



Welcome to the 2026 Chatham County Legislative Goals Packet. This document outlines Chatham County's strategic priorities and objectives for the 2026 legislative short session outside of the top five priorities.

Affordable Housing

Enable Local Governments to Support Affordable Housing Through Development Agreements

Background: Addressing the affordable housing shortage requires public-private partnerships that align development incentives with community needs. Development agreements provide a flexible tool for local governments to coordinate with private developers on conditional rezonings and project approvals. These agreements can include requirements set by local ordinances while also incorporating incentives, allowances, and flexibility to promote affordable housing.

Current state law allows for some flexibility in zoning regulations for projects that include affordable housing, as reflected in S.L. 2021-180 (S.B. 105), section 5.1.(a), which amends G.S. 160D-703 to include a "harmony requirement" for developments containing affordable units. However, there is no clear legislative framework explicitly allowing local governments to facilitate voluntary development agreements for affordable housing, which limits their ability to proactively address housing needs.

By clarifying the legal authority of local governments to engage in these agreements, North Carolina can create a framework for collaborative, community-driven solutions that prevent displacement and ensure efficient use of public and private resources.

Request: We request the creation of legislation that explicitly permits local governments to facilitate public-private partnerships through voluntary development agreements to support affordable housing. This legislation should:

- Clearly define "voluntary" development agreements to ensure transparency and mutual agreement between local governments and private developers.
- Establish clear parameters for policymakers and land use officials to navigate zoning and rezoning processes when negotiating development agreements.

- Protect the integrity and enforceability of voluntary development agreements to ensure they remain an effective tool for promoting affordable housing.

Providing this authority will allow local governments to proactively address housing affordability, encourage smart growth, and ensure that community expansion includes options for all income levels.

Aging Services

In Coordination with the Senior Tarheel Legislature

Create and Fund Senior Centers for All Counties in North Carolina

Background: Senior centers play a vital role in socialization, well-being, and access to essential services for older adults. They provide education, resource coordination, and social engagement opportunities that help prevent isolation, which can contribute to cognitive and physical decline. Many counties, particularly in rural areas, lack the funding and infrastructure to develop robust senior centers that can fully serve their aging populations.

Request: We request the creation and funding of senior centers in all counties across North Carolina to ensure that every older adult has access to a dedicated space for socialization, education, and resource navigation. These centers should be supported with ongoing operational funding to ensure their long-term sustainability and effectiveness.

Strengthen the Home & Community Care Block Grant (HCCBG)

Background: The Home & Community Care Block Grant (HCCBG) provides critical funding for services such as Meals on Wheels, in-home aide programs, and senior center operations, enabling older adults to remain in their homes rather than moving to institutional care. However, funding levels have not kept pace with the growing number of older adults, resulting in long waitlists for in-home services that support independence.

Request: Conserve the state's funds by directing money to the less expensive option of supporting the first choice of all older adults, which is to age in their homes and communities. Create policies that rebalance the system of HCCBG services versus institutional long-term care, including recurring budget appropriations. Policies must ensure the continuity and scope of annual services to allow older adults the choice of aging in place.

Increase Availability of Safe, Affordable, and Accessible Housing for Older Adults

Background: The housing shortage in North Carolina is particularly severe for older adults, many of whom require accessible, affordable housing that allows them to safely age in place. Rising housing

costs limited rental options, and a lack of age-friendly housing designs create significant barriers for seniors seeking to remain in their communities. Without action, many older adults will be forced into institutional settings or unsafe living conditions.

Request: We request state support for programs that expand the availability of affordable and accessible housing for older adults. This includes funding for home modifications, incentives for senior-friendly housing development, and policies that support aging in place. This request aligns with other Affordable Housing goals: see Affordable Housing.

Strengthen Adult Protective Services Statewide

Background: The federal Social Service Block Grant (SSBG) funds support each county's Department of Social Services, which includes the Adult Protective Service (APS) units. Interdepartmental competing needs result in disparities in the availability of APS resources across counties. SSBG funds earmarked for APS are often depleted by mid-year, if not earlier.

With the growth in the older adult population, county APS staff are simply overwhelmed by the increased demand in elder abuse cases. While the population increase of those age 60+ contributes to the increased number of APS reports, analysis shows that the number of abuse reports has increased per capita as well.

NC counties report the need for an average of two additional full-time APS staff to address the volume of cases reported each year.

