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June 1, 2015

Dear Citizens of Catawba County:

I am pleased to present to you the Catawba County Fiscal Year 2015/16 budget. Consistent with the Board of Commissioners' goals, the budget invests in education, public safety, economic development, parks and infrastructure.

Balancing the needs of the County with our desire to maintain a low tax rate for the citizens is always a difficult task. Since 2009, Catawba County has made hard financial decisions resulting in a net reduction of \$5.4 million and 37 County employees. Only public schools and Catawba Valley Community College (CVCC) have remained untouched. This budget includes an additional \$1.5 million in operating reductions across all departments.

This year, Catawba County underwent revaluation as required by statute at least every 8 years. Catawba County has chosen to conduct revaluation every 4 years to reduce "sticker shock" resulting from large adjustments in value over a greater span of time and provide property owners the chance to appeal values based on changes in economic conditions, which they can do only during a revaluation year. The 2015 Revaluation, which is based on sales over the last 3 years, resulted in a 5.88 percent decrease in County-wide real property values, which translates into \$5.96 million less in property tax revenue to support critical community services, which is equal to 3.78 cents on the tax rate. In addition to revaluation, the County addressed significant service issues including:

- Education –The County continued to increase current expense funding and provide for the capital needs of our public school systems and community college.
- Emergency Medical Services (EMS) – Recent response times have slipped above the Board of Commissioners' 8-minute response time goal.
- Jail – A 256-bed jail expansion to the Catawba County Detention Center is needed driven by crime rates, types of crimes committed, and Burke County's recent decision to close the shared district confinement facility.
- Sheriff – An additional criminal investigator is needed to improve case management and clearance rates.
- Parks – The top priority identified in the recently updated Parks Master Plan was to reinstate a 6-day per week schedule at all parks. Maintenance and repairs to parks are also needed.

To address these pressures, provide core government services, and maintain the County's good quality of life, the budget establishes a tax rate of 57.5 cents.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Randy Isenhower". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R".

C. Randall Isenhower, Chair

