Meeting Minutes
April 25, 2023

MINUTES OF MECKLENBURG COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

The Board of Commissioners of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, met in Budget/Public Policy Session in Conference Center Room 267 on the 2nd floor of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Government Center located at 600 East Fourth Street, Charlotte, North Carolina at 2:33 p.m. on Tuesday, April 25, 2023.

ATTENDANCE

Present: Chair George Dunlap and Commissioners
                    Leigh Altman, Patricia "Pat" Cotham, Arthur Griffin,
                    Mark Jerrell, Vilma D. Leake, Laura J Meier, Elaine Powell,
                    and Susan Rodriguez-McDowell
                    County Manager Dena R. Diorio
                    County Attorney Tyrone C. Wade
                    Clerk to the Board Kristine M. Smith

Absent: Deputy Clerk to the Board, Arlissa Eason

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chair Dunlap, followed by introductions and the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

23-0270   FY2024 PROPOSED FEE ADJUSTMENTS

The Board received as information presentations on proposed fee adjustments for FY2024 from Park and Recreation, Land Use and Environmental Services (LUESA), and Public Health.

Meeting Minutes
April 25, 2023

Background: Each year, the Board of County Commissioners receives a presentation highlighting proposed fee adjustments that the County Manager is considering as part of the Recommended Budget. Staff from Park and Recreation, Land Use and Environmental Services, and Public Health will provide the context for each proposed fee adjustment and respond to any questions.

W. Lee Jones, Director, Park and Recreation, Ebenezer Gujjarlapudi, Director, Land Use and Environmental Services, and Dr. Raynard Washington, Public Health Director gave the presentation.

Today's Overview

- Fee Adjustments
  - Rental of Park Open Space
  - Staffing Fees
  - Tennis Court Tournaments
  - Fee Eliminations

MeckNC.gov

2

RENTAL OF PARK OPEN SPACES

Description	Current	Proposed
Small Area	$ 52.00/hr.	Eliminate
Medium Area	$ 75.00/hr.	Eliminate
Large Area (OPEN SPACE)	$ 103.00/hr.	$100/hr.

MeckNC.gov

3

STAFFING FEES

Description	Current	Proposed
Limited Part-Time * For contractual events	$ 15.00/hr.	$22.00/hr.
Full-Time Park Operations Staff	$21-$29 per hour	$36-$49 per hour *includes benefits
Off-Duty Security	$42-$60 per hour	Market Rate presented by CMPD

M e c k N C . g o v

4

Tennis Court Tournament Fees
(Proposed Fees)

Tennis Court Reservations - Tournaments	Fees
County Rate (per court- half day)	$ 20.00
County Rate (per court -full day)	$ 40.00
Based on our current $5.00 per hour rate Half-day is based on 4 hours and Full-day is based on 8 hours	

M e c k N C . g o v

5

FEE ELIMINATIONS

Fee	Amount
Indoor playground	$2.00/$3.00
Corporate Wellness Memberships	$78.00 to $585.00
25 Meter lane (per hour)	$20.00-$30.00
25 Yard Short Course lane	$16.00 per hr.
Birthday Party Packages	$150.00-$250.00
Special Event Facility Rental-Entire pool	$150.00 (min. 2 hours)
Diving Well (per hour)	$64.00-$96.00

M e c k N C . g o v

6

FEE ELIMINATIONS

Marion Diehl Fees	Amount
3 Month Pool Pass (pool only)	
Youth Pass	$60.00-$70.00
Adult (18 and over)	$75.00-$112.50

M e c k N C . g o v

7

Comments

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell asked for clarification of the eliminated fees and if everyone was getting the large area fee. *Mr. Jones said yes, it is one fee that covers all areas, versus a fee for different areas. He said most areas that were rented were over an acre.*

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell asked about staffing fees on slide 4. She asked if the whole amount was going to people who are staffing or if it was what the County was charging to utilize staff. *Mr. Jones said it covered the benefits associated with the hourly rates for the staff.*

Commissioner Leake asked how parks versus playgrounds were disseminated. *Mr. Jones stated that they would not rent playgrounds as they were an amenity within a park.*

Commissioner Leak asked if they were responsible for security at the County sites. *Mr. Jones said the County was responsible for security at its sites. He said events would be staffed with the appropriate people and charged accordingly.*

Commissioner Leake asked if the information would be housed in the Recreation Centers. *Mr. Jones said they would begin the process online and then if there are more questions or information needed, we would sit down and meet with them to discuss the requirements for the event.*

Commissioner Meier asked regarding Park Road Park if a gentleman who was charged $50 for a bike event would now be charged $100. *Mr. Jones said it depends and that there may not be a charge. He said If they are housing bikes in a corner and not affecting other usages, there may be no fee at all but If the event affected other parts of the park that would prevent others from using it, then there may be a fee. He said it depended on the circumstance.*

Director Jones explained the fee eliminations.

Commissioner Griffin asked if the County had a program for free swimming classes. *Mr. Jones said yes, they give out a certain number of free swim lessons. He said the information was communicated on the County's website, recreation centers, and aquatic centers.*

Commissioner Powell said it seemed like they were trying to streamline things. *Mr. Jones stated that they are trying to simplify things for the users.*

Commissioner Powell stated that when you say it would not adversely affect revenue, I think it's important to say this will not adversely affect cost recovery because the average person didn't understand how much it costs for everything that went into anything special such as a special event or a special class, whatever the extras were beyond playgrounds. She said it was important to talk in terms of cost recovery because they had to be able to recover the cost. She asked for

clarification about elimination. *Mr. Jones said the goal was to streamline to eliminate redundancy.*

Commissioner Powell said the North Region Rec Center pickleball fees were so low that the people were not getting a membership, they were just paying the $1 fee. She said Iredell County people were coming in to play and were paying $2. She said the YMCA charged $5 to play and the people that had passes wanted to be able to play and asked what could be done. She said if they needed to increase the Pickleball fees, now would be the time.

Commissioner Powell asked when CMPD would set its rate and whether it would be before the budget. *Mr. Jones said he would let the Board know once they did. He said the off-duty rate range was between $45 and $75 an hour.*

Commissioner Altman said she would like to see the master schedule of all the fees. She said it may not make sense to the public without seeing the entire list.

Commissioner Altman asked when a space would need to be rented. Mr. Jones said if someone wanted a space in the park and wanted it exclusive to their guests, would they need to rent the space, depending on *the number of guests you would have.*

Commissioner Altman asked what the processing time was like to have an event. *Mr. Jones said to host an event, they would like at least 60 days' notice before the event.*

Commissioner Altman also asked if groups need insurance. *Mr. Jones stated yes, depending on the type of event, especially such as an event that included alcohol or had a bouncy house.*

Commissioner Jerrell asked for clarity/examples on slide 3, renting park open spaces. *Mr. Jones stated that if you were to have a birthday party with 100 people and no one else could enter the space, you would pay $100 per hour. He said the area is based on the size of the space.*

Commissioner Jerrell asked if they looked at changing anything with respect to fee waivers. *Mr. Jones said that they were now offering neighborhood committees four free events a year, whereas we previously only offered one.*

LUESA FY2024
Fee Adjustment Proposal

April 25, 2023

Fee Adjustment Highlights

- Proposed fee adjustments in Air Quality, Code Enforcement, Storm Water & Solid Waste.
- Proposed **fee-funded** staffing adjustments in GIS and Storm Water.
- Continued partnership with Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) to employ an additional crew.
- Increase in operating and capital costs to support Environmental Leadership Action Plan (ELAP).

