

Meeting Minutes
March 11, 2025

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 2:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 11, 2025.

ATTENDANCE

Present: Chair Mark Jerrell, Vice-Chair Leigh Altman
and Commissioners George Dunlap, Arthur Griffin,
Laura J. Meier, Elaine Powell,
Susan Rodriguez-McDowell, Yvette Townsend-Ingram
County Manager Dena R. Diorio
County Attorney Tyrone C. Wade
Clerk to the Board Kristine M. Smith
Deputy Clerk to the Board Arlissa Eason

Absent: Commissioner Vilma D. Leake

CALL TO ORDER

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

25-0146 INNOVATION DISTRICT UPDATE

The Board received an update on the Innovation District Development.

Leslie Johnson, Deputy County Manager
Roger Johnson, Economic Development Director
Collin Lane - Atrium Health, Senior Vice President, Facilities Management Group
Hillary Crittendon - Atrium Health, AVP, Head of Innovation District Operations + Strategy

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Background: Wexford Science & Technology ("Wexford") and Atrium Health ("Atrium") are developing an Innovation District (also known as The Pearl) that will include mixed uses such as a medical school, research buildings, office and retail space and housing. The project is located on approximately 26 acres along McDowell Street between Stonewall Street and Morehead Street.

On December 7, 2021, the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) adopted a Resolution approving an Interlocal Agreement with the City of Charlotte for a reimbursement of public improvements to be constructed by a private developer in support of new economic development opportunities by committing 90% of the incremental ad valorem taxes created by the project for a period of fifteen years and not to exceed value of \$38,356,477.

At the time this project was presented to the BOCC, it was estimated that the private investments would total approximately \$1.5 billion.

The total cost of the public infrastructure included in the project is \$94.2 Million. A tax increment grant (TIG) in the amount of \$60,000,000 from the City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County is to support the development the public infrastructure, to include:

- Purposeful Walk, Cycle Track & Plaza*
- Regional Parking Deck*
- New / Improved Roads*
- Pedestrian Underpass*
- Intersection Improvements*
- Transmission Line Relocation*
- Storm Culvert Relocation*
- Public Sanitary and Water Line*
- Grading & Demo*

The mechanism to finance this reimbursement will be a 15-year, 90% tax increment grant based on the new, incremental ad valorem taxes created by the project to be constructed by the developer. This arrangement is pursuant to Article 20 of Chapter 160A of the North Carolina General Statutes. Under this Article, the City of Charlotte entered into an infrastructure reimbursement agreement with the developer for the entirety of the \$60,000,000 tax increment grant. The City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County entered into an interlocal agreement whereby the County will remit to the City 90% of the County's incremental ad valorem taxes for a period of no more than 15 years for an estimated County share of \$38,356,477.

In addition to the public infrastructure improvements, Wexford and Atrium presented other community benefits associated with the project to include new jobs, affordable/workforce housing, workforce development initiatives/economic mobility and promoting the growth of small businesses and entrepreneurs.

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2024 Q4 STATUS REPORT

The Pearl is providing the data herein at the request of Mecklenburg County. In Q4 and early Q1, the Pearl solidified an academic partnership with CMS as well as receiving approval for The Pearl's Early College, which will educate high school students from Hawthorne across 4 pathways that lead directly to job placement. Construction continues to progress on schedule with plans to open The Pearl in June 2025. Targeting June 2, 2025 to celebrate The Pearl, its partners and the Brooklyn community via a dedication of the Purposeful Walk.

INVESTMENT TO DATE

\$965

MILLION

Private Funding

\$0

MILLION

City of Charlotte CIP Funding

\$0

MILLION

TIG Funding

TOTAL FUNDED TO DATE

\$965

MILLION

PROGRESS TO GOAL



RECENTLY COMPLETED

- ✓ Recently completed public improvements include completion of storm culvert which benefits all of uptown Charlotte and paving for sidewalks, Pearl plaza and Jacob's Ladder.
- ✓ \$2.3M commitment to Charlotte Small Business Growth Fund completed in May 2024.
- ✓ Over 5,000 construction jobs created to date, with 700 employees on site each day on average (760 at peak).
- ✓ Funds in place to provide scholarships to students pursuing healthcare careers.
- ✓ MOU for CMS partnership supporting NextUP STEM programming signed in January 2025. Program launched in July 2024 with teacher PD program. See detail on slides 3 and 4.
- ✓ Pearl Community Advisory Council established in January 2024. 4th meeting held in December. Currently electing a Youth At Large Seat rep.
- ✓ Early College at The Pearl approved by Joint Advisory Committee and State Board of Education. Via this new program, CCHS plans to place 100 students annually into 4 healthcare pathways, with ultimate placement into jobs at Advocate Health as an extension of Rise to Success program.