Request: Pass statutory changes recommended by the Adult Protective Services (APS) Improvement Design Team and provide recurring state funding to support the needed capacity to protect all vulnerable and disabled adults in NC.

Agriculture

Support Legislation which Seeks to Reduce the Minimum Acreage Requirements for the Present Use Value Program

Background: While Chatham may have a larger influx of small, intensive, niche producers in comparison to other counties state-wide, undoubtedly, other counties will experience similar growth with small-acreage producers simply because available land to work will become harder and harder to source. NCGS 105-277 sets the minimum acreage requirement for participation in the PUV.

Currently, horticulture producers must operate on at least five acres and agriculture producers on at least ten acres. Many of Chatham County's producers operate under those minimum acreage requirements and would benefit from participation in the PUV program.

Request: Support small local producers by promoting legislation reducing the minimum acreage requirement for participation in the PUV program.

Increase Legislative Support of our Land Grant Universities Cooperative Extension System

Background: The Cooperative Extension System is operated through the nation's Land-Grant University System in coordinating partnership with federal, state, and local governments. Here in North Carolina, our Cooperative Extension System is based at our two land-grant institutions (N.C. State University and N.C. A&T State University), forming the N.C. Cooperative Extension. There are 101 local centers in North Carolina, providing services to each North Carolina County and the Eastern Band of Cherokee. The mission work of Cooperative Extension is to extend research-based knowledge/information from the universities out to the communities across North Carolina, helping individuals to transform science into everyday solutions aimed at improving their lives/communities and growing our state.

Extension keeps North Carolina's \$100B+ agriculture industry growing and sustainable by connecting producers with the research-based information and technology they need. Within the areas of health and nutrition, Extension teaches individuals to make healthier decisions, reduce risks of chronic diseases, and live healthier lives through a wealth of nutrition, local foods, and food safety programs. As the largest positive youth development organization in the nation, Extension's 4-H programs address the diverse issues of today's youth, helping hundreds of thousands of youths grow into healthier, more involved generations of future leaders. Federal funding deficits leave much of the fiscal support to fall on the shoulders of local county governments, and it is critical to increase state funding towards Extension's mission work.

Request: Increase financial support of N.C. Cooperative Extension to meet shortfalls in operational costs (NC State Extension has recurring expenses of \$4.7M alone), to ensure that critical programming continues in all 101 county centers and can reduce the financial burden placed on many local county governments to support/fund this much-needed community work.

Conservation and Environment

Increase North Carolina ADFP Program Funding

Background: Chatham County continues to support additional funding for the North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Service's "Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund" (ADFP), the state's primary farmland preservation funding program. Despite receiving \$55 million in farmland preservation grant requests last year, ADFP received only \$3 million in unallocated funding from the North Carolina General Assembly—just 5.4% of the total demand.

Since establishing our farmland preservation program in FY 2024, Chatham County and our conservation partners have submitted 6 requests totaling \$2.09 million to North Carolina ADFP to preserve Chatham County farms through its conservation easement acquisition grant program without a single successful application, despite committing \$1.3 million in matching funds. Despite Chatham County's robust financial commitment to farmland preservation, the success of our farmland preservation program will continue to be limited without enhanced state funding support for the ADFP program.

Request: We request that the General Assembly increase funding for the Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund to better meet statewide demand for farmland conservation and to support locally led farmland preservation efforts.

Diversion and Advocacy

Expand Inpatient Psychiatric Stabilization Capacity for Justice - Involved Individuals and Civilians

Background: Justice-involved individuals with serious mental illness in our region face significant barriers to accessing inpatient psychiatric stabilization. Currently, there are no local facilities equipped to provide extended inpatient care for individuals who require structured supervision and medication management to regain mental stability.

As a result, our communities rely heavily on Central Regional Hospital for forensic and civil psychiatric admissions. However, this facility is frequently at or near capacity, resulting in long wait times for admission.

When inpatient beds are unavailable, individuals in psychiatric crisis are often "boarded" in local emergency departments for extended periods. Emergency departments are not designed to provide long-term psychiatric stabilization, intensive behavioral monitoring, or secure forensic-level care. This leads to:

- Delayed treatment and prolonged psychiatric instability
- Increased strain on hospital staff and law enforcement
- Extended detention in jails while awaiting transfer
- Higher risk of decompensation, self-harm, or harm to others
- Increased costs to counties and healthcare systems

Without adequate inpatient stabilization capacity, individuals cycle between jail, emergency departments, and the community without receiving the sustained treatment necessary for recovery. This gap undermines public safety, strains public resources, and negatively impacts families.

