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June 2, 2014

Dear Citizens of Catawba County:

I am pleased to present to you the Catawba County Fiscal Year 2014/15 budget. Consistent with the Board of Commissioners' goals, the budget invests in education, public safety, economic development, and infrastructure while maintaining the property tax rate of \$0.53 per \$100 of valuation for the 7th consecutive year.

Catawba County remains steadfast in its commitment to education by investing 47.6 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 \$65 million to education:

- \$40.6 million in operational funds
- \$16.8 million in continuing debt service associated with construction projects
- \$7.6 million for school facility and capital equipment needs.

Total operational funding is increased 1 percent for the public schools and CVCC. Operational dollars for the public schools continue to fund a 2 percent teacher supplement based on performance and technology needs. The Board of Commissioners values cooperation. Included in the public schools operational funding is the equivalent of \$52 per pupil of \$1.27 million designated separately for joint programs -- Conover School for Exceptional Children, Community Schools, Hickory Career & Art Magnet School core program, therapeutic day treatment, and the school bus garage. These funds will be available for distribution to school systems that cooperate to deliver these services with at least one other school system. Barring any major changes in funding by other counties, this funding is expected to maintain the County's ranking of 16th in total current expense funding for public schools and community colleges.

The budget commits 23.3 cents of every property and sales tax dollar to public safety. Funds are included for increased public safety staffing and capital needs as follows:

- Two road patrol deputies for the Sheriff's Office to address an increase in call volume and to maintain officer safety.
- Two detention officers for the Sheriff's Office to address an increase in inmate population.
- Two paramedics for Emergency Medical Services to expand the Conover EMS crew from 40 hours a week to 84 hours a week in response to an increase in call volume and response times.
- Renovations to the old Sherrills Ford Library for use by the Sheriff's Office and Social Services.
- Renovations to the County jail to create 16 additional female beds.
- Replacement of jail door gears in the old section of the jail as needed.
- Future public safety capital needs.
- Expansion of the Justice and Public Safety Center (scheduled to begin construction this year) to provide much needed court-related space and technology enhancements to house the 911 Emergency Communications Center, Emergency Operations Center, and Emergency Services, as promised with the quarter cent sales tax referendum that the citizens of Catawba County passed in 2007.



The Commissioners' goal of promoting and enhancing economic development is supported by funding for the Economic Development Corporation. In 2013, economic development projects resulted in the announcement of over \$271 million of new investment and 840 new jobs. The budget adds funding for Innovate Catawba and the Claremont Spec Building aimed at addressing the current deficit in the community of move-in ready industrial space. Funding is also included for the Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Chamber of Commerce's Visitor Information Center, and Edison Project to promote entrepreneurship, and a partnership with Conover, Hickory, Maiden and Catawba for the NC Data Campus aimed at attracting new and expanded industry to the community.

The budget includes increased operating costs for the new Sherrills Ford Branch Library scheduled to open in late Summer 2014. Current service levels for other County Libraries and Parks are maintained. Libraries remain an important resource to the community during this period of economic recovery, providing computers, internet access, and critical technology training to those looking for work. Park use among citizens continues to increase from past years' levels with the existing 4-day schedule of operating hours. With assistance from grant funding, Planning, Parks, & Development will construct .48 miles of natural and paved surface trail that will connect the Catawba County Government Center to the City of Newton Heritage Trail and Newton/Conover sidewalk network creating a continuous 5-mile trail network.

The County continues to review contracts and services annually to determine what makes sense to provide in-house, what services make sense to contract with the private or non-profit sectors, and what makes sense for the private or non-profit sector to assume. During the coming year, the County will partner with the Humane Society to operate the Animal Shelter and the biodiesel facility will be privatized.

Despite growth in critical service areas, the County continues to review staffing needs annually, rightsizing in areas as appropriate. As a result, the budget eliminates or reduces funding for 16 positions in 7 departments.

I encourage you to explore the budget, particularly the County Manager's budget message, to learn more.

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, Chair

