

# Harnett County's Legislative Priorities

Fiscal Year 2023

Adopted January 31, 2023



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# Top Legislative Priorities



## Economic Development

### **Assist with Efforts to Expand Natural Gas Capacity**

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. An example of this is the N.C. 87 corridor and the County-owned Western Harnett Innovation Park, which is well-located and has experienced substantial residential development over the last decade, but has missed out on commercial and industrial growth, partly due to a lack of natural gas availability. We ask for assistance in identifying opportunities to expand natural gas capacity throughout the county through public-private partnerships.

### **Assist County in Creation of Economic Development Sites, Buildings, and Industrial Parks**

Harnett County is committed to the development and marketing of industrial parks to expand the County's economy and provide quality jobs for the county's citizens. The County is currently seeking additional properties in strategic locations for the purpose of developing sites to market for economic development purposes. While land is available in the county for economic development, additional amenities are necessary to make these sites attractive for industrial recruitment. We seek additional assistance in developing sites for economic development to include utilities such as high-speed Internet, natural gas, water and sewer, streets, power, and other necessary infrastructure. In addition, the development of speculative industrial buildings has become necessary for communities to compete for companies seeking a new location or expansion. We ask our State legislators to consider programs and funding mechanisms that can help our communities take the next step in developing our business parks to match the current business climate for how companies make location and expansion decisions, as approximately 90% of new and expanding companies are seeking an existing building.

### **Support Four-Lane Highways into Wake County**

Harnett County does not have a four-lane highway into Wake County, which is a significant barrier to growth and economic development. U.S. 401 and N.C. 55 are natural candidates to be widened to four lanes. The Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO) is conducting a high-level study of U.S. 401 from Harnett into Wake County, and a project that will widen N.C. 55 to four lanes going into Wake County and create a bypass around the Town of Angier (R-5705) has been funded and construction is scheduled to begin in 2023. Due to rapid residential growth in northern Harnett County, however, the widening of U.S. 401 is needed much sooner than currently project. In addition to these projects, N.C. 55 needs to be expanded to four lanes north from where R-5705 leaves off at Jicarilla Lane to Five Points in Fuquay-Varina, and south through the Town of Coats to U.S. 421 in Erwin. Neither of these projects are currently funded. We ask for continued support and assistance in expediting these projects and moving them up on the priority list.

### **Assist County in Expanding Broadband Access to Underserved Areas**

Lack of access to high speed Broadband is a significant barrier to economic growth, and limits educational opportunities and outcomes for residents. Broadband access has become even more critical during the COVID-19 pandemic with more people teleworking and more students learning remotely. Harnett County completed a Broadband Survey in 2019 and entered into a partnership with an ISP in 2020 to expand Broadband availability in Harnett County. Funding from the CARES Act allowed the County to begin actively expanding Broadband access, and American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funding provides a significant opportunity for Harnett County to make considerable progress towards this priority by providing direct funding to the County as well as expanded grant programs through the State and Federal government. The State budget did provide some additional flexibility to allow the use of ARPA funds to partner with ISPs to expand Broadband in unserved areas, however we still do not feel State law provides sufficient flexibility for counties to take full advantage of these opportunities. Additionally, some of the County's incumbent ISPs have limited the County's ability to obtain funding through available grant programs. We request additional statutory flexibility to allow broader use of ARPA dollars to provide reliable high speed Internet to the county's residents at an affordable price, as well as fewer obstacles to the County's efforts to leverage grant opportunities to expand Broadband with less of a burden on County taxpayers.

# Top Legislative Priorities



## Harnett Regional Jetport

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### **Assist County with Expanding and Enhancing Harnett Regional Jetport**

Harnett Regional Jetport (HRJ) currently ranks 10th in the State for jobs supported and 10th highest for economic output among General Aviation airports. The economic impact of HRJ is more than \$147 million annually, according to the NCDOT Division of Aviation. Over the past decade, the County has made significant investments upgrading and improving existing infrastructure, but we need additional support to add the facilities that are necessary to meet the current level of service demand and to facilitate additional economic growth in Harnett County and the surrounding region. Ongoing projects include runway lighting rehabilitation, apron expansion, and design and construction of a new terminal. The North Carolina Statewide System Plan and the ongoing Airport Master Plan have identified a number of additional needs. Those include lengthening the runway from 5,005 to 5,500 feet and widening it from 75 to 100 feet; adding T-Hangars and Shelters, and Corporate Hangars; replacing current fuel facilities; and acquiring additional land for runway protection zones and hangar expansion. We ask for additional appropriations to help the County continue the progress currently being made at the Jetport to fully realize its potential as a critical economic engine for Harnett County.



## Education

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### **Provide Additional Solutions to Assist with Public Education Capital Funding**

Harnett County is among the fastest growing counties in North Carolina, and with that growth comes additional demand for public services including the education of students. The County's median home value is \$165,800 (Source: U.S. Census Bureau), which does not generate enough tax revenue to pay for the services the home's occupants will need. During fiscal year 2021-2022, 832 new single-family homes were constructed, with most being built in north/northwest Harnett County. This will create a significant burden on our school system. We request assistance identifying a solution to help fund public education in the county.

# Additional Legislative Priorities

## **Support Expansion of CAMPO's Boundary within Harnett County (State)**

Harnett County is split between the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO), the Fayetteville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (FAMPO), and the Mid-Carolina Rural Planning Organization (RPO). This split has made it difficult to obtain funding and support for priority transportation projects across the county. The 2020 U.S. Census presents an opportunity to expand CAMPO's boundary further into Harnett County to include locations that are strategic for the county's continued growth and development. We ask for support and assistance expanding CAMPO's boundaries within Harnett County to include the Town of Lillington, Campbell University and Harnett Regional Jetport.