Request: We respectfully request legislative action to strengthen inpatient mental health infrastructure for justice-involved individuals by expanding state psychiatric bed capacity and developing regional stabilization options. Specifically, we ask for increased funding to expand forensic

and civil inpatient beds at state-operated facilities, including Central Regional Hospital, with prioritization for justice-involved individuals awaiting stabilization or competency restoration. In addition, we urge the development of regional secure psychiatric stabilization units that can provide 30–90 days of intensive, structured treatment closer to local communities, reducing reliance on distant state hospitals and prolonged emergency department boarding.

We also request policies to reduce extended psychiatric boarding in local emergency departments by creating clearer transfer pathways and funding mechanisms that support timely placement in appropriate stabilization facilities. Finally, we encourage expanding both inpatient and community-based competency restoration programs, along with establishing reasonable admission timelines, to prevent unnecessary and prolonged detention of individuals whose primary need is treatment rather than incarceration. Strengthening this infrastructure will promote public safety, reduce strain on hospitals and law enforcement, and ensure that individuals with serious mental illness receive the level of care necessary for stabilization and recovery.

Expand Good Samaritan Law

Background: North Carolina’s Good Samaritan Law (G.S. 90-96.2) provides limited legal protections to individuals seeking medical help during a drug overdose, but it does not fully protect the person overdosing or others at the scene. These gaps discourage calls for emergency assistance due to fear of legal consequences, leading to preventable overdose deaths.

With fentanyl involved in over 77% of overdose deaths statewide in 2022, expanding protections is critical. Recognizing this urgent need, the Chatham County Board of Commissioners adopted a resolution on March 6, 2023, urging the NCGA to revise and expand the law.

Request: Amend the Good Samaritan Law (G.S. 90-96.2) to:

- Expand legal protections to the person overdosing and all individuals at the scene seeking medical help.
- Ensure immunity for possession of substances like fentanyl to remove barriers to emergency calls.
- Extend protections to students and others seeking medical help on campuses.

Strengthen Reentry Services and Increase Funding

Background: More than 15,000 individuals return home to their communities after being released from North Carolina state prisons each year. Reentry services are essential to the survival of most individuals as they begin to rebuild their lives. The Division of Rehabilitation and Reentry provides a large array of reentry programs, services, and resources to help many community members rebuild their lives, however, additional funding is needed to make these services available to all communities in North Carolina. Individuals are more successful if their reentry services, programs, and resources are initiated during their incarceration before returning home as this strengthens and

increases their chances of reintegrating successfully. Increasing the programs, supports, and resources available will allow individuals to be connected to housing, employment, education, physical and mental health, chemical dependency, and basic life skill services which determine the individual's impact in their local community.

Request: Because of this, we recommend increasing support for reentry programs, to ensure that reentry residents are connected to the support they need to be successful.

Public Health

Public Health Funding

Background: Local public health departments are mandated by the state to provide essential services, including communicable disease prevention and response. However, state funding for these services remains inconsistent and inadequate, leaving counties to cover the majority of costs. This funding gap limits the ability of local health departments to proactively manage public health threats, particularly as emerging diseases and outbreaks continue to strain resources. Without stable, recurring state funding, counties must rely on unpredictable local budgets to meet these critical public health responsibilities.

Request: Establish recurring state funding for local public health foundational capabilities, specifically for communicable disease prevention and response, to ensure local health departments have the resources needed to protect public health and meet state-mandated obligations.

Protect Local Board of Health Authority

Background: North Carolina counties need local authority to govern effectively on land use, public health, and development. However, state laws increasingly preempt local control. In North Carolina, local Boards of Health have the responsibility to protect and promote public health, as well as the authority to adopt rules necessary for that purpose. However, recently proposed state legislation has aimed to limit that authority, specifically targeting local well rules. Local governments are best equipped to address community needs.

Request: Oppose state legislation that restricts local decision-making, including the authority of the local Boards of Health.

Regulate Intoxicating Cannabis and Hemp

Background: Intoxicating cannabis and hemp products, including edibles and vape pens, are being widely sold in North Carolina without clear safety regulations. Many of these products are packaged in

ways that mimic common snacks and appeal to children, leading to a rise in emergency department visits for THC ingestion among youth. Unlike other states, North Carolina does not currently require a minimum purchase age or retailer permits for businesses selling these products. This regulatory gap increases the risk of accidental ingestion and youth substance use, particularly as sales in vape shops and other retail locations grow.