MeckNC.gov

9

Air Quality Budget Highlights

- Budget request - **$ 1,957,569** (Includes **$119,013 enhancement** in **tax funding**).
- Endorsed by the AQC on February 27, 2023.
- No increase in FTEs.
- Includes proposed fee increase for regulated community (industrial sources of air pollution and gasoline dispensing stations).
- **Enhancement** with Property tax funding request aligns with BOCC priorities and supports "general good" activities including:
  - Environmental Leadership Plan.
  - Local leadership in ozone and fine particulate matter pollution reduction.
  - Communication/outreach.
  - Competitive grant writing activities (for GRADE, IRA etc).

M e c k N C . g o v

10

Proposed Fee Adjustments

1. 20% Adjustment For Permitted Stationary Sources.
   - Approximate Revenue Increase of $190K (source population fluctuates).
   - First increase in 10 years.
   - The NC Division of Air Quality and the only other approved NC Local Programs Increased Fees Last Year.

2. New Annual Monitoring Fee ($300) for **all** permitted Stationary Sources.
   - Revenue of approximately $160K.
   - Same for all facilities (538 permitted sources).

M e c k N C . g o v

11

Annual Air Quality Fees

Proposed increase of 20%

Class	# of Businesses	Examples of Industry Type	Current Fees	Proposed Fees
Title V	10	Foundries, Steel Mill, Wood-fired boilers	$9500	$11400
SM	60	Gasoline terminals, Hospitals, Asphalt plants	$5400	$6480
SB	30	Water treatment facilities, Small industries with boilers	$1750	$2100
B	47	Concrete plants, Larger printing/coating	$1250	$1500
C	67	Auto-body shops, Commercial printing/coating	$625	$750
Stage I	324	Gasoline Stations	$100	$120

- Annual Emission Fee – **increase** from **$50**/ton to **$60**/ton (20%)
- **New** Annual Ambient Monitoring Fee= **$300**

MeckNC.gov

12

Code Enforcement Highlights

- **Inspection activity:**
  - 418,726 in **FY2022**
  - Projected to be 420,000 in **FY2023**
- **Permits issued:**
  - 118,854 in **FY2022**
  - Projected to be 118,000 in **FY2023**
- **Plan Review activity:**
  - Residential Projects for **FY2022** is 3,582 (estimating 4,848 reviews in **FY2023**)
  - Commercial Projects for **FY2022** is 5,661 (estimating 14,128 reviews in **FY2023**)

MeckNC.gov

13

10

New Professional Services Fee

- Supports legal and professional services for reviewing legal documents, easements, egress, etc., on properties that directly relate to the North Carolina State Building Codes.
- Marked increase in these services requested by the construction industry and the development community to navigate code compliance with legal documents.
- Proposed Professional Services Fee of **$300.00** per hour.

MeckNC.gov

14

Technology Fee Adjustment

- A unique paperless inspection management system.
- Created in 2006 as a requirement per NCSBC. This platform tracks all inspections for the projects that are permitted to meet the requirements of Chapter 17.
- Currently, the software tracks 900+ licensed professionals for necessary licenses, credentials, and inspections.
- Requesting an increase to **$225.00** from the current fee of **$125.00**.
- Provides a revenue-neutral fee to support the increase in technology costs.

MeckNC.gov

meck-si.com
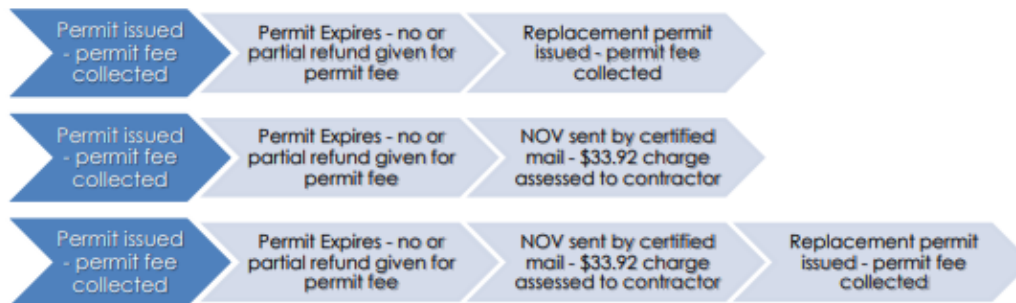The Paperless Special Inspection Management System

FMO Fee Ordinance Adjustment

Service	Current	Proposed
Fire Alarm Shop Drawings	$140.00	$200.00
Fire Sprinkler Shop Drawings	$140.00	$200.00
Construction Cost < $50,000	$165.00	$200.00
Construction Cost $50,000 to $100,000	$175.00	$225.00
Construction Cost $100,001 to $500,000	$190.00	$275.00
Construction Cost $500,000 to $1,000,000	$220.00	$350.00
Construction Cost $1,000,001 to $5,000,000	$290.00	$550.00
Construction Cost $5,000,001 to $10,000,000	$430.00	$775.00
Construction Cost > $10,000,000	$650.00	$1,225.00
Interactive Review	$140.00	$165.00
Multi-Family	$300.00	$375.00
Residential Review	$35.00	$75.00
Rezoning Petitions	$165.00	$75.00

16

Expired Permits and Notice of Violation

- Add new item to the existing fee ordinance.
- Implement a NOV fee for an **expired permit** of $35.00
- A new transaction code to track these charges.

Permit issued - permit fee collected → Permit Expires - no or partial refund given for permit fee → Replacement permit issued - permit fee collected

Permit issued - permit fee collected → Permit Expires - no or partial refund given for permit fee → NOV sent by certified mail - $33.92 charge assessed to contractor

Permit issued - permit fee collected → Permit Expires - no or partial refund given for permit fee → NOV sent by certified mail - $33.92 charge assessed to contractor → Replacement permit issued - permit fee collected

M e c k N C . g o v

17

GIS Support For Accela and Addressing

- A GIS fee of **$2.00** for each permit issued for address and owner information verification, data maintenance and support POSSE and Accela.

- Estimated revenue of **$230k** based on an estimated 115k permits for FY24.

- Will support a new resource in GIS to manage the database and support to the Accela implementation.

- Support the GIS Strategic Business Plan (FY23-24) related to the new ArcGIS Enterprise On-Premise System Development and Implementation including integration with Accela.