## **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, and considerably less than the school system would receive were the program fully funded. In 2020, Harnett County Schools received \$728,034.59 in Impact Aid Funding, but would have received \$4,126,969.99 had the program been fully funded, a difference of nearly \$3.4 million. We request that Congress fully fund the Impact Aid Program to address the impact of military-connected students on local school systems. The National Association of Federally Impacted Schools (NAFIS) has also asked for increased appropriations for FY 2022, and additional cosponsors for H.R. 5255, the Advancing Toward Impact Aid Full Funding Act, which would provide a path to fully funding Basic Support and would also provide increases to Federal Property and Children with Disabilities payments. A similar bill in the U.S. Senate is also anticipated.

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

Harnett County loses sales tax revenue due to vendors not properly designating the county location for delivery of goods. A significant portion of the County has 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 in 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 County with Economic Development Marketing Efforts (State/Federal)**

Harnett County currently owns three industrial parks, which it is marketing for targeted business development, along with a number of privately owned sites across the county. The County works with EDPNC, the Research Triangle Regional Partnership, and others to increase awareness of these properties. The County has seen varied success in selling these properties for industrial and commercial use. We wish to make our legislators aware of Harnett County's economic development efforts and product, and ask for their continued assistance advocating for Harnett County and sharing information regarding the availability of funding, grants, and other resources to enhance our ongoing economic development marketing efforts.

# Additional Legislative Priorities

## **Support Creation of Bypass around City of Dunn (State)**

U.S. 421 is a major artery through Harnett County for commerce; however, travel slows considerably through Downtown Dunn, especially at certain times of the day. The construction of a bypass around Dunn that passes by Edgerton Industrial Park and the Food Lion Distribution Center would improve travel through this area and enhance the appeal for commercial and industrial development in this area. A bypass has been considered in the last several years and there is a project designation with NCDOT (# U-6052). We ask for assistance pushing this project forward as a priority for design and funding.

## **Provide Assistance to Modernize Rural Roads to Accommodate Farm Equipment (State/Federal)**

Agriculture remains Harnett County's number one industry. Many of the County's roads, however, are not suited to accommodate modern agricultural equipment, creating backups and potentially leading to accidents. This issue has been exacerbated by the County's rapid population growth, which is leading to increased traffic on rural roads. We seek support from NCDOT to assist in modernizing these roads to better accommodate modern farm vehicles.

## **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 safety concerns is substantial. Harnett County Schools included \$1,914,450 for school security and safety measures in their FY 2022 budget request. We ask for additional funding to help make our schools safer places for teachers to teach and for students to learn.

## **Provide Communicable Disease Expansion Funding Beyond FY 2023 (State)**

The State Budget includes \$36 million in funding for local health departments to expand local communicable disease programs to address the impacts of the COVID-19 public health emergency. The purpose of these funds is to expand communicable disease surveillance, detection, control, and prevention activities to address the COVID-19 and other communicable diseases. While these funds are greatly appreciated, they are non-recurring funds that will be allocated in FY 2022 and 2023 only and will expire at the end of FY 2023. Harnett County is projected to receive \$206,561 in each fiscal year for a total of \$413,122. The Harnett County Health Department is concerned about identifying funding to keep this program going after FY 2023, and seeks additional funding to extend the program beyond this time period or the ability to use the appropriated funding beyond FY 2023 to continue this program.

## **Lower NCDOT Road Takeover Threshold to 60-65% 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 Development Services requests that the threshold be lowered and changed to 60-65% buildout and that occupancy not be a requirement since this is not enforceable at the County level.

# Additional Legislative Priorities

## **Expand Fire Prevention Grant Opportunities to include Counties (State & Federal)**

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Currently, State 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 county 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 hold community-related fire prevention programs.

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

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Senate Bill 5 would require licensing and permitting for individuals and firms that install and service portable fire extinguishers and fire suppression systems. Harnett County Emergency Services views this as a critical public safety issue. Licensing and permitting of these operations would ensure a standard and accountability for these vendors, and would provide business owners with confidence that their systems have been installed by a qualified contractor.

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

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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 provide more opportunities for high school students to take advantage of opportunities for higher education.

## **Increase Appropriation for ADFP Trust Fund (State)**

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The Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation (ADFP) Trust Fund provides payments to families for placing conservation easements on their property while still allowing the land to be used for agricultural and timber production. Due to limited funding for the program, projects have been turned down or have been only partially funded. Harnett County Soil & Water Conservation District requests increasing the annual appropriation to ADFP from \$6 million to \$10 million. The NCDFA Farmland Preservation Office believes this appropriation will better equip ADFP based on statewide applications.

## **Preserve Federal and State Block Grants for County-Administered DSS Programs (State)**

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The Harnett County Department of Social Services seeks the preservation of Federal and State Block Grant Funding to allow DSS to administer programs considered to be vital to the community. The department also asks for continued funding to allow the administration of these programs and that shifting the responsibility for funding program administration to the County be avoided.



For more information, contact:  
Harnett County Manager's Office  
455 McKinney Parkway  
Lillington, NC 27546  
910-893-7555

[harnett.org/boc/2023-legislative-priorities.asp](https://harnett.org/boc/2023-legislative-priorities.asp)