



Wilson County Government North Carolina

County Manager's Budget Message Fiscal Year 2026-2027

**Honorable Chair, members of the Board of County Commissioners and fellow citizens of
Wilson County:**

It is my honor to submit the Fiscal Year 2026-2027 (FY27) Recommended Budget. Our team approach included the County Manager, Finance Director, Deputy County Manager, Assistant County Manager, Assistant Finance Director and our Department Leaders. This budget, as presented, is balanced, and meets the requirements of the North Carolina Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act and has no tax increase. It is carefully guided by the Board of Commissioners' Five Core Values, Commissioner Committee guidance and is subject to a public hearing, your revisions, and approval.

Core Values



**Sound Financial
Management**



**Innovative County
Workforce**



**Community
Partnerships**



**Quality
of Life**



**Superior Education
& Workforce**

This year's budget is quite different than many budgets I have seen over the years. Imagine starting your budget planning with the following:

- No state budget, nor guidance from the state on what those funds will be, so you use prior year figures.
- The federal government changes the reimbursement rules for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, reducing reimbursement by 25% and the difference shifts to county funds. Wilson County's increase is likely close to \$900,000 this year and \$1.5 million next year. The state has not offered any assistance as of this presentation.
- Medicaid Special Assistance costs will drastically increase next fiscal year around \$1.5 million. Again, this is on the county funding side. As Kimberly Irvine, DSS Director, told you during her budget presentation, the state lifted the cap a few years back, MUAH's (Multi Unit Assistant Housing) have increased in Wilson County to Wake County levels and there is very little state oversight and no increased funding from the state.

These are the obstacles that we face in crafting this year's budget. Counties are required to pass a balanced budget by June 30th every year. So, we have worked diligently to craft a budget that provides county funds for state and federal unfunded mandates.

Our second challenge is the larger requests this year. I started the budget season by asking our departments to keep budgets flat as possible. They came through and I am proud of their budgets. We did have two areas that had sizable funding requests. Those requests combined with the mandated funds mentioned earlier made this budget additionally challenging. Here's a look at what that might look like if we considered those:

- Wilson County Public Schools - \$6 M increase / 5.8 cents increase tax rate
- Wilson County Sheriff's Dept - \$1.7 M increase / 1.5 cents increase tax rate
- Mandated SNAP unfunded costs shift - \$900,000 increase / 1 cent increase tax rate
- Mandated Medicaid SA unfunded costs - \$1.5M increase / 1.5 cents increase tax rate

If all of this was funded as requested, it would mean 9.8 cents on our tax rate. **I am not recommending this.** We are required to provide and pay for SNAP and Medicaid SA and this will be accomplished through a variety of budget reductions and cost shifts.

Wilson County has very low debt service. This year is the first year of our new debt service payments. The next 18 months are our heaviest payment years before numbers decline as we pay off older debt next fiscal year.



Sound Financial Management

Wilson County's continued growth drives our budgetary priorities, particularly capital planning. Commissioners have taken a proactive and strategic approach to address urgent capital needs while initiating a long-term planning process. Staff developed both short and long-term capital plans. This success reflects our commitment to strong, forward-thinking and financial leadership. After last year's budget was presented, Wilson County Government:

- Opened the new EMS North Central City station, serving 30% of our county's EMS responses. - \$1.5 million ARPA
- Started working with our architect on the new EMS East Station, following the quality design of the North Central City station. - \$1.8 million ARPA
- Opened the newly renovated Technology Services annex at the Blalock Building to better accommodate GIS and Technology staff that were doubled up in offices.
- Held a ribbon cutting for Wilson County Government Center on completed renovations.
- Broke ground on the new Sheriff's Training Center and we will soon celebrate its grand opening with a ribbon cutting. \$2.1 million ARPA

Major Capital and Planning

Major capital needs are funded through our Capital Improvements Plan and with funds approved for borrowing in December 2025 by the Local Government Commission.

Continuing our county's multi-year capital planning that began in 2024, with your guidance we Budgeted Capital, Built a Capital Improvements Plan and Began assessment of capital needs.
Goal Accomplished

We assessed and followed our capital improvements plan. In this budget we used our financial resources to accomplish short term/long term capital through borrowing and making capital plans sustainable, and we are advancing through that plan with completion of projects.

We have been on a journey to be less reactive and more proactive with capital needs allowing us to budget capital evenly. As our service needs increase, we must now: **Plan** growth within our footprint and expansion areas; **Prioritize** future needs wisely (urgent vs. nonurgent); **Preserve** taxpayer resources



Innovative County Workforce

Thank you for your support of compensating employees and maintaining market salaries. They are the driving force and the reason we can provide quality public services. To balance our compensation goals and meet the financial demands of this fiscal year, this budget recommends a delay to our salary adjustments until January 2027 after the annual audit to create additional savings. That proposed adjustment would be a 2.15% market adjustment and 2.85% step for a total of 5% salary adjustment effective January 1, 2027. This board's investment in employee compensation is vital to maintaining motivated and value-driven employees that provide essential services to citizens.