MeckNC.gov

18

Storm Water Budget Highlights

$4.0M enhancement is tied to negative impacts to the environment from growth/urbanization – based on financial model.

- Support the 2035 goals of the ELAP (Capital Costs = $3.1M)
- Four additional staff and resources (Operating Costs = $0.6M):
  - Maintain CIP projects and buyout properties.
  - Address decline in Employee Climate Survey results.
- Two additional staff and resources (Operating Costs = $0.3M):
  - Manage cumulative increases in land development activity and storm water treatment structure installations.

19

Proposed Organization

Operations Program
Organizational Chart
Budget Unit 3151
FY2024 addition (proposed)

New Team

20
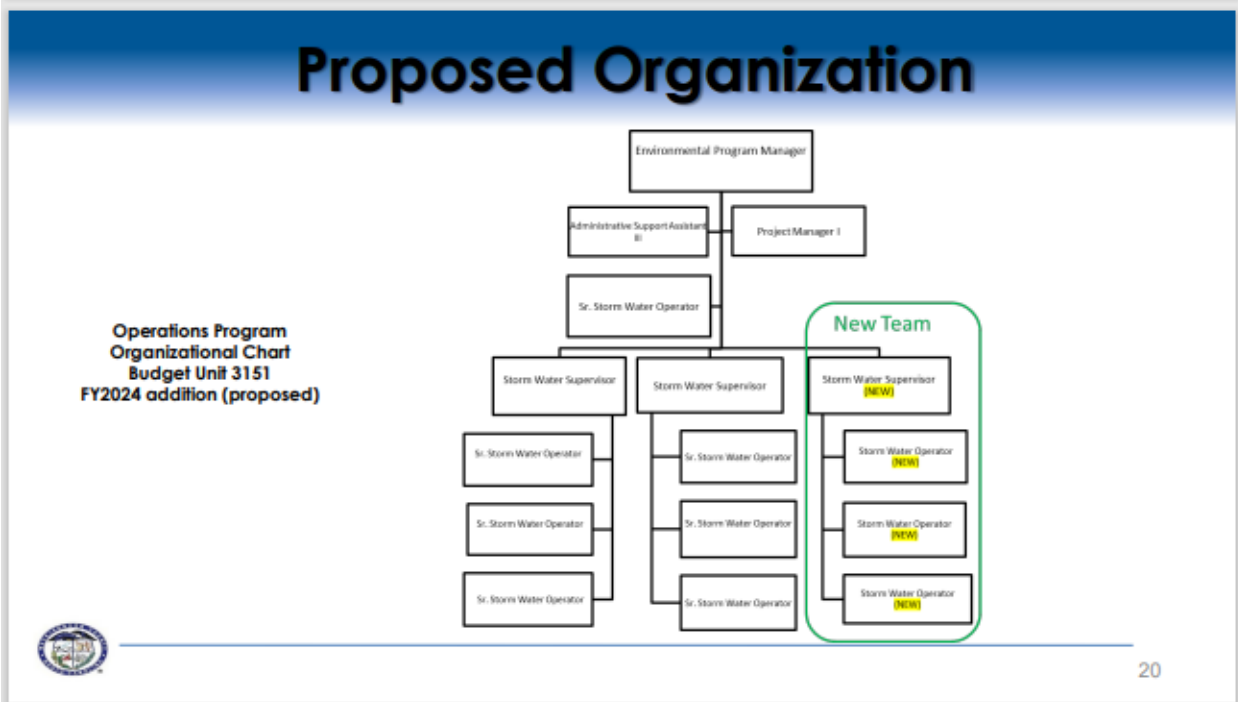
Storm Water Budget Highlights

- Proposed FY2024 fee increase based on new financial model and associated funding strategy.
- Assumes $20M Bond Sale in FY2026.

Major System Fee (Countywide)

Tiers	FY2023 Monthly Rate	FY2024 Monthly Rate (proposed)	FY2024 Monthly Rate Increase (proposed)
I	$1.04	$1.12	$0.08
II	$1.58	$1.71	$0.13
III	$2.41	$2.60	$0.19
IV	$4.48	$4.84	$0.36
Commercial (per acre)	$27.71	$29.93	$2.22

21

Solid Waste Budget Highlights

- Budget Request - **$47,568,000 (includes fee increases).**
- Consistent with financial model that includes a mix of fee increases and bond issuance (versus 100% PayGo).
- Stable, long-term funding strategy for operating and capital programs – potential $30M borrowing in FY2024.
- FY24 budget with fee increases was unanimously recommended by WMAB on Feb. 21, 2023.
- Construction will start for multiple Capital Projects in FY24.
- Fee modifications as presented to the BOCC on November 15, 2022, are requested.

22

Solid Waste "Opportunities"

- **Mulch Imbalance:**
  - RFP to find a partner to process yard waste elsewhere.
  - Up to 60k tons of off-site yard waste processing requiring higher fees for disposal.
- **Equipment Cost Escalation:**
  - Yellow metal/equipment costs have increased ~30%.
  - Significantly higher than CPI.
- **Loss of Leaf Central Location**
  - Exploring additional areas to store and process leaves – working with Real Estate Mgt.
- **Material Recovery Facility:**
  - Commodity pricing is trending significantly lower (anticipated to last through FY24).
  - MRF Retrofit in progress
  - Temporary MRF construction initiated

23

Residential Availability Fee Adjustments

Annual Residential Availability Fee (RAF): adjustment to cover costs associated management of infrastructure, recyclables processing and ongoing capital projects.

- **Presented to the BOCC on Nov. 15, 2022;** $5 annual increase was recommended and acknowledged by the BOCC.
- Monthly Increase of $0.42 per property.
- Annual Increase from **$39.50** to **$44.50**.

MeckNC.gov

24

Proposed Technical Fee Adjustments

- Proposed increases in tip fees to cover contractual increases.
- Invoiced to the City and Towns.
- **Speedway Landfill:** $1.10/ton increase: $37.85 to **$38.95**/ton
- **Non-County Recyclables:**   **$8/ton** increase $108 to **$116.00**/ton

Note: Technical Fees are included in the Solid Waste Fee Ordinance

MeckNC.gov

25

Proposed Technical Fee Adjustments

- Construction Debris: **$3.50**/ton increase to **$57. 00**/ton

- Drywall (Un-Painted): **$2.00**/ton increase to **$34.50/ton**

- Yard Waste: **$7**/ton increase to **$36**/ton

- Annual **Out of County** Residential Stickers:

  - Increase by $10 annually: **$90 for a year; $45 for 2nd half year**

- **Transfer Fee** - "new" $12/ton (for the transfer station)at the John Price Center

  - Added to other disposal fees and will affect commercial customers and the City who will use the new center.

MeckNC.gov

26

Proposed Technical Fee Adjustments

- NO INCREASE for residential inbound cost for "small/residential" amounts.

- Tires and TV Disposal:

  - Tires will increase by **$0.50**/tire for all sizes

  - TV disposal for **Commercial Customers** will increase **$5**/unit: from $25 to $30 each.

