

Statement on FY 19-20 Durham County Budget

Written by Chair of the Durham Board of County Commissioners Wendy Jacobs

I am very proud of the Durham County FY 19-20 Budget. This budget is a reflection of the priorities we have heard from our community and our staff and is aligned with Durham County's strategic plan goals our Board and identified priorities.

We had many tough choices to make as there are many great and justified funding needs in our community. We have to make decisions that leverage strategic use of our limited public resources in our efforts to ensure that all people are thriving in our community.

Education and our children are prioritized in this budget. Education is the most important factor impacting life outcomes and our children are our most vulnerable and precious resource. When we invest in our children, we are investing in our future. About a third of the County's General Fund budget is for education. This budget allocates nearly \$146 million for Durham Public Schools (DPS), an increase of \$7.25 million over last year's funding. In addition, we are supporting DPS with more than \$5.4 million in direct funding for School Resource Officers (SRO's) and school health services and \$134,000 to support the Bull City Community Schools Initiative.

In this budget, Durham County Government is further supporting DPS, our children and our families with our increased commitment to early childhood education. Research continues to prove that this investment is critical for positive life outcomes. We are increasing our funding for the Durham Pre-K program, dedicated to universal access for all children in Durham, to \$5.1 million. Also in this budget is an ACES -Adverse Childhood Experiences- Coordinator, an Early Childhood Coordinator, and support for evidenced based programs such as Wash and Learn and Reach Out and Read that create the foundation for literacy.

Our Board is also increasing our investments in our youth and workforce development with funding for Made In Durham's efforts to promote Work Based Learning, more than \$1.4 million in scholarships for all Durham high school graduates to attend Durham Tech, new STEAM and Teen library programming at our renovated Main Library, Durham Tech's new culinary arts program at American Tobacco Campus and increased support for Kids Voting's civics education in DPS.

This budget is also a reflection of our ongoing efforts to invest in and address the critical needs of all people in our community:

a Racial Equity Officer to help us ensure that Durham County programs, services and policies are addressing and promoting racial equity, more than \$4.8 million in funding for programs that help keep our residents out of our criminal justice system and supported in re- entering our community. In this budget, the county is taking on local funding of formerly grant supported positions within our phenomenal Bull City United violence interruption program, our Formally Incarcerated Transitions (FIT) health program, our Project Build gang prevention program and our Re-Entry Council which helps support returning residents with housing, job and health needs.

In this budget the County is addressing needs of our most vulnerable residents - a 50% increase in funding for our Durham Center for Senior Life to help with adult day care and health, the doubling of Eviction Diversion emergency funding, increased Child Welfare positions to

support our families and children in crisis and capital funding for our ground breaking Affordable Housing projects at 300 and 500 East Main Street.

Our Board also continues our commitment to sustainable wages for all residents including Durham County employees with an allocation of \$3.1 million to complete the compensation recommendations implemented for public safety employees last year. Our board is also committed to ensuring that this implemented in an equitable and fair way for our low salary and below market rate identified staff.

Finally I want to acknowledge our incredible budget staff who went above and beyond during our more than 27 hours of budget work sessions. Keith Lane our Budget director, David Ades, Assistant Budget Director and all of the budget staff, along with our Finance Director, Susan Tezai, General Manager, Claudia Hager, and all those who presented to our board. Thank you for all the expertise and information you provided so that we could make the most well-informed decisions possible. I also want to thank all of the Durham residents for the invaluable input you provided to us that also greatly informed our decision making during this budget process through your emails, online comments, phone calls, face to face meetings and comments at our public hearings.

To our beloved Durham community, I hope you will find the Durham County Budget the most readable ever and feel like you can read each department's page and understand where and how your public dollars are being spent. I hope you will find parts of this budget that you are really excited about!!!

Lastly, I want to acknowledge that this budget represents a 2.3 cent increase over our revenue neutral tax rate of 68.92 cents for a new rate of 71.22 cents. Last year's tax rate was 77.79 cents, so this will be a 6.57 cent tax rate decrease from last year. With only about \$9.2 million in new tax revenue this year and more than \$40 million in requests for this new revenue from 27 county departments and Durham Public Schools, it is very difficult to address the needs of our community and balance the impact that increasing market values in downtown neighborhoods are having on long time, low income, and fixed income residents.

Yes, Durham County Government's budget is a moral document. I believe that the budget our board has approved tonight prioritizes strategic investments in the incredible work that happens each and every day in Durham County Government, in partnership with Durham Public Schools, Durham Tech, Durham City Government, nonprofits and so many other community partners as we work together to tirelessly ensure that Durham's Vitality is Built Upon the Health of Our Residents and the Capacity of Our Community to Foster and Enhance the Well Being of Every Citizen.

Wendy Jacobs
Chair, Durham County Board of Commissioners
919-418-3169