



## Buncombe County Hurricane Helene Government Aid Requests February 2025

### Top Priorities

- **Local Government Recovery and Stabilization Grants.** Allocation of recovery funds directly to local jurisdictions to stabilize local government revenue, stabilize law enforcement and public safety funding and to aid in ongoing recovery efforts including, but not limited to, household assistance, infrastructure repair, and small business support. The impacts of revenue losses to Buncombe County have already necessitated a reduction in services, such as those provided by libraries, as well as reductions in the education budget allocation based on reduced collections across the board.
- **Permanent Housing Solutions for Displaced People.** The County's housing stock was constrained *before* the storm and now countless residents have been displaced their homes either for the short term or lost them indefinitely.
  - The County would advocate for a block grant model wherein state appropriations are made directly to counties for the purposes of not only new housing but also reconstruction, rehabilitation and repair. This model would ensure that the funds are deployed as quickly as possible to help storm victims.
  - Another solution the General Assembly should consider is repurposing, and potentially deeding to affected counties, underutilized state-owned land for the construction of new permanent housing. Examples of underutilized state land where this could be employed exist in the Swannanoa and Woodfin communities.
- **Additional Support for Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program Administration and Management.** There is a need for funding assistance with administration, engineering and permitting fees associated with participation in the program, which has become more critical than ever before. It is cost prohibitive for many landowners who want to participate in the program, and therefore the County would request a cost-share appropriation to be deployed in order to meet demand for the program.



## Policy Priorities

- **Legislation delaying the scheduled equalization of public service companies due to the deferred FY25 property revaluations.**
- **Support Additional Resources for Mental and Behavioral Health including emergency responders, law enforcement and state employees.**

## Appropriations Priorities

- **Additional state funding for state employees, including K-12 and Community College education employee salaries.**
- **Business Recovery Loans/Grants.** Establishment and significant allocation of funds for a small business forgivable loan model with job/investment milestones and forgiveness terms similar to those found in economic incentive programs. This would allow for small businesses to continue or restart operations with the support of a potentially forgivable loan, providing further sustainability for the community as a whole.
- **Water and System Expansion and Redundancy.** Funding for residents of impacted communities to make residential septic repairs, as well as to facilitate the expansion of the current system to include the Candler Extension project, which was one of the County's top priorities on the 2024 legislative agenda. Additional funding is also being requested for redundancy and water system extension to connect to local utility providers and ensure service for local and state assets.
- **State funding for emergency response infrastructure, equipment and vehicles.** Emergency response needs including ambulance apparatus replacement (\$1.26M), fire department equipment, and preparedness and resiliency facilities to support future disaster events.
- **Reimbursement for Local School Consolidation Study Mandated by S.L. 2023-128.** The County respectfully requests a reimbursement for \$300,000 costs incurred related to the school consolidation study required by the General Assembly in 2023. The County has finalized the study and submitted it to the General Assembly. This request was previously a priority on the 2024 legislative agenda.

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