

# **2023 State of the County**

**March 27, 2023**

**Chair Brenda Howerton**

**7 p.m.**

Good evening to our audience. I'd like to welcome all of you who have joined us in these chambers. I want to also thank our audience watching us on Channel 8 or viewing via live streaming on computer.

No matter how you are joining us this evening, I want you to know that we sincerely appreciate your interest in the affairs of this wonderful, vibrant community. And that you don't mind taking the time to learn of our work over the past year.

As is our custom, I am indeed honored to bring you our State of the County Address. It is always a pleasure to stand before you and reflect on the successes of Durham County Government and to look forward.

I need to take a moment to speak about the tragic and deadly shootings involving our young people that have taken place in recent days and weeks. Sadly, too many of our teens have been victimized by gun violence. We, the members of the Board of Commissioners, offer our heartfelt thoughts and prayers for these families. As a community, we can never stop trying to address the many reasons for these deaths and injuries. Let's do what we can to help our community reduce these incidents of gun violence across Durham.

My heart goes out to all the families who have had their lives forever changed due to the loss of their child. Thoughts and prayers are offered up, but we can never stop trying to address the many reasons for these deaths and injuries.

Let me begin this message by recognizing my esteemed colleagues on the Board of County Commissioners. I am sure you know that we are a group of dedicated, hardworking commissioners who take our roles as public servants very seriously. I'll add that we don't mind working locally or beyond the Durham County boundaries, to develop ways to support our citizens needs and interests.

I will now introduce my fellow Board members and ask them to stand....

Vice Chair Wendy Jacobs. Commissioner Heidi Carter. Commissioner Nimasheena Burns and Commissioner Nida Allam.

Before I recognize our leadership and employees, permit me take a moment to showcase our work just a bit.

I am honored to serve on the Board of Directors of the National Association of Counties or NACo. I chair the Healthy Counties Committee and am a member of the Large Urban Caucus committee. I also was recently appointed to the Local Government Advisory Committee of the United States Environmental Protection Agency or EPA.

Vice Chair Jacobs serves on several NACo committees. She was named a member of the Justice and Public Safety Steering Committee and is a member of the NACo's Familiar Faces Initiative Leadership Network. She also serves on the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners Environment Steering Committee and the Health and Human Services Steering Committee.

Commissioner Nida Allam serves on Durham County's Public Health Board and Durham's Partnership for Children. She is a member of the Women's Democracy Lab Future President's Program, and the Hunt Institute's Hunt State Policy Fellows program. And I must also add that Commissioner Allam and I were recently named founding members of the Counties for a Guaranteed Income.

Commissioner Nimasheena Burns serves as NACo's Vice Chair of the Resilient Counties Advisory Board and Vice Chair of the Justice and Public Safety Steering Committee's Juvenile Subcommittee. She is also on the North Carolina Community College Foundation Board.

And Commissioner Heidi Carter committees include the Alliance Health Board, County Commissioner Advisory Committee and Network Development Committee, Triangle J Council of Governments and Piedmont Food Processing Center.

As you can see, your elected officials are involved in many endeavors!

In March of 2022, Dr. Kimberly Sowell joined Durham County as our first female County Manager! Her leadership in this first year has been outstanding! As dynamic organizations do, Durham County welcomed new senior staff members. At the same time, we witnessed the departure of several longtime key leaders.

Since taking on her role as this organization's leader, Dr. Sowell has introduced an updated organizational chart led by the following executive team members: Deputy County Manager for External Affairs Maurice Jones; Assistant County Manager for Community Stewardship, Julio Delgado; Assistant County Manager for Community Prosperity Tammie Hall, and Chief of Staff Shannon Trapp. Rounding out this Team are three familiar faces: Deputy County Manager for Financial Affairs Claudia Hager; Assistant County Manager for Community Well-Being Joanne Pierce and Dwane Brinson, Assistant County Manager for Community Safety.

And let me also add that our Board of Commissioners hired Al Andrews as our new Durham County Attorney. He began his tenure in January.

At this time, I would like to ask all our Durham County Department Heads to please stand to be recognized. Thank you all so much for your wonderful leadership!

Before I move forth, I want to note two department heads who retired recently, but their impact will be long lasting. Social Services Director Ben Rose retired last fall, and our Acting County Attorney Willie Darby retired at the start of the new year. We're sending best wishes to them both that they are enjoying a well-earned retirement. Let's give them a hand.

Finally, please allow me to pause to honor the memory of one of Durham County's most loyal and dedicated employees. Our longtime County Attorney Lowell L. Siler who made his transition on September 9, 2022. I know I speak for all of us when I say Lowell was such a great man. He will always hold a special place in our hearts. Rest in Peace, my dear friend.

So, now I want to focus on our amazing Durham County employees who have been resilient and steadfast over these past few years, especially as we all worked to get through the COVID pandemic. To all of you, we say thank you so much for all you do for Durham County!

Yes, all our employees work hard every day, and tonight I'd like to showcase a few of them who have helped to shine a spotlight on Durham County Government.

Keith Lane, please stand. Keith is our Budget and Management Services Director. He was honored with the A. John "Jack" Vogt Lifetime Achievement Award for Outstanding Commitment to the Advancement of Local Government Budgeting & Evaluation.

Charlita Felder, please stand. Charlita is a Waste Reduction Supervisor in General Services. She received the 2022 Mike Stillwell Award for being named the North Carolina Solid Waste Enforcement Officer of the Year.

