



# **Durham County 2021**

## **State of the County Address**

### **Video Part 3**

Delivered by Chair Brenda Howerton  
October 2021

Hello, I am Brenda Howerton, Chair of the Durham County Board of Commissioners. It is my pleasure to bring you our final installment of the State of the County address.

In our first episode, I focused on the extraordinary work our employees performed in planning for, identifying and addressing the pandemic.

We confronted the ever-changing issues that emerged with the goal of protecting the lives of our citizens.

In my second report, I continued to focus on our successes and challenges in trying to manage during a pandemic.

In this third and final report, I want to talk about the most significant federal legislation that has ever been approved and shared with state and local governments.

Following payments to state and local governments to navigate the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak through the **\$150 billion** Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF), and the billions of dollars in federal COVID relief aid that went to the state's schools, Congress approved another major piece of legislation to provide even more broad COVID relief.

The American Rescue Plan Act, or ARPA legislation was signed into law this **March by President Biden.**

The American Rescue Plan will deliver \$350 billion for state, local, territorial, and Tribal governments to respond to the COVID-19 emergency. Funding will also focus on infrastructure issues that face communities including efforts to bring back jobs.

The good news is that Durham County will receive **\$62,445,275.**

Half of these ARPA funds have been shared with our county, and the remaining half will be appropriated a year from now. Funds are intended to cover costs from March 3, 2021 through December 31, 2024. And finally, the funds must be encumbered by 2024, with all invoices paid by 2026.

This is a great deal of money and, there are specific priorities included in the legislation. Let me quickly walk you through the areas that

governments, including Durham County can use this money for. In general, here are the six categories outlined in the legislation.

1. **Support Public Health Response:** these monies will fund the battle against COVID 19, medical expenses, mental health care and certain public health and public safety staff.
2. **Replace Public Sector Revenue Loss:** these funds can be used to provide government services in the case of revenue reductions resulting from the pandemic.
3. **Water and Sewer Infrastructure:** We can make investments to improve access to clean drinking water and invest in wastewater and stormwater infrastructure.
4. **Address Negative Economic Impacts:** The money will help governments respond to economic harms to workers, families, small businesses, impacted industries and the public sector.
5. **Premium Pay for Essential Workers:** Fortunately, governments are allowed to offer additional support to workers who have, and will bear the greatest health risks because of their direct service in critical infrastructure sectors.
6. **Broadband Infrastructure:** This helps make necessary investments to provide unserved, or underserved locations with new, or expanded broadband access.

This funding provides us with a **once in a lifetime opportunity** to make important enhancements in our community.

In addition to the funds, we will receive at Durham County, this legislation also provides **\$51,881,733** for the City of Durham.

Together these funds will allow your local governments to work collaboratively to make a real impact on the quality of life for our citizens.

Currently, both the County and the City are developing a process to seek your help in developing appropriate programs and processes to spend this money according to strict federal guidelines developed by the U.S. Treasury. The critical point is this. If we don't use the money according to guidelines, we will have to return it.

I want you to know that your Commissioners are working with our staff to develop a critical evaluation process to ensure that the final selected projects make the highest and greatest impact for our citizens for many years to come.

Over the summer, there have been two citizen engagement meetings to begin to share relevant information and to hear your ideas and your priorities for the future.

In June and August, the City and the County jointly sponsored two Zoom sessions to begin to solicit your ideas and suggestions on how to spend the money. So far, more than 300 citizens have shared their input. Also, some 80 proposals have been submitted suggesting possible programs on which to spend the money.

Don't worry that you have missed this process! We have allowed more time for your elected officials to hear from you. There are a few more

upcoming community engagement opportunities to solicit your ideas and suggestions. Between now and November there will be three more Community Engagement opportunities.

While two meetings will probably be virtual, we are trying to conduct an in-person meeting in the unincorporated area of the County, depending on COVID conditions. Be assured you will hear more specifics about that soon.

There is a great deal of work being conducted on this plan. But we need your participation. Please visit our Durham County website.

[www.dconc.gov](http://www.dconc.gov) where we have added a special section on the ARPA Funding Process. Also, on the site, we will announce the times, dates and specifics for the upcoming meetings.

We encourage you to read more and follow the ARPA process closely. As I mentioned earlier, we must use these funds wisely to make strategic investments in the six areas as required by the federal government.

As I close let me thank you again for your attention. Indeed, we look forward to your great ideas to help us make Durham even better. Have a great day and thank you for participating in your Durham County Government.

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