Community Partnerships

This budget continues funding for nonprofits. We have been studying our nonprofit spending over the years, and counties, more than ever, must focus our funds on what we are statutorily required to provide for our essential services. County government services are Human Services. We provide food, shelter, medical assistance, immunizations, healthcare and more through our statutorily required Department of Social Services, Health Department and Senior Services. In addition we provide Veteran Services. Starting this year, we are recommending additional reductions in nonprofit funds, with additional adjustments in the years ahead. The savings will shift to supporting the mandated quality human services we are required to fund. This budget funds non-profits at \$198,700.



Quality of Life

We continue positive indicators in our county's quality of life. That comes from investing in economic development, health and wellness, vital services and life/safety.

This budget funds economic development in partnership with the City of Wilson. In recent years we have seen two major announcements for two separate facilities from Johnson & Johnson, in addition Schott Pharma, Idexx, Reckitt (makers of Mucinex) and more. We have seen investments from companies that already call Wilson County home like Collins Aerospace. These real dollars support jobs and higher wages.

The new downtown professional ball stadium just opened for its first games and is in an active season. This budget funds the third of ten annual commitments of \$1 million per year for that project.

This recommended budget funds critical services at Emergency Management, Emergency Medical Services, Public Safety, and 911 communications. While the EMS budget is at \$11 million, the cost of one ambulance is now just over \$405,000.

As mentioned earlier, because of new federal requirements and state changes, county budgets for Departments of Social Services across the state have been hit with increases as federal reimbursements are reduced for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. This shifts the burden to the county. Over the last two years, our DSS Board and new director have worked to streamline services and staffing and have greatly reduced their budget while maintaining quality services. We continue to advocate the state and federal government to provide flexible options for implementation of HR1. Many counties call this “fund it or fix it” but for now, we must budget accordingly. DSS - \$14.6 million | Health \$10.7 million

Our public library and all branches assist citizens of all ages with resources for reading skills, supporting our youth’s educational attainment, research, career seeking and digital literacy. Our first-class bookmobile reaches our most rural areas connecting residents with services. This budget funds Library Services at \$2,961,283.



Superior Education and Workforce

Wilson County continues its strong financial support for Wilson County Public Schools and Wilson Community College. The Recommended FY27 Budget includes \$26,818,819.20 for current expense, representing a 2% increase above the prior fiscal year. Capital Outlay is recommended at \$1 million.

I’m proud that in December 2025, we achieved our goal of receiving the Local Government Commission’s approval of financing for the new Frederick Douglass Elementary and we adhered to the approved all-inclusive budget by Wilson County Commissioners of \$32 million. This budget includes new payments of \$2.2 million on the new school.

It should be noted that since 2017, Wilson County Commissioners have invested over \$81 million into school capital upgrades, including the Wilson Academy of Applied Technology and Frederick Douglass Elementary financing. And we will provide a \$2 million match to the state’s Needs Based Funding of \$42 million for the new Wells-Hearne Elementary school in the next 18 months.

Wilson Community College continues to improve its campus while providing valuable education and job training. This budget funds college capital at \$1 million and \$3,022,093 for current expense.

Budget Summary

The proposed Fiscal Year 2027 budget totals \$142,356,259. As recommended, it is based upon a \$0.595 tax rate with no increase. Wilson County traditionally budgets conservatively at 98% of collections and balances based on an amount that can be offset with a combination of greater than estimated revenues and expenditures less than appropriated. Our three largest service expenditures continue to be Human Services 27%, Public Safety 26%, and Education 22%.

This budget was created upon our best estimates regarding current and future revenues, North Carolina legislative actions, and department leader's funding guidance.

Budgeting taxpayer funds is something that our staff and this board take seriously. This budget reflects fiscal discipline, expenditure control and spending prioritizations. While we are facing a challenging budget year, we are positioned for stronger years ahead.

Budget Timeframe

After this budget presentation, May is for Commissioners' budget meetings. May 28, 2026, is the budget public hearing at 6:30 p.m. here at Wilson County Government Center. After that, commissioners may approve the budget. The final budget must be approved by June 30, 2026.

I am honored and humbled by the opportunity you have provided me to serve this great county. I appreciate our county employees' work and commitment that allow for quality and efficient services to accomplish the greater good.

As your manager and on behalf of staff, we appreciate you. Your guidance and thoughtful decisions continue to be noticed by the residents of this awesome county. I commend the Board of Commissioners for your solid governance and leadership.

Respectfully submitted,

Ron Hunt,
County Manager