Note: Waste Tire Fund Subsidy in FY2024 anticipated to be $500,000 to make up for shortfall of State revenue for processing tires. State continues to underfund grant programs associated with waste tires and electronic wastes

MeckNC.gov

27

Meeting Minutes
April 25, 2023

Comments

Commissioner Powell questioned whether all the fee adjustments were exactly in alignment with the Environmental Leadership Action Plan. *Mr. Gujjarlapudi said that the ELAP did not really have a fee, but all the mentioned activities were in alignment and further the ELAP goals.*

Commissioner Powell said they had in the plan that as time went on, they had to increase the fees. She asked if it was enough. *Mr. Gujjarlapudi said it was a good start, enough to meet our obligations for the next couple of years. He said, if need be, we can come back to the County Manager but for now, it was a reasonable adjustment.*

Commissioner Powell said regarding slide 26 that it seemed like the Board could get some feedback about the big changes that were being made. *Mr. Gujjarlapudi clarified that it is a 350-ton increase going from 53.50 to 57, which is an increase of $3.50 a ton.*

Mr. Gujjarlapudi said for Solid Waste they looked at the fees every year to see if any adjustments were needed.

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell asked if the fee adjustments were going to make the County more efficient with permitting and inspections. *Mr. Gujjarlapudi said right now they were getting ready to implement Go-live with Accela, the new technology solution, by the end of the calendar year and that was going to streamline and simplify a lot of the processes. He said performance and issues were looked at every month by the BDC (Building Development Commission), which was made of the industry. He said they hold the County accountable concerning performance and expectations.*

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell questioned if we were staffed enough to handle what we had going on or if we were working with a skeleton crew. *Mr. Gujjarlapudi said they were constantly recruiting. He said at the beginning of this year, there were almost 50 vacancies, and they were now in the mid-30s and were making progress.*

Commissioner Altman questioned slide 26 if it was a good or bad thing accepting recyclables from out-of-county residents. *Mr. Gujjarlapudi said on the net is a good thing for us, and we only accept recyclables, not trash. He said they could sell the recyclables and bring the revenue back into the County. He said overall it was a benefit to the County.*

Commissioner Altman questioned what was happening with the tires. *Mr. Gujjarlapudi said they are being sent to a recycling location off-site with a contractor for recycling.*
Commissioner Altman asked why they didn't charge more to recycle tires. *Mr. Gujjarlapudi said*

various companies have tried that in the past and have found that if the cost was too high, you would see illegal dumping on the side of the road or in an empty lot.

Commissioner Altman asked where the bulk of the tires come from. *Mr. Gujjarlapudi said they come from various sources.*

Proposed 2024 Fee Adjustments
Public Health

Dr. Raynard Washington, Public Health Director
April 26, 2023

New Fees – Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program

Service Type	CPT	New Fee
Colposcopy of the Cervix	57452	$122.14
Colposcopy of the cervix, with biopsy and endocervical curettage	57454	$163.02
Colposcopy of the cervix, with biopsy	57455	$155.33
Colposcopy of the cervix, with endocervical curettage	57456	$146.57
Surgical Pathology, Gross and microscopic examination	88305 88305TC 88305-26	$68.33 $32.61 $35.72
Surgical pathology, gross and microscopic examination; requiring microscopic evaluation of surgical margins	88307 88307TC 88307-26	$274.84 $196.08 $ 78.76

29

New Pharmacy Fee: Over-the-Counter Medication

Service Type	CPT	FY24 Proposed Fee	Change from FY23 Fee
Miconazole cream 2%	J3490	$5.00	New

30

Vaccines: Change Fees to "Acquisition Cost"

Service Type	CPT	FY24 Proposed Fee	Change from FY23 Fee
DTaP	90700	At Cost (currently $25.77)	-$1.26
Tdap	90715	At Cost (currently $43.83)	-$.97
DTap/Polio	90696	At Cost (currently $56.39)	-$.82
DTap/HBV/IPV	90723	At Cost (currently $88.88)	-$1.16

31

Vaccines continued: At "Acquisition Cost"

Service Type	CPT	FY24 Proposed Fee	Change from FY23 Fee
(SARS-CoV-2) (coronavirus disease [COVID-19]) vaccine	91317	At Cost (TBD)	Free

35

Questions?

MecklenburgCountyNC.gov

36

Comments

Meeting Minutes
April 25, 2023

Commissioner Dunlap said that he knows that the Health Department had the ability to waive a fee. He asked what the process was to waive a fee if someone couldn't afford to pay their bill. *Dr. Washington said, in most cases, no one is required to pay at the time of services except for a select number of adult vaccines that are optional such as a Rabies vaccine or a Shingles vaccine He said for those, the patient would be asked to pay at the time of service, but otherwise, no service is contingent upon the ability to pay. He said there is never a fee for children or family planning. He said they billed people on a sliding scale. He said people were asked about their ability to pay, and if they said they couldn't, they were asked for their income, which was calculated, and if they didn't have it at the time, they would be sent a bill.*

Commissioner Dunlap asked when the books are balanced, and patients still had an outstanding balance if it was a write-off. *Dr. Washington said that they would still have a balance on their account but that the Health Department did not pay for collection services. He said it was a condition of the state that they had to render service even though someone may have an outstanding balance.*

Commissioner Powell asked how it was that the Health Department made a person pay before receiving a rabies shot. *Dr. Washington said rabies shots were very expensive. He said they only did pre-exposure prophylaxis; If a person was working where there was a high likelihood of rabid animal exposure, then it was only a few hundred dollars. If someone was exposed (post-exposure prophylaxis), that person would have to go to the ER for initial treatment and would likely go back to the same hospital for rounds 2,3, and 4, which could cost up to $20,000. He said if they qualified, they could get some assistance through the hospital's programs. He said there were hundreds of exposures a month. He said they were looking into potentially being able to do doses 2,3, and 4 but did not have a solution yet.*

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell asked for more information on colposcopies. *Dr. Washington said that they expect to have at least 2 active clinics per month serving 8 – 12 patients on a given day. He said they had about 40 external referrals a month due to abnormal Pap Smears. He stated that one of the challenges was getting appointments scheduled due to the external facilities being very busy. He said another challenge was the patient needing a cash payment at the time of service, so if the patient didn't have the funds to pay, it could delay getting procedures done. He said there were also some challenges in closing the loop with some of the agencies to ensure the County, as the initial care provider, was able to do close follow-up. He said this would allow them to deliver the service directly and control the cost to the patient.*

Meeting Minutes
April 25, 2023

23-0273   MECKLENBURG COUNTY DIGITAL DIVIDE OVERVIEW

The Board received as information an overview highlighting digital divide initiatives throughout Mecklenburg County.

