

**County of Ashe**  
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County Manager:

Adam Stumb

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**County Manager's Budget Message**

**FY 2020/21**

The proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2010-21 for Ashe County, North Carolina has been prepared in accordance with the North Carolina Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act and NC General Statute 153A-82.

**Current Budget:** The current year's budget, FY 2019/20 ends with uncertainty surrounding COVID19, which we anticipate continuing into the new budget cycle. No one expert can claim to understand the full impact this will have in the coming year, but there is consensus around the fact that things will not be the same. The biggest impact will be felt around sales and occupancy tax as the economy moves out of its standstill.

While the future does look grim, we should not discount the good work that has taken place in the current budget year. The Board of Commissioners have purchased property to open a new convenience site on Hwy 163; economic development is continuing through a proposed land purchase to expand on the existing industrial park; seven new vehicles have been purchased at the Sheriff's Office; and work continues at the airport on new fuel tanks, waterline and expansion of the taxiway and apron. These airport projects have been done almost exclusively with State and Federal grants. These accomplishments represent the highlights of all the good work that our County departments put into serving their community.

**Proposed Budget:** While department heads began the budget process early in the COVID19 outbreak, expectations and plans have changed. The recommended budget, to the best of our ability represents a conservative spending plan for the coming year. Spending was reduced or held in place, with some exceptions where there were prior obligations like equipment purchases at the landfill. The proposed budget also includes no new positions. Additionally a cost of living adjustment was not included and I will ask department heads to forgo any capital expenses for the first quarter of the year. A hiring freeze will be assessed as we enter into the budget year, but at this time, hiring will be addressed individually by department.

**Department of Social Services:** DSS and the Health Department will continue the work that has started this year in the developing of a new building for both departments. We are working close with an architect and engineer to begin planning and development which will roll into the proposed budget year.

**Public Buildings:** In addition to the regular upkeep for our buildings, the proposed budget includes installation of new security features at the courthouse. A key fob system is proposed to allow or limit access to certain parts of the building. This will allow the court system and other departments more control over who has access inside each individual suite.

**Law Enforcement and Corrections:** The proposed budget does not include the requested four deputies but does include an investment in new equipment for law enforcement which includes an additional new vehicles and an upgrade to VIPER radios for all officers. The Corrections budget shows a reduction in revenues because of uncertainty in the number of inmates we will have in the coming year because of fewer out of County inmates or State misdemeanor confinement inmates.

**Emergency Management:** The \$80,000 that was appropriated earlier has been included in the proposed budget for COVID19 related expenses. Expenses in Emergency Management will fluctuate with the number of cases we get in the county and the need to ramp up supplies and hospital space.

**Cooperative Extension:** The outlook for the High Country Commercial Kitchen looked positive earlier this year, but that outlook has changed. Development of the Kitchen had included two capital expense allotments for equipment, the first being \$30,000 in the current year. We have reduced that capital amount in the proposed budget to \$15,000. As the economy moves towards a recovery, the kitchen will be an asset to those looking to restart or to create a new business.

**Environmental Services (Collections & Disposal):** Included in the proposed budget are funds to begin construction of the Hwy 163 Convenience Site. The intent in increasing the Solid Waste Fee in last year's budget, was three fold. One, was to make improvements to the Hwy 16 site including signing a long term lease and paving the site. Two, was to purchase land for a new site along Hwy 163. And three, to construct the site at 163. This proposal will finish that plan, with construction beginning this Fall on the 163 Site, which will be completed by Spring 2021.

The significant increase on the disposal side is for engineering and assessment work at the landfill to begin the process of permitting a new cell. This new cell will guarantee that we have additional space at the landfill for approximately fifteen years. Permitting will take a minimum of three years to complete.

**Parks and Recreation:** In the Parks and Recreation budget is an amount to develop a new county wide parks and recreation master plan. The current plan was approved in 2006 and could no longer be used in application for a Parks and Recreational Trust Fund Grant. Additionally, the working plan is for the County to assume ownership of the current middle school property, which will need planning prior to being redeveloped for Parks and Recreation.

**Conclusion:** The proposed budget for the General Fund for fiscal year 2020/21 is \$37,775,363. The revenue neutral rate is .4443. This proposed budget is recommended with no change from the current tax rate. One local fire department, West Jefferson, has requested to increase their tax rate from .017 to .03.

This budget includes the hard work of all departments and without their dedication, it could not come together as it did. Our department heads and employees have answered the call to be good stewards of the money that the public entrust us with. As we begin a new year of uncertainty, I expect they will continue that and make sound decisions to carry us through a difficult year.

This budget document also would not come together without the help of the entire Finance and Administration Departments lead by Sandy Long and including Angie Eggers, Teresa Bare, Ashley Lambert, Barbara McCoy and Ann Clark.

I respectfully submit this budget to the Board of Commissioners, and welcome discussion of this proposal.

Adam Stumb  
County Manager