STEPS IN PROGRESS

- Purposeful Walk and Jacob's Ladder is currently under construction. Completion est. Spring 2025. Driven by Advocate investment/leadership and the community via Purposeful Walk Steering Co. Purposeful Walk Dedication, open to the Community, being planned for June 2025.
- Public improvements under construction include parking improvements, sidewalk development on Innovate Lane and East Lawn seating wall (public greenspace).
- 29.2% MWSBE awarded % of total cost of work across total project (vertical builds + infrastructure). Monthly reporting to CBI based on requirements of Mecklenburg County and City.
- New partnership with Boston Scientific announced, which includes bringing their Close The Gap health equity research platform to Charlotte (1 of 2 US cities the company is prioritizing for research).
- WFSOM leadership working with JCSU on creation of pre-med program as well as connection to Academic Alliance.
- Affordable housing: We have advanced discussions with Inlavin and City of Charlotte regarding development of the North Tryon site.
- Public parking construction nearly complete with spaces intended for public use during nights and weekends.



FUTURE MILESTONES

- Wexford announced plans to develop Wexford Connect Labs which is designed to accommodate researchers, small startups and serve as soft-landing space to support Charlotte's business attraction efforts.
- The Pearl's Early College will welcome students from Hawthorne Health Sciences Academy into the Pearl, with plans to ultimately place 100 students per year into jobs.
- Extending Rise to Success into Philip O'Berry with a track focused on surgical tech training and job placement directly from high school.
- Both buildings in Phase IA on track to achieve a LEED Gold (versus Silver) Certification and combined will be the largest Net Zero Carbon buildings in Charlotte.
- Pearl programming will begin in May 2025 in walkable, open, indoor and outdoor spaces. Programs will include art and pop-up activities, speakers, food truck events, wellness events and activities that recognize the history of Brooklyn.
- Solidified partnership with CPCC around Biomedical Equipment Technology training. CP students in this track will receive internship and apprenticeship placements at Advocate (and other Pearl partners) as part or partnership.

NEXT STEPS

Economic development student currently underway to determine the direct, indirect and induced job impact of The Pearl's first two buildings, opening June 2025. We are engaged in discussions to bring a food and beverage partner to The Pearl. Inclusive hiring practices are at the core of our partner selection process, and the front-runner has a proven track record of successful inclusive hiring in Charlotte.

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TIG REQUIRED COMMITMENTS

INVESTMENT TO DATE

\$965
MILLION
Private Funding

\$0
MILLION
City of Charlotte CIP
Funding

\$0
MILLION
TIG Funding

TOTAL FUNDED TO DATE

\$965
MILLION

KEY POINTS FOR BIENNIAL REPORTS

PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS



- Recently completed public improvements include completion of storm culvert which benefits all of uptown Charlotte, paving for sidewalks on Innovate Lane, Pearl plaza and Jacob's Ladder, and East Lawn seating wall (public greenspace).
- Completion of Purposeful Walk and Jacob's Ladder is estimated Spring 2025. Driven by Advocate investment/ leadership and the community via Purposeful Walk Steering Committee.
- Purposeful Walk Dedication, open to the Community, planned for June 2025.
- We have advanced discussions with Inlivan and City of Charlotte regarding development of the North Tryon site.
- Public parking construction nearly complete with spaces intended for public use during nights and weekends.



SUSTAINABILITY

- Both buildings in Phase IA on track to achieve a LEED Gold (versus Silver) Certification
- Stats on largest Net Zero Carbon buildings in Charlotte

PROJECT PARTICIPATION



- 29.2% MWSBE awarded % of total cost of work across total project (vertical builds + infrastructure). Monthly reporting to CBI based on requirements of County and City agreement.
- Over 5,000 construction jobs created to date, with 700 employees on site each day on average (760 at peak).

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OTHER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



BUSINESS ATTRACTION

- Wexford opening Wexford Connect Labs, designed to accommodate researchers, small startups and serve as soft-landing space to support Charlotte's business attraction efforts.
- New partnership with Boston Scientific announced, which includes bringing their Close The Gap health equity research platform to Charlotte (1 of 2 US cities the company is prioritizing for research).
- \$2.3M commitment to Charlotte Small Business Growth Fund completed in May 2024.

TALENT PIPELINE DEVELOPMENT



- MOU for CMS partnership supporting NextUP STEM programming signed in January 2025. Program launched in July 2024 with teacher PD program. See detail on slides 3 and 4.
- Early College at The Pearl approved by Joint Advisory Committee and State Board of Education. Via this new program, CCHS plans to place 100 students annually into 4 healthcare pathways, with ultimate placement into jobs at Advocate Health as an extension of Rise to Success program. Students will matriculate from Hawthorne Health Sciences Academy.
- Extending Rise to Success (certification and hiring program) into Philip O'Berry with a track focused on surgical tech training and job placement directly from high school.
- WFSOM leadership working with JCSU on creation of pre-med program as well as connection to Academic Alliance.
- Solidified partnership with CPCC around Biomedical Equipment Technology training. Students in this track will receive internship or apprenticeship placements as part of partnership.