Background: Throughout the nation, organizations and institutions have either incorporated or transitioned to digital and online platforms as a mechanism to serve their customers and clients. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic led this change to pivot rapidly. In addition, digital access and literacy are fundamental for enhanced student learning, job attainment and work skills proficiencies. Unfortunately, there was (and still remains) a segment of the population that is left out due to lack of internet access and devices, familiarity to navigate systems and/or competency with software, thereby creating a digital divide. This gap exists locally, and addressing this is priority for our community. Hence, there is cross-section of initiatives that are being undertaken to bridge this divide.

County Manager Diorio stated that the ask of the Board was for $10 million; not for us to appropriate $10 million but that the County would commit to spending $10 million on Digital Divide activities on a go-forward basis.
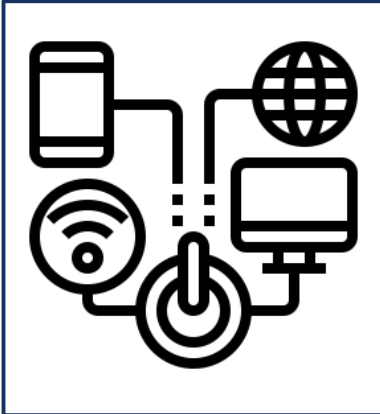
Dr. Leslie Johnson, Deputy County Manager gave the presentation.

Digital Divide Overview

Mecklenburg County
BOCC Public Policy Workshop
April 25, 2023

WHAT IS DIGITAL DIVIDE?

The term "digital divide" refers to the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard to their opportunities to access information and communication technologies and to their use of the internet for a wide variety of activities.

Understanding the Digital Divide | READ online (oecd-ilibrary.org)
https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/science-and-technology/understanding-the-digital-divide_236405667766#page5

2

WHAT'S DIGITAL INCLUSION?
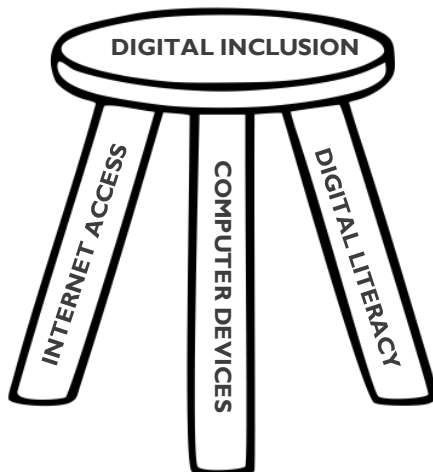
"Digital Inclusion" refers to the activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to and use of information and communication technologies.

3

https://www.digitalinclusion.org/definitions/

BEST PRACTICE STRATEGY

Five Elements of Digital Inclusion:

1. Affordable, robust broadband internet service

2. Internet-enabled devices that meet needs of user

3. Access to digital literacy training

4. Quality technical support

5. Applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration


Digital Inclusion must evolve as technology advances. Digital Inclusion requires intentional strategies and investments to reduce and eliminate historical, institutional and structural barriers to access and use technology.
(*"Definitions." National Digital Inclusion Alliance. Accessed July 2020.* https://www.digitalinclusion.org/definitions*)*

[4]

CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG STRATEGY

Center for Digital Equity

Vision: The Center for Digital Equity is the backbone organization for a collective impact strategy bringing together residents, public, and private sector partners to co-create solutions allowing every resident the opportunity to thrive in our modern culture.
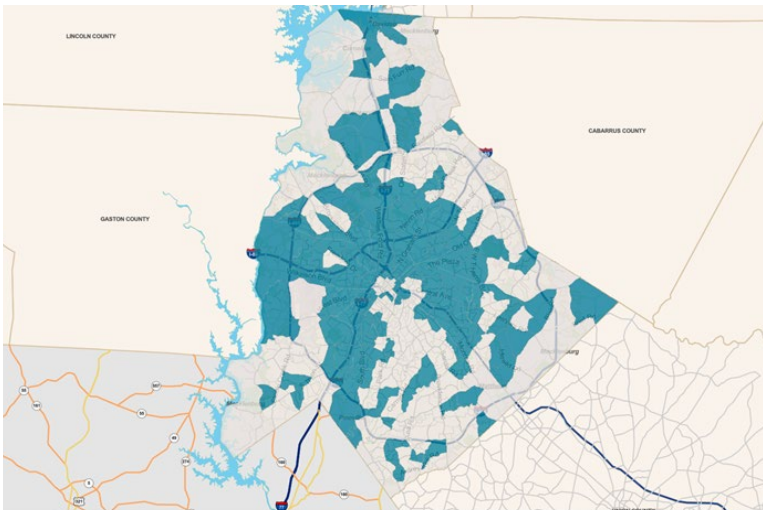
Mission: To make Mecklenburg County the most digital equitable community in America.

CDE
THE CENTER FOR DIGITAL EQUITY

QUEENS UNIVERSITY *of* **CHARLOTTE**

[5]
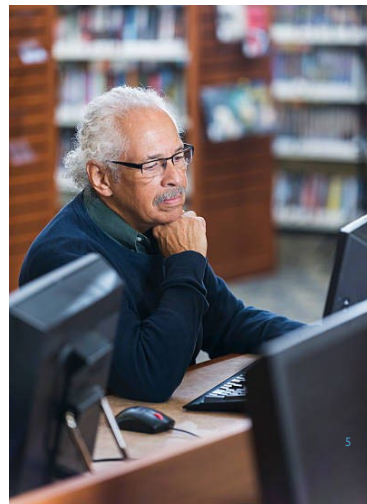
CENTER FOR DIGITAL EQUITY FRAMEWORK
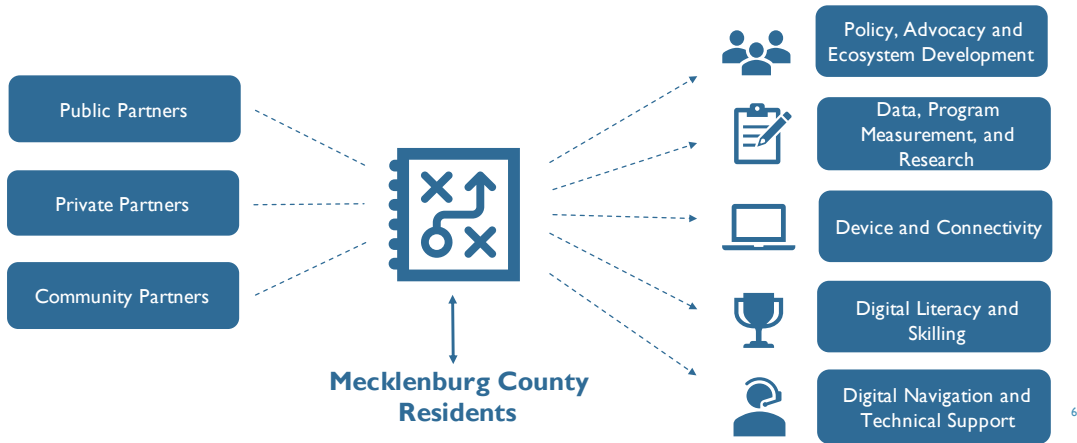
MECKLENBURG COUNTY DIGITAL DIVIDE

