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**CATAWBA COUNTY GRANTS PERMISSION FOR USE
OF JUSTICE CENTER GROUNDS ON SUNDAY, MAY 27, 2012**

For years, Catawba County has had an ordinance governing the public use of grounds and facilities that has served the best interests of the community. This ordinance has ensured public safety, protected public property, and insulated taxpayers from undue liability and risk.

Today, Catawba County received an application for public use of the lawn of the Catawba County Justice Center for the purpose of assembly on Sunday, May 27, 2012. This application raised questions regarding the constitutionality of the existing regulation, specifically the 14-day requirement for applications to be received in the County Manager's Office.

Catawba County has always striven to uphold the First Amendment rights of free speech and peaceable assembly. After receiving the citizen's application today, the County consulted with constitutional law experts. Following significant discussion and analysis, and in the interest of demonstrating appropriate respect for the ideals embedded in the Constitution, Catawba County has chosen to grant permission for the assembly this Sunday. The issues raised have given the County the opportunity to examine the existing regulations, and in the coming weeks staff will be working on creating a revised ordinance that ensures balance between the community's significant interests and the exercise of first amendment freedoms.

All inquiries should be directed to Debra Bechtel at (828) 465-8319 or debra@catawbacountync.gov