OTHER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

- Pearl Community Advisory Council established in January 2024. 4th meeting held in December. Currently electing a Youth At Large Seat rep
- Pearl programming will begin in May 2025 in walkable, open, indoor and outdoor spaces. Programs will include art and pop-up activities, speakers, food truck events, wellness evens and activities that recognize the history of Brooklyn.

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 NextUp STEM Workforce Engagement				
Q1: January – March 2024				
Focus	Reach	Impact	Pearl Link	Big Picture
Planning and preparation for programming and teacher professional learning	N/A	Established industry partnerships and set up pilot program structure	Ensured STEM programming aligns with The Pearl's biomedical engineering, medtech, sustainability, and AI/tech in healthcare focus areas of the district. Built industry-backed pathways that meet workforce demands.	Economic Growth: Life sciences job growth projected at 8% annually. AI in healthcare expected to grow 30% by 2030, with significant investment in Charlotte's healthcare corridor. Early investment in STEM ensures talent pipeline alignment.
Teacher professional learning and workforce development alignment	15 Innovation Ambassadors	Ongoing training ensures 515+ CMS students annually receive Pearl industry STEM-aligned instruction in class	Ambassadors embed Pearl-related programming into their schools, reinforcing pathways to careers in life sciences, medical technology, and AI-driven healthcare.	High-Wage Jobs: Healthcare simulation is projected to be a \$7B+ industry by 2030. AI-skilled healthcare professionals are in critical demand. Early exposure and career-aligned learning create stronger local workforce retention.
Q2: April – June 2024				
Industry exposure for students	20 Olympic HS engineering students	Hands-on engagement in civil engineering and sustainability with RJ Leeper.	Directly supports The Pearl's focus on smart building technologies, green energy, and healthcare infrastructure. Aligns with regional efforts in sustainable urban development.	Regional Demand: 40% of STEM jobs in NC by 2030 will be engineering-related. Sustainability careers growing at 10-15% annually. Civil and biomedical engineers are increasingly needed in healthcare facility planning.
Industry exposure for students	115 middle school students from Freedom School Partner sites	Hands-on engagement in healthcare simulation technology with Carolinas Simulation Center	Pipeline for Hawthorne Health Sciences Pathway and Charlotte's expanding medtech sector, ensuring early exposure to healthcare careers.	Industry Acceleration: Medical simulation and health analytics are key drivers of AI and healthcare automation. The sector is projected to add 500,000+ jobs nationwide by 2030.
Q3: July – September 2024				
STEM Immersion	15 Innovation Ambassadors	Ongoing training ensures 515+ CMS students annually receive Pearl industry STEM-aligned instruction in class	Ensures consistent, industry-informed STEM education, reinforcing Charlotte's medtech workforce pipeline.	STEM Retention: STEM retention increases by 20% when students experience continuous exposure K-12. Creates a sustainable local talent pipeline for industry partners like Medtronic, Siemens, Atrium Health.
Regular STEM programming through pilot schools	816a Students (Walter G. Byers, Metro, Collinswood, Lansdowne, Northridge, Levine Children's)	Ongoing/sustained student engagement -classroom integration	Students build foundational skills in medical technology, sustainability, and engineering, ensuring workforce readiness for The Pearl's industry partners (Medtronic, Siemens, Atrium Health, etc.).	Future Workforce: AI & healthcare analytics projected to add 500,000+ jobs nationwide by 2030. Early alignment ensures Charlotte remains competitive in life sciences and medtech talent development.
Ongoing Brooklyn VR Project (monthly)	30 Philip G. Berry computer science students	Building VR and digital innovation skills.	Directly connects to Pearl's focus on simulation technology, virtual surgical training, medical device design, and healthcare applications training, and AI-driven healthcare education.	Tech Economy Growth: Digital health, AR/VR in healthcare, and AI-driven medical training are expected to be \$50B+ industries by 2030.
Q4: October – December 2024				
Workforce exposure for underrepresented students	90 East Meck HS girls	Introduced to medtech careers through Medtronic panel.	Supports Pearl's workforce initiatives by expanding pipeline of women in STEM and medtech fields.	Equity in STEM: Women make up only 28% of the STEM workforce. Medtech is a \$500B+ industry growing at 6.4% annually. Developing diverse pipelines strengthens Charlotte's global competitiveness.
Healthcare and sustainability programming	20 Wilson STEM Middle School students	Learned about food science and sustainability at Sanger Heart and Vascular.	Supports The Pearl's focus on healthcare sustainability and life sciences innovation.	Job Growth: Biomedical engineering careers expected to grow 10% by 2030. Healthcare sustainability projected to create 100K+ jobs globally.
Vocational training for special education students (weekly)	16 Metro School students (ages 18-22)	Hands-on exposure to medical plastics and entrepreneurship at Innovation Barn.	Connects to Pearl's work in medical material sustainability and inclusive workforce development.	Inclusive Workforce: Disability-inclusive hiring improves retention and workforce participation rates. Careers in accessible healthcare and sustainable medtech growing at 12% annually.
STEM Kit Launch (Innovation & Sustainability)	1,000 students across the region	Introduced to biomedical engineering and life sciences industries.	Directly supports The Pearl's commitment to early workforce engagement in healthcare innovation and life sciences.	Industry Impact: STEM-related jobs in life sciences and sustainability projected to grow 12-15% nationwide by 2030. Early engagement increases workforce readiness and industry alignment.