Request: Enact legislation to prevent child and youth access to intoxicating cannabis and hemp products by:

- Prohibiting the sale or distribution of intoxicating cannabis and hemp products to individuals under 21.
- Implementing packaging regulations that require appropriate warnings, child-resistant features, and restrictions on marketing that appeals to minors.
- Requiring retailer permits for businesses selling intoxicating cannabis and hemp products.
- Prohibiting individuals under 21 from entering vape shops.

Tobacco and Youth Vaping Prevention

Background: While cigarette use has declined among North Carolina youth, vaping and e-cigarette use have surged, posing serious health risks. Nicotine addiction at a young age can have long-term consequences on brain development and overall health. Federal law has already raised the minimum legal age for tobacco sales from 18 to 21, but North Carolina law has not yet aligned with this standard. Without state action, enforcement gaps remain, making it easier for minors to access these harmful products.

Request: Amend North Carolina's youth access law to raise the legal age of tobacco and vaping product sales from 18 to 21, aligning with federal law and strengthening protections against youth nicotine addiction.

Well Water Testing

Background: Testing private wells for contamination is critical to protecting public health. However, financial and other barriers make doing so inaccessible for many community members. Statewide, less than half of existing wells have ever been tested. In addition, community concern regarding emerging contaminants like PFAS has been rising in recent years, yet testing for these contaminants is not available through the State Lab. Currently, testing through costly, private labs is the only option for North Carolina residents.

Request: Support legislation to provide funding for private well testing through the State Lab, including PFAS testing.

Increase State Funding for Digital Equity Initiatives

Background: Digital equity is essential for full participation in modern society, yet many North Carolina residents lack access to broadband, computing devices, and digital literacy resources. These barriers disproportionately impact rural communities, low-income households, and older adults, limiting opportunities for education, employment, and essential services.

Recent funding opportunities, such as the Digital Champions Grant from the North Carolina Broadband Infrastructure Office (NCBIO), have demonstrated overwhelming demand for digital equity programs. While \$14 million was allocated, requests from all 100 counties totaled over \$150 million, highlighting the substantial need for ongoing investment in digital inclusion efforts.

Request: We request increased state funding for digital equity programs to support device distribution, broadband adoption, and digital literacy training. Expanding investment in digital inclusion will ensure North Carolinians have the tools and skills necessary to participate in the digital economy, access essential services, and engage fully in their communities. Sustained funding is critical to closing the digital divide and building a more connected, resilient state.

Social Services

Support SNAP Program Changes to Maintain Service Levels for Food Insecure North Carolinians

Background: North Carolina is currently one of only three states planning to pass the full administrative cost shift included in the *One Big Beautiful Bill* to local communities. This change represents a \$69 million statewide expense and an estimated \$350,000 annual increase for Chatham County. These administrative funds help ensure SNAP eligibility determinations are completed accurately and on time and are particularly critical as North Carolina works to reduce its error rate to avoid federal penalties that could total as much as \$420 million annually.

Request: Support legislation or budget provisions that maintain state responsibility for SNAP administrative costs and prevent the full cost shift to counties. Maintaining adequate administrative funding will help ensure timely and accurate eligibility determinations while protecting counties from significant new unfunded mandates.

Stabilize the NC Medicaid Program Through Protection of Medicaid Expansion and Implementation of One Big Beautiful Bill Administrative Requirements

Background: The stability of the NC Medicaid program is threatened due to underfunding of the Medicaid rebase and increased administrative requirements included in One Big Beautiful Bill. On January 1, 2026, the work requirement (Community Engagement) will require beneficiaries to submit proof of work and be determined eligible twice per year. This will impact approximately 2600 Chatham County residents. Statewide estimates indicate that 92% of Medicaid beneficiaries are employed.

Request: Support full funding of the Medicaid program, including the Medicaid rebase, and provide sufficient administrative resources to counties and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services to implement new eligibility and work verification requirements without disrupting coverage for eligible residents.