Digital Deserts *
exists in all
7 local jurisdictions

*Digital Desert defined as a household
without a device and/or access to internet*

Meeting Minutes
April 25, 2023

MECKLENBURG COUNTY INVESTMENTS

Initiative	Description	Amount
Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Digital Divide Expansion	An expansion of the Library's existing efforts to address digital divide by enhancing DigiLit curriculum, increasing the number of DigiLit courses, adding a mobile DigiLit classroom, purchasing approximately 100 WiFi enabled laptops for checkout, continuing to offer free hotspot checkouts, opening a pop-up computer center in Uptown, and providing additional materials that support workforce upskilling and English as a Second Language. (ARPA)	$2,917,635
City Startup Labs- REEP 3.0	The ReEntry Entrepreneurship (REEP) program will provide comprehensive and applied workforce and entrepreneurial training to formerly incarcerated persons. (ARPA)	$962,800

8

MECKLENBURG COUNTY INVESTMENTS

Initiative	Description	Amount
Community Education Resource Centers	Two computers labs with 11 high tech computers and a 3D printer at each site—Amay James and Bette Rae Recreation Centers. The labs will be available for public access and programming to include educational sessions on game coding. (Participatory Budget)	$90,000
MeckTech "Pilot"	Provided households impacted by COVID-19 with personal computers. A total of 1,400 devices were distributed October– December 2020. (CARES) Supplemental Information • The City of Charlotte allocated CARES funding for the purchase of 655 additional devices. • The Merancas Foundation donated funds to purchase and refurbish 325 more computers.	$500,000

9

MECKLENBURG COUNTY INVESTMENTS

Initiative	Description	Amount
Wi-Fi: Virtual Expansion at Detention Center & Courthouse	Wi-Fi infrastructure throughout detention facility and courthouse providing the capability to conduct professional evaluations, telemedicine visits and court proceedings in a virtual environment. (ARPA)	$800,000
Total		**$6,980,435**

11

MECKLENBURG COUNTY INVESTMENTS

Initiative	Description	Amount
Per Scholas IT Training	Funding to provide 12–14 weeks of tuition-free technical and professional skills training needed to launch quality jobs in the IT sector such as IT Support, Software Engineering, Cybersecurity, and AWS. (AR	$400,000
Wi-Fi: Neighborhood Parks	Free public WiFi within the boundaries of six identified parks– Druid Hills, Grier Height, Kilbourn Reid, Tyron Hills, and Fred Alexander Parks. (ARPA)	$350,000
Wi-Fi: Recreation Centers	Free public WiFi at eight recreation centers or pavilions–Arbor Glen, Bette Rae Thomas, Ivory/Bake MLK, Jr, Southview, Sugaw Creek, West Charlotte, and Clanton Recreation Centers (ARPA)	$960,000

10

PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS

Initiative	Description

311 Digital Navigators	• The Center for Digital Equity has launched a Digital Navigator service that is designed to ensure everyone in Mecklenburg County can find and connect with available digital inclusion resources.
	
	Digital Navigators help individuals navigate to and through:
	  o Signing up for affordable home broadband internet service
	  o Purchasing affordable technology
	  o Basic device and connectivity issues
	  o Learning new digital skills

12

PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS

Initiative	Description

Access Charlotte	• The City of Charlotte earmarked $3.25 million in funding from its CARES Act Fund to support a range of investments that promote digital inclusion and equity across the city:
	
	  o $1.5 million to provide public Wi-fi network on transit and in select public spaces and residential areas broadband deserts
	
	  o $1 million to the Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools Foundation to provide internet connectivity for hotspots to enable remote learning during.
	
	  o $750,000 used for:
	    ▪ 311 Digital Navigators
	    ▪ 8 Learning Labs – services that provide computers, devices and other equipment to the community.

13

PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS

Initiative	Description

Access Charlotte	• The City of Charlotte earmarked $3.25 million in funding from its CARES Act Fund to support a range of investments that promote digital inclusion and equity across the city:
	
	  ○ $1.5 million to provide public Wi-Fi network on transit and in select public spaces and residential areas broadband deserts
	
	  ○ $1 million to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Foundation to provide internet connectivity for hotspots to enable remote learning during.
	
	  ○ $750,000 used for:
	    ▪ 311 Digital Navigators
	    ▪ 8 Learning Labs – services that provide computers, devices and other equipment to the community.

PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS

Initiative	Description
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) Campaign	• Public awareness promotions (website and mailers to parents) on the Affordable Connectivity Program and Digital Navigator Service.
Digital Skills Ready @ 50+	• Google.org awarded a grant to the AARP Foundation to provide technology and digital skills training to people over 50 years of age. Senior Planet from AARP, Fill My Cup! and Mecklenburg County are partnering to provide classes and workshops on a wide range of technologies, from video conferencing to online job search tools to office productivity software.
Digital Literacy Program	• Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) has partnered with Digital Charlotte, Queens University and Charlotte Works to create a program where residents learn how create resumes, search for jobs, pay bills, and do online banking.

PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS

Initiative	Description
Eliminate the Digital Divide (E2D)	• E2D collects used laptops from generous corporations, refurbishe them in student‑led technology labs, and distributes them to stude families who don't have a computer at home.
MeckTech Computer Kit	• As a recipient of an Emergency Connectivity Fund grant, the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library will be issuing 20,000 refurbished laptops to adults who do not have computer/laptop and reside in Mecklenburg County. Each laptop is free and includes a preloaded productivity and education applications. • The Center for Digital Equity has Digital Navigators on site when laptops are being distributed to assist individuals in applying for th Affordable Connectivity Program.

16

PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS

Initiative	Description
Your Home, Your Internet	• Inlivian and The Center for Digital Equity received a grant from the Federal Communications Commission. The grant will allow the CD in partnership with Inlivian, to expand the digital navigator initiative with a direct focus on residents in Inlivian properties and those receiving housing vouchers.