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Workforce Development Engagement Deeper Dive: Mecklenburg County Only

STEM Lab: In 2024, NextUp directly engaged students from 9 CMS partners, spanning K-12, including educators:

- Directly Engaged CMS Students: 415+
- Additional Reach (STEM Kits, Informal Programming, including summer engagement with NPOs e.g. Freedom School Partners, Dottie Rose Foundation): 1,000+
- Total Unique Student Touchpoints/Experiences in 2024: 1,415+

Total Teacher Experiences in 2024:

- Teacher Networking Events: 3

Hours of Teacher One-on-One STEM Coaching – September 2024-present: 48 (*Teachers are paid for their time*)

Early College at The Pearl: Approved by Joint Advisory Committee and State Board of Education. Via this new program, CCHS and Hawthorne will place 100 students annually into 4 healthcare pathways, with ultimate placement into jobs at Advocate Health as an extension of Rise to Success program.

- Pathways include neurodiagnostics technologist, nursing, radiology technologist, healthcare simulation
- 100 students per year across these years which will flow into entry level jobs for each graduating class
- Exploring fifth pathway, surgical technician, with Philip O'Berry high school to support future IRCAD job needs

Economic development study currently underway to determine the direct, indirect and induced job impact of The Pearl's first two buildings, opening June 2025



PROJECT SPOTLIGHT



CULVERT FINAL CONCRETE POUR COMPLETE



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the pearl

Weekly Progress Report

01/20/2025 - 01/24/2025

Work Completed This Week (1/20 - 1/24)

- C4E AHCO – Elevator Lobby Ceiling Install Began
- C4E AHCO – WF-1 arrived to site and prep began
- C4E – Began TCO process for T/I rooms on levels 3, 4, 5, & 9
- C4E – Started Terrazzo and wood flooring in the L1 forum
- C4E – Began hanging and finishing loading dock ceiling
- C4E – Completed Level 11 and Level 12 GWB-2 ceiling spray
- C4E Connector - Wood flooring in auditorium complete this week
- INF – Completed paver install in sequence 7
- INF – Continued grading, forming, and tying rebar for Innovate Lane sidewalks
- INF – Completed Plaza local storm
- INF – Completed concrete pours for culvert
- R1 – Final cleaning from level 7 through MP
- R1 – Started R9 shaft work
- R1 – Completed R8 channel steel
- R1 IRCAD – Install Remaining Bathroom Specialties
- R1 IRCAD – Begin Install of Fortress Panels in Surgical Ballroom
- R1 IRCAD – Install Wall Tile

Work Planned For Next Week (1/27 - 1/31)

- C4E AHCO – Installation of Hard Wood Floors in Elevator Lobbies
- C4E AHCO – L15 Lighting Install on going.
- C4E – Auditorium millwork install starting
- C4E – Balance of forum ceiling
- INF – Complete east lawn Seatwall
- INF – Continue pouring paver subbase and installing pavers
- R1 – Complete close up of R7/R8 Elevators
- R1 – Generate BR+A Punchlist for R1
- R1 – L1 Bathroom vanity install
- R1 IRCAD – Continue Install of Flooring on Level 4
- R1 IRCAD – Continue Install of Fortress Panels
- R1 IRCAD – Hang Hard Lid Ceiling Drywall on Level 2 Assembly
- R1 IRCAD – Begin Install of Medical Equipment at Sterile Processing Rooms

Wake Forest University School of Medicine

Atrium Health

WEXFORD
SCIENCE+TECHNOLOGY

Wake Forest University School of Medicine

R1L

Comments

Commissioner Altman said she appreciated the global update and representations Atrium made to the public and County Commissioners. She said they agreed to the Tax Increment Grant (TIG), and it was the Board's obligation to ensure a 1:1 ratio between those promises and commitments and what ultimately got delivered. She asked for more details regarding the off-site workforce housing as well as on-site. She asked them to follow up with information on who was on the advisory committee and what specific steps they had undertaken to ensure community alignment with the work in the innovation district.

