of Sales Tax for Delivered Goods (State)

Harnett County loses sales tax revenue due to vendors not properly designated the county location for delivery of goods due to the significant portion of the County with zip codes which are shared with surrounding counties. The use of the five-digit zip code instead of the nine-digit zip code sometimes results with the wrong county being credited for taxes when the delivery destination is in Harnett County. This is particularly important when it comes to building materials being delivered to site for new construction and residents shopping online. Harnett County is working to educate homebuilders and residents about this issue, however we seek State assistance, which could include requiring vendors to use a central database maintained by the State, requiring use of the nine-digit zip code for reporting, or developing a statewide addressing database.

Assist Harnett County in Funding its Veterans Treatment Court Program (State/Federal)

Harnett County's first-in-the-state Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) celebrated its sixth anniversary in November. In its first six years of existence, the Harnett VTC has helped many veterans in Harnett County and the surrounding region who struggle with substance abuse and other issues connected to their military service build fulfilling and productive lives back home. The VTC is one of four currently operating in North Carolina, and accepts any qualifying veteran from across the state who has the ability to travel to the court's weekly sessions. The court substantially expanded its reach in 2016 when it was awarded a three-year grant from the federal government (SAMHSA and BJA). The grant allowed for the hire of three full-time and three part-time staff, and paid for much needed treatment services including one-on-one counseling which the veterans would not be able to receive from the VA. The grant ran out in October 2019, and additional support is needed to sustain the VTC going forward. We ask for additional support for this program that provides invaluable services to veterans in Harnett County and across the State of North Carolina.

Restore State Aid Funding of Public Libraries to Pre-2011 Levels (State)

The Harnett County Public Library requests the restoration of state aid funding of public libraries to the pre-2011 level of \$15.7 million, as well as the elimination of special provisions that distribute state aid outside of the equitable formula developed by the State Library Commission.