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Dear Citizens of Catawba County:

I am pleased to present to you the Catawba County Fiscal Year 2012/13 budget. The budget maintains the property tax rate of \$0.53 per \$100 of valuation, consistent with the Board of Commissioners' goal to provide needed County services within available revenues. Education, public safety, and economic development remain top priorities, while County operational costs are held relatively flat with only a 1.2 percent increase.

As the State has eroded funding to schools and community colleges over the past several years, Catawba County has remained steadfast in its commitment to education by investing 48 cents of every property and sales tax dollar for the instructional costs and capital needs of the three public school systems and CVCC. The budget allocates a total of \$87.85 million to education (\$40.06 million in operational funds, \$16.57 million in continuing debt service, and \$31.22 million for school facilities). Major projects include: a new Longview Elementary School and Hickory High School storm drain repairs for Hickory Public Schools; major renovations to South Newton Elementary School and replacement of HVAC units at Shuford Elementary School for Newton Conover City Schools; bleacher replacements for Catawba County Schools; and campus renovations and planning funds for a new Vocational Building for CVCC.

Twenty-two cents of every property and sales tax dollar is committed to public safety. Three additional road patrol deputies are included (two starting in July and one at mid-year) to address an increase in call volume and officer safety. Two EMT paramedics are added (starting October 1st) to improve service in the eastern part of the County and to assist EMS in meeting its 8-minute response time goal. Funds are included for a much needed Animal Shelter expansion to help address shelter over-population and spread of disease, and to increase animal adoptions. Additionally, the budget continues to reserve funds towards the expansion of the Justice Center and Public Safety Center to provide much needed court-related space, technology enhancements and the housing of the 911 Emergency Communications Center, Emergency Operations Center, and Emergency Services, as promised with the quarter cent sales tax referendum.

Catawba County is fortunate to have a large number of highly-trained and dedicated volunteers providing fire and medical first response services. The budget includes a fire tax rate increase for two volunteer fire departments: Bandys (from \$0.06 to \$0.07) and Cooksville (from \$0.0517 to \$0.0617). Bandys recently expanded service provision, undertook two major building projects and was the only Fire District that provides fire, rescue, and medical first response service to its citizens



with a tax rate lower than \$0.07. The County will also be partnering with Bandys Fire Department to house the new EMS crew at Station 1. Cooksville plans to work towards offering medical first response, lower its insurance rating, and address general operations/equipment needs. The budget continues funding for the six rescue squads in the County for the Medical First Responder Program and increases funding for needed equipment.

Economic development is supported by funding for the Economic Development Commission, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Chamber's Visitor Information Center and Edison Project to promote small business, and a partnership with Conover, Hickory, Maiden and Catawba for a multi-jurisdictional business park.

The budget maintains current service levels for County Parks and Libraries. Park use continues to increase with the existing 4-day schedule of operating hours and libraries remain an important resource to the community, providing computers, internet access, and training to those looking for work. In partnership with the Historical Association, the County will work to secure and preserve the Bunker Hill covered bridge. Funds also continue to be set aside for a new Sherrills Ford branch library.

I thank my fellow County Commissioners and the citizens of Catawba County for their trust and support of our continued efforts to meet our citizens' needs.

Sincerely,

CATAWBA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Katherine W. Barnes

Katherine W. Barnes, Chair