Commissioner Altman said she was especially interested in district jobs. She said the original goal was that one in four health jobs would not require a bachelor's degree and pay 66% more than the

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average roles. She said that was a very important factor for her. *Mr. Lane said the schools would open on July 7th, and the College of Health Science would be open on August 25th.*

Commissioner Altman asked, given the proximity from August to March 11th, how many jobs did they anticipate opening, what the categories were, and what salaries were anticipated. *Mr. Lane said they would have to do a separate review of the economic impact report. He said they were direct, indirect, and induced jobs, which they all represented. He said the idea was that it was a multiplier for those jobs.*

Commissioner Altman said it was urgent to have that information. She asked what strategy they had in place for marketing and reaching people in harder-to-reach areas. *Mr. Lane said that would benefit from a separate presentation.*

Ms. Crittendon said, from a strategic perspective, many of the programs were ones of which Atrium had been building for years and they and they leveraged relationships in the community to build a lot of them. She said the work they had been doing around early college and talent pipelining was focused on Title 1 schools and giving those students pathways into jobs, as well as connecting closely with Central Piedmont with certification courses that aligned with the industry.

Mr. Lane said it was a ten-year plan, and there would not be 5,000 jobs to start on day one, but they would multiply.

Commissioner Powell thanked the presenter and said TIGs often went unchecked in other counties, but that would not happen in Mecklenburg County. She said she was concerned that there were several complaints about the area around Atrium Main, which was a green space, but people often went there to smoke.

Commissioner Powell said she would like more details regarding their actions in sustainability. She said she had received complaints regarding the loss of tree canopy on the Cornelius campus. Mr. Lane said they spent \$38 million improving the mile stretch between East Boulevard and Moorehead. He said they worked in partnership with the County and City to bury lines along it, *and they had about \$3 billion of investment in Mecklenburg County.*

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell asked for a status update on their goal of becoming completely carbon neutral by 2025 and if they had been able to follow through with utilizing the registered apprenticeships.

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell said her focus was on the TIG, and the project was very complex. She said it seemed they were looking for a way to avoid paying property and sales taxes, and the Board would like transparency and visibility on which buildings were or were not taxed or part of the TIG. She said she had heard there would be \$17 million in sales tax, but Atrium received an \$8 million rebate check from Mecklenburg County. *Mr. Lane said they were on a 90% TIG with*

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the investment they had made. He said there was a lot of sustainability work being done, and the building was a leading carbon-zero building because they were fully electrified.

Commissioner Griffin said it had many moving parts and asked if they had communicated with the UNC system to facilitate the transfer of credits if students decided to pursue a four-year degree or if they planned to partner with the UNC system.

Commissioner Griffin asked if there was a salary range published for the four pathways through their early college program. *Mr. Lane said they began with a living wage, which was the lowest they paid, at \$17.50.*

Ms. Crittendon said they worked closely with the UNC school system and other programs. She said the early college program allowed students to start as early as 9th grade and would allow them to receive their CNA certification over those four years and earn articulated credits that could be used towards other degrees, as well as the opportunity to be placed in the roles referenced. She said they could dive further into the specifics. She said the students would be able to receive all of that schooling for free because it would be done in high school, and they could pull the salary range information as well.

Commissioner Dunlap said he was excited about the project, and people often thought about the public's benefit of receiving the TIG. He said that if they had read the document, they would know why the TIG was beneficial.

Commissioner Dunlap said he was very excited about the MWBE participation and rewards. He said he was confident they would follow through and be a part of the County for a long time. He said the project was just beginning and there would be years of improvement. *Mr. Lane said it created a talent attractant magnet which put Charlotte on the map for all the other downstream benefits.*

Commissioner Townsend-Ingram said \$17.50 was not a livable wage, and they should consider ensuring they had the right representation in who they chose to partner with. She said they should also make sure they had the data and set up the foundation to ensure they could collect the right data. She said they should be able to explain the impact to the public. *Mr. Lane said the \$17.50 was the starting wage for the health system across all their hospitals, but there were very few at that starting wage. He said that on the campus they were discussing, those jobs were pipelines and higher-wage jobs.*

Commissioner Altman felt it was very important for them to receive information regarding the number of jobs, how many per category, and the salary. She said she was looking to see a strategy for how they would reach the harder-to-reach parts of the community and their advertising plans.

Commissioner Powell said she liked all the language about education and pathways. She said it was historically available to healthcare workers, and there were always pathways for people. She said

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she was glad they mentioned attracting talent.

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell said she was mindful of the downstream benefits, and it was very exciting. She said their revenue dip was also real, and it was important that the public felt confident they were really taking their jobs seriously and making sure the financial obligations were fulfilled. She said she could not explain what she could not see, which was why she wanted more information around the TIG, as the complexity made it opaque, regardless of whether it was with nefarious intent.