17

MECKLENBURG COUNTY INVESTMENTS

Initiative	Internet Access	Computer Devices	Digital Literacy
City Startup Labs- REEP 3.0			✓
Charlotte Mecklenburg Library Digital Divide Enhancements	✓	✓	✓
Community Education Resource Centers	✓	✓	✓
Meck Tech Pilot		✓	
Per Scholas IT Training			✓
Wi-Fi for Neighborhood Parks	✓		
Wi-Fi for Recreation Centers	✓		
WiFi Virtual Expansion Detention Center & Courthouse	✓		

18

PARTNER INITIATIVES

Initiative	Internet Access	Computer Devices	Digital Literacy
311 Digital Navigators	*	*	*
ACCESS Charlotte	✓		
CMS Campaign	*		
Digital Skills Ready @ 50+			✓
Digital Literacy Program (MCSO)			✓
Eliminate the Digital Divide (E2D)		✓	✓
MeckTech Computer Kit		✓	
Your Home, Your Internet	✓		

❖ *Promotional information, resource access, and technical assistance*

19

MECKLENBURG STATISTICS

HOUSEHOLDS WITH NO COMPUTER

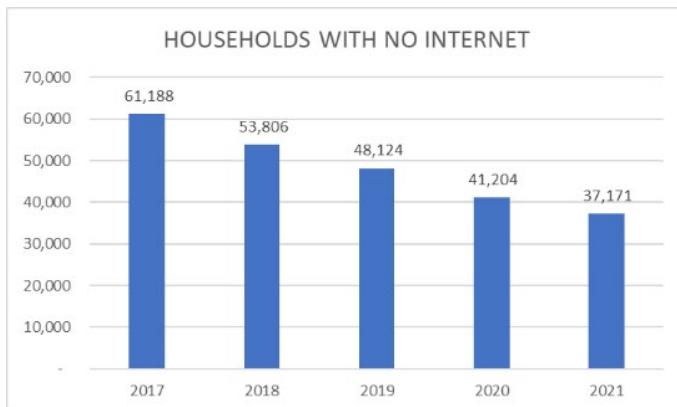| Year	Households
2017	32,087
2018	26,803
2019	23,119
2020	20,027
2021	17,874
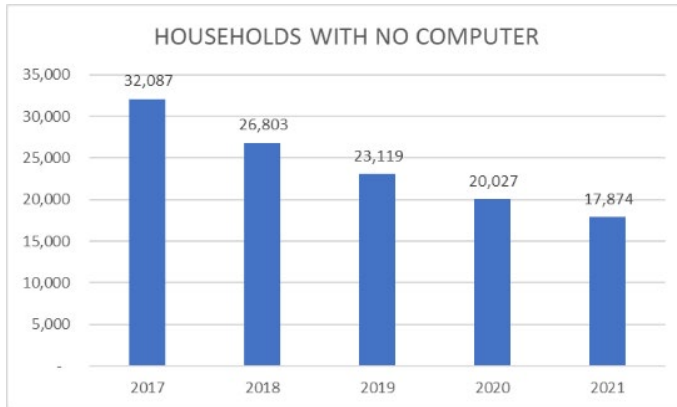
4.1%
2021
HOUSEHOLDS
WITH NO COMPUTER

[20]

American Community Survey, S2801, Types of Computers and Internet Subscriptions, 5 Year Estimates

MECKLENBURG STATISTICS

HOUSEHOLDS WITH NO INTERNET

Year	Households
2017	61,188
2018	53,806
2019	48,124
2020	41,204
2021	37,171

8.5%
2021
HOUSEHOLDS
WITH NO INTERNET

[21]

American Community Survey, S2801, Types of Computers and Internet Subscriptions, 5 Year Estimates

34

APPENDIX
MECKLENBURG COUNTY INVESTMENTS: INITIATIVES W/ DIGITAL INTEGRATION

Agency/Initiative	Description	Amount
Charlotte Mecklenburg Black Chamber of Commerce Healthcare Workforce Development	The HealthCare-Healthy Careers is an allied health, dental, and nursing professional workforce development training program. The program focus on marginalized and low-income communities with a special emphasis on LGBTQIA+ youth, former foster youth, and immigrants. **The program will leverage technology, including augmented reality, virtual reality and online training platforms.** Upon completion, participants receive assistance to secure certifications and matchmaking for available entry-level jobs. (ARPA)	$600,000
Latin American Chamber of Commerce of Charlotte (LACCC)	The funding will support a Hispanic/Latino Center for Economic Opportunity in the Albemarle Road Corridor of Opportunity. The Center will serve as a destination for employee recruitment, upskilling, workforce training and will feature a small business incubator and coworking services to create a pipeline of **entrepreneurs and assisting them to start, sustain and scale up their business.** This project addresses one of the Leading on Opportunity Strategies to help more Hispanic/Latino families living in lower opportunity communities get and stay on a path to living wage income and asset through increased access to high quality jobs that pay living wages and pursuit of entrepreneurship. (ARPA)	$1,500,000

22

APPENDIX
MECKLENBURG COUNTY INVESTMENTS: INITIATIVES W/ DIGITAL INTEGRATION

Agency/Initiative	Description	Amount
Mount Carmel Baptist Church (MCBC) Enrichment Program	MCBC will address the mental health of our students and families by using Sanford Harmony, a Social Emotional Learning Curriculum. The program is accessible online and on mobile apps. This will allow parents and members to access all aspects of the program at no cost. **MCBC will provide each student with technology access, allowing teachers and students to benefit from the online portions of Sanford Harmony** (ARPA)	$415,000
She Built This City	An expansion of the Women in the Trades Apprenticeship program, by adding a second location to train 160 additional participants. The workforce program provides participants the skills needed to obtain employment in a construction company or apprenticeship program and offer **wrap-around services to remove barriers such as** childcare needs, **technology needs**, and access to transportation. (ARPA)	$540,413
SMART GIRLS HQ LLC **Smart Girls Squad STEM Program**	Smart Girls is a 30-week STEM career education program for 5th-grade girls which increases interest, confidence, and fluency in STEM career paths. Funding supports 300 students with at least 70% of the students representing demographics historically underrepresented in STEM careers. **Designer Module: Animate Your Message– Digital Storytellers: Students design a public service announcement around a cause they care about and create an animated message to share with classmates and families** (ARPA)	$435,800

35

APPENDIX
MECKLENBURG COUNTY INVESTMENTS: INITIATIVES W/ DIGITAL INTEGRATION

Agency/Initiative	Description	Amount
Southminster	Funding focus will be on improving healthcare outcomes for seniors COVID-19, with specific attention on helping to alleviate social isolation among seniors in Charlotte Mecklenburg. Higher priority will be give programs and services that seek **address social isolation through means such as** mental health support, caregiver training and education, and **technology solutions.** (CARES)	$250,000
The Academy of Goal Achievers Mentor Program	An intensive mentoring program that provides high school students young adults (13-23 years old) the opportunity to develop into youth le and prepare and successfully complete postsecondary education and care pathways. Key program activities in this two generational model incl increase, prepare and expose participants to training and employme opportunities that meet workforce demands now and in the future t college and career readiness, group mentoring and career coaching. **There are also sessions on social media and creating LinkedIn profiles.** (ARPA)	$443,925

24

Comments

Commissioner Jerrell asked County Manager Diorio to bring clarity to the $10 million to continue initiatives. *County Manager Diorio said they wanted to be able to say they have raised the money, so if $10 million was invested in Digital Divide, they counted that towards the fundraising goal as opposed to just cutting a check and giving it to someone else where we would not know where the funds were going and couldn't track how they were being used. She said that what we've already done, which was almost $7 million, was taken into consideration, and the items in the Appendix, which was over $4 million they were in the $11 million range of direct investments in Digital Divide and programs that have Digital Divide inclusion components.*

Commissioner Jerrell confirmed that they were already over the ask. County Manager Diorio said yes.

