

Harnett County's Legislative Priorities

Fiscal Year 2021

Adopted February 1, 2021



strong roots • new growth

Top Legislative Priorities



Broadband

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, however additional funding is required to expedite expansion of this critical utility. We request funding to assist the County in creating a fiber optic network to provide reliable high speed Internet to the county's residents at an affordable price.



Economic Development

Assist County with Economic Development Marketing Efforts

Harnett County currently owns three industrial parks, which it is marketing for industrial and commercial 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 that they assist us by advocating for Harnett County and sharing information regarding the availability of funding, grants, and other resources to enhance our ongoing economic development marketing efforts.

Assist County in Creation of Industrial Parks and Sites for Economic Development

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 additional product 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. The County is willing to pursue opportunities to take advantage of resources through EDA, Golden LEAF, CDBG, Utility Account, Rural Economic Infrastructure, and other programs. We seek additional assistance in developing sites for economic development to include utilities such as high-speed Internet (greater than 10 Gbps), natural gas, water and sewer, streets, power, and other necessary infrastructure.



Harnett Regional Jetport

Assist County with Expanding and Enhancing Harnett Regional Jetport

Harnett Regional Jetport is an economic engine for Harnett County. In the past decade, the County has rehabilitated runways and taxiways; and has improved the apron, taxiways and runways to accommodate larger aircraft to expand the airport's aviation and economic capabilities. To fully take advantage of the Jetport's economic development potential, it needs additional hangars and more land to allow for future growth. 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. The current terminal was built in 1982 and is only 1,800 square feet, which does not meet the 4,500-square-foot standard for the State's Airport Development Plan for Blue Airports. The terminal is more than 95% designed. We ask for additional appropriations to enhance what is currently available to offset the cost to the County of making these critical enhancements for future growth of this important resource.

Top Legislative Priorities



Transportation

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) has launched 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 is planned and set for funding in the coming years. Additional funding is required to extend the N.C. 55 widening project south to the Town of Coats. We ask for continued support and assistance in moving these projects up on the priority list.

Support Creation of Bypass around City of Dunn

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 Warehouse in Dunn would improve travel through this area and would also 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. We ask for assistance in pushing this project forward as a priority for design and funding.

Support Expansion of CAMPO's Boundary within Harnett County

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 continued support and assistance expanding CAMPO's boundaries within Harnett County to include the Town of Lillington, Campbell University and Harnett Regional Jetport.



Education

Increase Lottery Payout to Counties

Since its inception, the North Carolina Education Lottery has provided valuable funding assistance to school districts across the State including Harnett County Schools. However, the percentage of lottery revenue school districts receive has continued to decline as more and more lottery funding is diverted for other uses. We ask that the lottery payout be restored to its initial level of 40% of revenue. We also ask that when counties receive grant funding through the Needs-Based School Capital Fund that counties are made whole for any funding they would have received from the lottery beyond the annual amount of the grant.

Additional Legislative Priorities

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 2019, Harnett County Schools received \$879,239.01 in Impact Aid Funding, but would have received \$4,421,611.44 had the program been fully funded, a difference of \$3,542,372.43. We request that Congress fully fund the Impact Aid Program to address the impact of military-connected students on local school systems.

Assist with 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 opportunities to expand natural gas capacity throughout the county through public-private partnerships.

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.

Provide Additional Solutions to Assist with Funding Public Education (State & Federal)

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 \$148,400 (Source: N.C. Department of Commerce), which does not generate enough tax revenue to pay for the services the home's occupants will need. At present, more than 9,500 new homes are at some stage of development across Harnett County, with nearly half (4,700) located in northwest Harnett County. This will create a significant burden on our school system. We request assistance in coming up with a solution to help fund public education in the county.

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 Schools included \$1,417,954 for school security measures in their FY 2021 budget request. We ask for additional funding to help make our schools safer places for teachers to teach and students to learn.

Additional Legislative Priorities

Preserve Funding for Local Health Departments (State)

Over the last several years, county health departments have seen funding reductions including to federal WCH grant funding County health departments receive. County health departments have lost approximately \$2.2 million since 2011 due to carveouts, which makes operation more difficult. This issue is of renewed importance due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We request preservation of funding levels for county departments of public health.

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

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

House Bill 466 (Firefighters' Line of Duty Diseases/Funds) would have expanded the list of cancers covered as occupational diseases for firefighter's death benefits (from 3 to 7) and appropriate funds to cover the additional death benefits. House Bill 520 (Firefighters Fighting Cancer Act) would have expanded the types of cancers that are considered occupational diseases for firefighters and covered by worker compensation act. Harnett County Emergency Services requests support of these initiatives and that it be accompanied by a dedicated funding stream so that it won't negatively impact county budgets.

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

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

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

Senate Bill 519 would have required 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)

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.

Additional Legislative Priorities

Provide Funding to Support and Establish Treatment Courts (State)

Harnett County is home to the first Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) in North Carolina. Established in 2013, the Court 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. VTC accepts any qualifying veteran from across the state who has the ability to travel to the court's weekly sessions. The Court has been able to provide this service through federal grants, however grant funding is increasingly difficult to obtain. We ask for additional support for this program, as well for the reinstatement of funding for other programs such as mental health courts and drug treatment courts, which could provide assistance to residents who are not veterans but would still benefit from these programs and services.

Appropriate Recurring Funds to Support State Aid for Public Libraries (State)

Since 1941, the N.C. General Assembly has appropriated state aid funding for public libraries in North Carolina to promote and equalize public library service across the 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 in recurring funding, as well as the elimination of special provisions that distribute state aid outside of the equitable formula developed by the State Library Commission. The Library also requests the appropriation of \$500,000 in recurring funding to the NC Kids Digital Library. Launched in 2017, NC Kids is a statewide eBook consortium that includes more than 37,000 eBooks, audiobooks, and streaming videos for children that align with North Carolina's summer reading program initiatives.

Increase Appropriation to Agricultural Development & Farmland Preservation Trust Fund (State)

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 \$4.3 million to \$6 million. The NCDA Farmland Preservation Office believes this appropriation will better equip ADFP based on statewide applications.