Commissioner Griffin expressed his appreciation for their work and said he would like to hear from Hillary on how those pathways would materialize.

Chair Jerrell thanked the Board for their questions and said he noticed the desire for transparency and accountability. He said the opportunity to maximize their priorities as a Board was what they could view it as, and he appreciated the partnership with the project.

Chair Jerrell said it was important for the Board to know when they would get that information and data back. He said he encouraged people to reach out to the Board members to share information and from a community perspective, he wanted it known that it was discussed with his constituents in district 4.

25-0156 WOMEN'S ADVISORY BOARD FISCAL YEAR 2026 BUDGET PRIORITIES

The Board received budget priorities for Fiscal Year 2026 from the Women's Advisory Board.

Elyse Hamilton-Childers, Community Support Services Prevention & Intervention Director
Adrian Cox, Budget Director

Background: As requested by the Board of Commissioners, each year advisory boards are provided the opportunity to present their budget priorities to the Board as part of the annual budget process. Denawa Alberti, Chair of The Women's Advisory Board (WAB), will present the advisory board's FY2026 budget priorities.



Women's Advisory Board FY26 Budget Priority Recommendations

Presented to the Mecklenburg
Board of County Commissioners
March 11, 2025

Key Priorities

Identified Based on Statistical Data and Community Feedback

<input type="checkbox"/>	Access to Healthcare and Childcare	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Women Entrepreneurship	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Accessible Housing and Transitional Shelters	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhancing Education and Job Training Opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mental Health Resources	<input type="checkbox"/>



Access to Childcare and Healthcare

Findings

Childcare Access:

- **Working Parents:** An estimated 66% of children under six in NC live in households where all parents are employed, underscoring the critical need for accessible childcare. (childcarenc.org)
- **Cost of Care:** The average annual cost of center-based care for a preschooler consumes 40% of the median income for a single-parent family in NC, highlighting significant affordability challenges. (childcarenc.org)

Healthcare Access:

- **Primary Care Access in Mecklenburg County:** Approximately 15% of residents aged 19-64 lacked health insurance in 2020, limiting access to essential healthcare services. (<https://health.mecknc.gov/>)



Childcare and Healthcare Access

Recommendations

Increase	Increase Subsidized Child Care Funding by expanding existing child care subsidy program to assist more low-and middle-income families. Streamline eligibility requirements to reduce barriers.
Support	Offer grants or tax incentives for businesses that provide onsite childcare or child care stipends. Encourage public-private partnership to establish workplace-based childcare centers.
Consider	Expanding Pre-K Access. Continue supporting of funding for NC Pre-K to accommodate more eligible children in Mecklenburg County.
Establish	Create a multi-agency task force focused on improving maternal health, reproductive rights, and chronic disease prevention. Leverage partnerships with healthcare providers, nonprofits and local universities.



Entrepreneurship

Findings

- **Economic Inequality**
 - As of 2022, 13.1% of women aged 18 and over in NC were living in poverty. (nationalpartnership.org)
- **Business Ownership**
 - Women own approximately 44.2% of businesses across NC.
 - In 2023, NC was ranked as the second-best state in the US for women-owned businesses, trailing only NY. (2024 Wells Fargo Impact of Women-Owned Businesses Report)
- **Employment and Revenue**
 - As of 2023, women-owned firms in the US employ 12.2 million people and generate \$2.7 trillion in sales. (governor.nc.gov)



Entrepreneurship

Recommendations



Continue and expand programs like Business Launchpad to continue to empower women-owned businesses



Expand Small Business Incubators for Women
Establish more business incubators and accelerators that provide mentorship, networking, and office space for women entrepreneurs. Continue to foster collaboration between public-private sectors to provide technical and leadership support to these business.



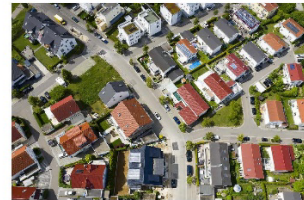
Provide funding for digital and financial literacy training through existing partnership with institutions like CPCC, etc. to assist women who are struggling with access to capital.



Accessible and Transitional Housing

Findings

- **Housing Wage:** In 2023, the housing wage in NC—the hourly wage needed to afford a modest two-bedroom rental was \$25.21. This means a minimum-wage worker (\$7.25/hour) would need to work approximately 139 hours per week to afford such housing. (nchousing.org)
- Approximately **25%** of renter households in NC are extremely low-income, with a shortage of about 195,661 affordable rental homes for these households.
- **Unsheltered Homelessness:** The 2024 Point-in-Time count reported 384 individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the county, marking a 33% increase since 2023.
- **Poverty Rates:** NC ranks 38th nationally for the percentage of women living in poverty (13.6%), with rates exceeding 20% among Hispanic, Native American, and Black women.
- **Housing Instability:** Women, especially single mothers, are disproportionately affected by housing instability, often spending more than 30% of their income on housing.
- Between 11% and 36% of youth aging out of foster care experience homelessness during their transition to adulthood, a rate substantially higher than the 4% observed in the general young adult population.