Address Workforce Challenges in Maintaining a Child Welfare Workforce to Serve NC Children and Families

Background: One of the root causes for lack of positive outcomes identified in a 2019 study of NC's child welfare system was "the difficulties front-line workers experience in a culture that is not consistently focused on staff well-being, unmanageable workloads, and a lack of effective facilitative tools, all leading to high staff turnover and unfilled vacant positions." While Chatham County Department of Social Services has consistently experienced support from county leadership and the Board of Commissioners and benefited from the county's financial health, this is a widespread problem in other communities. The Child Welfare Workforce Study included recommendations of appropriate workloads and additional funding is needed to ensure that counties can hire employees to match these recommendations. Furthermore, NC DHHS will also require additional resources to train both the existing and additional workforce.

Request: Support state funding to implement the recommendations of the Child Welfare Workforce Study, including resources for counties to meet recommended staffing levels and funding for NC DHHS to expand training and support for the child welfare workforce.

Provide Adequate Funding for Adult Protective Services and Guardianship

Background: The Senior Tarheel Legislature, NC Association of County Commissioners and NC Association of County Directors of Social Services have all recommended increased funding to counties for adult services. In FY 24, \$62 million was provided by local governments to support these programs while only \$3 million came from state funds.

Request: Support state funding to implement the recommendations of the Child Welfare Workforce Study, including resources for counties to meet recommended staffing levels and funding for NC DHHS to expand training and support for the child welfare workforce.

Expand Investments in the Early Childcare System, Including Increases for Childcare Subsidies

Background: Access to affordable quality childcare is widely viewed as an important strategy in preventing child abuse and neglect and supporting child-wellbeing. The NC Child Fatality Task Force, the CDC Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Resources for Action, NC Essentials for Childhood, and the NC Perinatal Health Strategic Plan all recommend that childcare be more readily accessible to families. In addition, the newly created [NC Taskforce on Child Care and Early Education](#) identified additional specific recommendations that include the setting of a statewide rate floor, exploration of a childcare endowment, non-salary benefits to childcare professionals, subsidized or free childcare for childcare teachers, and exploration of partnerships with the UNC and Community College systems to increase access for public employees and students.

Request: Increase state investment in North Carolina’s early childcare system, including expanded childcare subsidy funding and implementation of recommendations from the NC Taskforce on Child Care and Early Education to strengthen the childcare workforce and improve access to affordable childcare for families.

Support Any Efforts to Expedite Appropriate Funding of Innovations Waiver Slots for Children and Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Background: North Carolina’s Innovations Waiver provides critical home and community-based services for children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) that are not otherwise covered by Medicaid. However, demand for these services continues to far exceed available slots. According to the North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities, approximately 18,000 North Carolinians remain on the waitlist for the Innovations Waiver. Expanding the number of waiver slots would allow more individuals with I/DD to access essential supports that enable them to live safely and independently in their communities.

Request: Increase funding to expand Innovations Waiver slots and reduce the waitlist for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in North Carolina.

Tax Administration

Protect Local Government Revenue

Background: Counties in North Carolina rely on property taxes as their primary locally controlled revenue source to fund critical public services, including public schools, emergency services, infrastructure, and social services. As the General Assembly explores potential reforms to the state’s property tax system, it is important that these discussions maintain the financial stability of local governments while addressing concerns related to affordability and tax burden.

Proposals that alter reassessment timelines could prevent counties from capturing real time market conditions and may shift tax burdens in unintended ways. Similarly, changes to longstanding property valuation methodologies that move away from market based assessments could create administrative challenges, reduce transparency, and complicate communications with taxpayers.

Local governments also rely on the ability to set tax rates and administer property tax systems based on local needs. Limiting this authority could undermine the ability of counties to fund core services that residents rely upon. At the same time, property value increases have created legitimate affordability challenges for some homeowners. Current property tax relief programs serve an important role in addressing these concerns but reach only a small percentage of homeowners statewide.

Maintaining fairness within the property tax system is also essential. Existing gaps, such as the Blue Ridge loophole that allows certain property owners to avoid full property tax liability through ownership structures, create inequities between taxpayers and reduce revenue available to support local services.

Request: The General Assembly should ensure that any property tax reforms preserve the fiscal stability of counties and maintain the integrity of North Carolina's long standing market based property valuation system. Reforms should protect local government authority over reassessment practices and tax rate setting so counties can continue to meet the service needs of their residents while also closing the Blue Ridge loophole to ensure fair and consistent taxation of property.

Additionally, the General Assembly should consider expanding eligibility for existing property tax relief programs, including the Homestead Exclusion and Circuit Breaker programs, to better assist homeowners experiencing affordability challenges. Any expansion of these programs should balance taxpayer relief with the need to maintain stable and sustainable local government revenues.