Commissioner Jerrell asked that regarding the 17,000 individuals without computers if smart devices were included. *Dr. Johnson said no, this number was just strictly types of computers.*

Commissioner Jerrell asked what constituted a digital desert. *Dr. Johnson said the slide showed the aggregate data plots for a census track. She said it showed that more than half of the households within that geographic boundary did not have either a device or internet access.*

Meeting Minutes
April 25, 2023

Commissioner Jerrell asked if the City was quarterbacking a strategy to drive down the numbers. County Manager Diorio said the Center for Digital Equality at Queens had the framework and were charged with advancing the framework, but there wasn't much money behind it. She said the County made its investments. She said there was a private sector fundraising bowl of $20M that was sitting at the Foundation for the Carolinas and there was a committee making decisions about how money would be deployed. She said it was a little fragmented.

Commissioner Jerrell said he didn't get the sense that there was a comprehensive strategy to drive to zero. *Dr. Johnson said that the Center for Digital Equality in this formal state, commenced in 2021, prior to that it was individual efforts.*

Dr. Johnson said that private dollars were available to support CMS and hotspots for schools. When the county funded the Mecktech kit program, it was primarily funding adults, so they were trying to bridge the gap and do something that was complimentary. She said the group has now established a strategic plan, most of it was leveraging federal dollars that existed. She said a good portion was being used to access the Affordable Connectivity Program. They are doing the lion's share to get the devices into the community. She said the City was standing up some things, and the County was relying heavily on the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library System to implement many of the programs. She said instead of doing something different, the County focused on how to widen the net.

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell asked if it was self-reported who didn't have internet or a computer. *Dr. Johnson said the data points being used was from the American Housing Community Survey which was comparable to the US census.*

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell stated that in 2019, we donated several computers to E2D. She asked if the County has consistently kept up with donating its used computers. *Dr. Johnson stated that they still used E2D to donate the computers, allowing them to be part of the ecosystem for being refurbished.*

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell said that she would like to know how many computers per year have been donated.

Commissioner Leake asked how seniors could get assistance in understanding computer basics as they are the individuals who were left out of the process. She said they needed to find a way to impact the crescent to enlighten the people in the County, especially in District 2. She asked how they could provide those basic resources. *Dr. Johnson said they could always do more. She said there were programs out there, such as Digital Skill Ready @50+, and the programs were housed at VCW and Hickory Grove Library. She said there were also programs at Southminister*

which provided a host of services to be supportive and gave iPads to seniors.

Kaitlyn Moen described all the computer literacy programs available for seniors as well as the general community. She also talked about the ARPA funded classes.

Commissioner Leake asked for the information disseminated in District 2. *Dr. Johnson said she would create the equivalent of a flyer with information.*

Commissioner Griffin asked how the task force from Queens evaluated their success as it related to Digital Inclusion. *Dr. Johnson said the center was working on robust metrics that demonstrated the collective impact based on the strategies the County was implementing. She said metrics from the census gave them a pulse of how they were doing and trending. She said they were also trying to gather how many they were able to touch and how many they were able to get internet access to. She said they needed to find a way to have a consistent methodology and get data centrally deposited to get the aggregate of what multiple people are doing to see the collective impact.*

Commissioner Griffin asked if there was a sense of timing to have an improved capacity for evaluating. *Dr. Johnson said they were trying to do storyboarding which included an active map that could show information more readily. She said most of the datapoints used now came from reputable but national databased that were filtered down to the County. She said they needed to get the local data, but there had not been a defined time for that.*

Commissioner Griffin said laptops that were 6+ years old and had not been retooled sometimes lost certain functionalities. He asked if there was any sense of how they could make sure the devices were capable of utility by the residents. *Dr. Johnson said sustainability; she said the current focus was leveraging the federal dollars. She said the library is in the process of distributing 20,000 laptops and 2-3 years from now they could reach their useful life and what would be the strategies then. She said they needed to come up with an ongoing strategy. She said Wi-Fi at the parks will give ongoing connectivity.*

Commissioner Griffin said there needed to be more comprehensive sustainability.

Commissioner Meier asked if there was a program in the City or County that helps people pay for internet access. The Affordable Connectivity program is specifically designed to help individuals get internet access from local providers at a significantly reduced cost for those who apply. She said navigator service is very helpful in completing the paperwork to get the most cost-effective plan.

Commissioner Cotham said services have improved since she became a commissioner. She said

unfortunately, several people, many of whom are seniors, didn't understand the lingo. She said some acronyms that were used may not be understood by seniors, so they asked that we keep the radar up with understanding.

Commissioner Powell said she would like to have an action map where the colors could be changed based on areas where action has been taken to ensure the Digital Desert is being serviced.

Commissioner Powell said one of the barriers that wasn't mentioned was how people and business couldn't get highspeed internet because of the railroad tracks.

Commissioner Powell said she received many calls during COVID-19 about the Digital Divide in the Mountain Island Lake Library area. She said they needed to contact the libraries about limited hours on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays because it was hard on families when the libraries weren't open when they really needed them.

Chair Dunlap stated that after hearing the presentation, he isn't sure who was "driving the bus". He said he understood that the City and County made a commitment to invest but the County determined what we invested in. He asked if the County reported back to the center to say this is what our investments were. Dr. Johnson said yes.

Chair Dunlap asked if once the center received that information if there were updates to tell the County and the City where the investments were made.

Chair Dunlap said slide showed that in 2021, there were 37,000 without internet, etc. and the map showed that most were in the crescent. He said he was trying to assess what the additional need was and to what degree the County needed to invest in it. He said people needed to be connected to even apply for a job. He said they still had a long way to go. He said monitoring needed be done on an ongoing basis to know what was left to be done. He said even as more was done, computers became obsolete, this seems to be a matter that will never be completely solved. He said there needed to be some type of replacement policy.

Chair Dunlap asked if there was an expectation to make an additional investment and what that investment ought to look like. He said they have been talking for years about ways to spend Fund balance and this would be the place to it. He asked if the County made the decision regarding where the investment was, did that reduce the numbers presented. *Dena Diorio said there was a $20M private investment that had not yet been deployed. She suggested to continue to work with Dr. Johnson on the committee to wait and see how that goes before investing more. She said the County fulfilled their obligation, but the City hadn't done the rest of its commitment along*

with the private dollars not yet been deployed. Her recommendation was that the County wait to see how that went over the next year when it would be in a better position to decide how and where to invest.

Dr. Johnson said the Center for Digital Equity was the forum to have the North Star and manage accordingly. Dr. Johnson discussed how and where the City allocated its investment.

23-0017   COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Commissioners shared information of their choosing within the guidelines as established by the Board, which included, but not limited to, past and/or upcoming events.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made by Commissioner Meier, seconded by Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell, and carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting.

With no further business to come before the Board, Chair Dunlap declared the meeting adjourned at 4:57 p.m.

_____   _____
Kristine M. Smith, Clerk to the Board   George Dunlap, Chairman