Accessible and Transitional Housing

Recommendations

Continue Funding for Nonprofits Specializing in Women's Housing Needs
Strengthen partnerships with organizations that focus transitional housing.

Support Trauma-Informed Housing Programs
Ensure transitional housing facilities integrate mental health services, especially for domestic violence survivors or formerly incarcerated women.

Leverage County-Owned Land for Affordable Housing
Continue to support utilizing county-owned properties for housing developments.



Enhance Education & Job Training Opportunities

Findings

- Women represent nearly 61% of unemployment insurance claimants in Mecklenburg County, despite comprising 52% of the population. (charlottework.com)
- Industries such as Education & Health Services and Leisure & Hospitality, which are predominantly female-staffed, have experienced significant layoffs, exacerbating unemployment among women.



Education & Job Training

Recommendations



Continue to support pre-apprenticeship programs for women in male-dominated fields like tech, construction (e.g. She Built This City).



Expand partnerships for re-entry programs for women returning to work after caregiving, incarceration or domestic violence.



Provide additional funding for job placement and career coaching services to continue to provide these vital services.



Create more awareness campaigns of existing county programs that provide job training, specifically programs sponsored through the local DSS and libraries.



Mental Wellness

Findings

- One in four NC women has been diagnosed with a depressive disorder
- Recent CDC study found 1 in 10 women reported an episode of major depression within the last year.
- Nearly 3 in 5 teen girls (57%) felt sad or hopeless.
- Financial barriers, accessibility challenges, and stigmas surrounding mental health leave many reluctant to seek treatment.



Mental Wellness

Recommendations

- Continue to support facilities such as the Behavioral Health Urgent Care that provide greater access to care
- Continue to create more awareness for MeckHope and continue language expansion to include more languages
- Expand partnerships to co-locate mental health providers such as therapists or counselors within areas that community members frequently access such as nonprofits that partner with the county
- Provide additional funding for social workers and mental health professionals at CMS
- Explore pipeline program with local colleges to recruit clinicians and social workers to the County



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Thank you!

Mecklenburg County Women's Advisory Board
Denawa Alberti, Chair



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Comments

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell said she loved their priorities and recommendations from the start. She said she wanted to highlight that they had five vacant seats and find out if they had applicants. *Kristine Smith, Clerk to the Board, said there were applicants coming to the upcoming Board meeting.*

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell said she loved their board as they were thoughtful and did wonderful presentations. She said someone from their group should run for office because it made her think they had good candidates.

Commissioner Dunlap said they had great presentations and made great progress. He said the age range of 19-64 was a very wide range. He said they should narrow the focus and said the seniors should be a separate category. He asked if the committee could review applicants before they went before the Board. He said he would like to see a response to their concerns because many of the things they were asking them to do were already being done. *Ms. Smith said when they got applicants, they were forwarded so they could review them. She said, if they had the minimum requirements, they were passed on.*

Commissioner Townsend-Ingram said her presentation was so well done that it sparked more and more questions she wanted to drill down on. She asked if they had statistics that spoke of housing or lacked adequate health insurance. She said it related to pregnant black women, as they had the highest rate of infant mortality, and how that impacted one and the other, likewise, regarding seniors. She said if they were unhoused, they were likely unfed, and they needed to know where the gaps were.

Commissioner Griffin thanked the staff and the presenter. He said the federal government was no longer building public housing, so all the recommendations and findings identified in the presentation just made it feel they had to double down on upward mobility to help the community residents get the skills and opportunities to get the jobs coming online. He said the need for healthcare was apparent.

Commissioner Griffin asked if the Pearl would provide on-site childcare.

Commissioner Powell asked how they could raise awareness of domestic violence. Ms. Hamilton-Childers said it was important to let people know what was available. *She also mentioned having advocates go into the community to speak because word-of-mouth was important. She said they had to be intentional in getting information out in different ways.*

Commissioner Powell said there were so many hospitalized patients who left and went back, so if they could partner with Atrium and Novant to provide the Get Help number, so when they

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were ready, they could help. She asked Ms. Hamilton-Childers to speak more with the advisory board and return with information on how the Board could do more and do better.

Chair Jerrell said he thought the presentation was outstanding. He said understanding and grounding the Board in what their key priorities were, as a Board, helped him go through the presentation. He said he felt she helped them understand her findings extremely well, and her findings were very grounded and rooted in things that could impact the folks they were very concerned about. He said her key priorities, findings, and recommendations really aligned with the Board's goals and priorities. He said he saw real intentionality in that, and the feedback she received showed how much they appreciated that.

Ms. Hamilton-Childers said her team was extremely involved and passionate about the work they did. Chair Jerrell said that was apparent, and he appreciated that.

25-0083 CITIZEN ADVISORY BOARD BUDGET PRIORITIES – AIR QUALITY COMMISSION

The Board received information regarding the budget priorities from the Air Quality Commission, a citizen advisory board to Board of County Commissioners.

Leslie Rhodes, LUESA, Air Quality Director and Peter McGrath Chair to the Air Quality Commission gave a verbal presentation.

Ms. Rhodes said her team and division were one of three certified local air quality programs in North Carolina. She said their mission was to lead and assist Mecklenburg County toward meeting and maintaining the federal health-based national ambient quality standards. She said they did so by improving air quality, measuring air pollution, and listening and responding to residents, businesses, and community partners in the County and around the State.

Mr. McGrath said their charter authorized them to do many things, including making their annual report, which they would do later in the year, and advising the Board on how to ensure Mecklenburg County maintained a certified local air quality program.

Mr. McGrath said most of the air quality statutes, regulations, and rules that govern Mecklenburg County air quality were federal and enforced by the EPA. He said the federal government delegated authority to run the Federal program to the state of North Carolina, which then delegated the authority to the County. Therefore, all federal air pollution law in Mecklenburg County was implemented and run by the County. He said it was the goal of the County to keep that authorization in perpetuity.

Mr. McGrath said one priority for the budget was to ensure adequate funding for the County air quality to ensure the local certification would continue in the next fiscal year. He said they

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discussed with Ms. Rhodes the budget request they would make as part of LUESA's budget, and they were confident that her budget request would allow that.

Mr. McGrath asked the Board and the County Manager's Office to allocate funding to Ms. Rhodes' division to ensure the diversity of the staff mirrored the diversity of the community. He said their final priority was to increase funding to the Mecklenburg County air quality to ensure and expand outreach to the community, especially environmental justice frontline communities.

Mr. McGrath said they believed air quality across the County was fairly uniform and homogenous. He said they believed awareness of air quality issues and information was not evenly distributed. He said they wanted to expand education and outreach activities to those areas of the County where they believed information, access to, and awareness of air quality issues were not as great as it was in other parts of the County.

Mr. McGrath said it was understood that a significant portion of funding derived from federal grants but if those priorities were considered, the Board, County Manager, Ms. Rhodes, and the Air Quality Commission would have to monitor diversity efforts and outreach efforts to ensure compliance with federal law and policy, so they did not jeopardize any of the federal funding. He said, speaking personally, he was concerned that, to an extent, any federal funding that had been available for those kinds of efforts in the past would not be as available in the future.

Comments

Commissioner Powell thanked Mr. McGrath for his work.

Commissioner Dunlap said it was good to know they were following the rules. He asked if, even though there were federal mandates being carried out, did the federal government give the money to the State, if the State added additional dollars, or if they only got the federal dollars. *Ms. Rhodes said they received federal grants through the USEPA, a portion of the gasoline tax from North Carolina, and collected fees for permitting in compliance services with the County.*

Commissioner Dunlap asked, if based on all executive orders that had been signed, were there any eliminations or rollbacks. *Ms. Rhodes said nothing had yet been rescinded or frozen and they were actively continuing to draw down the federal funds.*

Commissioner Griffin thanked Mr. McGrath for his commitment.

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell asked if the implementation through the County was a statewide occurrence rather than a unique situation. Mr. McGrath said the State was authorized to implement the federal clean air programs in North Carolina, and 97 counties were state-run and 3 were *county-run*.

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Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell said she appreciated their efforts to ensure diversity. She said it was interesting that air quality was equal across the County, but education was not.

Commissioner Townsend-Ingram said she was thinking further into education and asked if they had reciprocal agreements with CMS (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools). She said the most marginalized groups didn't understand the impact of air quality. *Mr. McGrath said they did not have any formal understandings but worked with them continually. He said they learned that instead of going out to a particular community, they would try to partner with community associations or partner with schools, and said they would like to attend events and speak about air quality, as they did not need to create an audience if an audience was already there.*

Commissioner Altman said she appreciated the presenters as well as their work.

Chair Jerrell said he appreciated them as well as their focus on diversity and justice.

25-0166 COMMISSIONER REPORTS

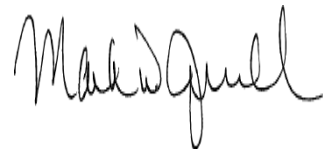
Commissioners shared information of their choosing within the guidelines as established by the Board, which included, but not limited to, past and/or upcoming events.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to come before the Board, Chair Dunlap declared the meeting adjourned at 4:27 p.m.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "A. Eason". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of "A" being large and stylized.

Arlissa Eason, Deputy Clerk to the Board

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Mark Jerrell". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized, with the first letter of "M" being large and prominent.

Mark Jerrell, Chair