Susan Tezai, it's your turn to rise please. Susan is our Chief Financial Officer, and she has served as the President of the Largest City-County Finance Officers Association, also known as the "BIG TEN" group.

Stand up please, Ryan Eaves. Ryan is our Stormwater and Erosion Control Division Manager. The North Carolina Sedimentation Control Commission presented us an award of Excellence in the Large Program Category. This honor highlighted the

County's response to work conditions created by COVID-19, as along with our status as a leader in erosion control across the state.

Congratulations to Deputy County Manager Claudia Hager on her 2023 Women in Business Awards recognition with the Triangle Business Journal!

Hager is among a class of 25 exemplary women celebrated this year. Women selected for this honor have positive reputations in their areas of expertise. They exhibit outstanding leadership and noteworthy accomplishments.

These employees certainly represent all our employees, and the great work going on every day in Durham County. Will all our county employees please stand? Let's give them all a big hand!

Certainly, this past year has been filled with achievements and accomplishments across the enterprise.

Earlier this year, it was my honor to be a part of the delegation that traveled to Lake Placid for a final vote by the International University Sports Federation, to bring the World University Summer Games to the region in 2029. Durham along with Raleigh, Chapel Hill, Greensboro and Cary will be the locations of these games. This will be one of our state's largest ever sports events and is expected to bring an economic impact of nearly \$150 million to the state.

This regional planning effort involved the state, colleges and universities, several corporations and individuals. I want to especially acknowledge Hill Carrow, the North Carolina Bid Committee Chairman and CEO and thank him for his leadership! This has been his vision for over 30 years and now the work begins in earnest.

Please watch this short [video](#).

Yes, Many Teams, One Dream.  
This will be wonderful for our region.

Our Board of Commissioners, along with the County Manager's Office received the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Partnership Award. This honor was presented at the annual North Carolina Association of County Commissioners Conference. The County Partnership Award recognizes local governments for their outstanding partnership with the North Carolina Cooperative Extension. This award noted the County's value for collaborative leadership, and innovative approaches from the staff that benefit Durham County residents.

For the second year in a row, we received multiple awards from the National Association of Counties. Durham County was named a NACo Achievement Award Winner for seven programs:

1. Durham County Transit Plan
2. Durham County Administrative Assistant Chatbot
3. Durham County Government, Board of Elections - Ballot Tracking Application
4. Durham County Social Services Low Income Homeowner's Relief Program
5. Durham County Social Services Emergency Rental Assistance Program
6. Durham County Library Innovation League
7. Mobile Integrated Healthcare /Community Paramedic Program

Our great Public Health Department picked up several important awards including:

- A National Association of City and County Health Officials 2022 Innovative Practice Award honorable mention for our Durham County COVID-19 Data Initiative.
- A \$750,000 grant was received from The Duke Endowment to support anti-racism work with the Partnership for a Healthy Durham.
- And A Certificate of Recognition from North Carolina Division of Public Health for the Community Health Assessment.

Durham County Emergency Medical Services received the American Heart Association's Mission: Lifeline® EMS Gold Plus Award for the fifth consecutive year. This award is given to EMS services for implementing quality improvement measures for the treatment of patients who experience severe heart attacks.

I could go on with more honors and awards received by our departments and employees, but I hope these give you a sense of how impactful the work of our departments is across the spectrum.

At this time, I would like to transition and touch on a few of our Board's important priorities from the past year and beyond.

I will start with one of most significant actions taken by this Board. The decision to conduct a 2022 General Obligation Bond Referendum in the amount of \$550.2 million dollars was critical. Indeed, this was Durham County's largest bond ever placed before our voters. This Bond included:

- \$423 million dollars for Durham Public Schools
- \$112 million dollars for Durham Technical Community College
- And \$13 million dollars for our Museum of Life and Science

Thankfully, all three Bond questions were overwhelmingly approved by our voters in November. Certainly, we now look forward to the new buildings, renovations, land

acquisitions and future expansions this money will produce for these three vital partners

Certainly, safe, affordable housing is a vital need that helps support our entire wellbeing and quality of life. Earlier this month we heard the results of our annual city-county satisfaction survey. Again, and not surprisingly, Affordable Housing registered as a top priority!

Durham County has a commitment to affordable housing, and we are developing two projects on East Main Street.

The 300 E. Main St. project includes 110-units of mixed income affordable housing and a parking garage. The project also will have a childcare/Pre-K space for children from birth to 5 years old. It will accommodate 86 children.

This project includes 3,000 square feet of commercial/retail space focusing on non-profits and other organizations that will have a positive social impact. The deck is almost done. And soon work will begin on the affordable housing section.

Our 500 E. Main St. housing component has 195-units of mixed income affordable housing, and a 246-unit market rate housing wrapper with commercial/retail space. It is meant to be very suitable for a possible grocery market and other tenants. This project also includes a parking garage.

Construction on the deck and market rate housing is currently underway. The affordable housing construction will soon follow.

And, the City of Durham and the County have agreed to work together to use some of its combined ARPA funds for several affordable housing projects. Another example is a City ARPA Award in the amount of \$644,000 for Reentry Housing, which will increase the availability of housing for justice involved Durham residents.

We received \$62,445,275 from the federal government to make transformational change across the community as part of the American Rescue Plan Act program. Staff took time to create a strong evaluation process to make sure we were using the funds in accordance with guidelines set by the U.S. Treasury Department.

We invited nonprofits to apply for funding in the permitted categories and provided workshops to help them understand the process.

Sixty-nine nonprofit organizations responded to our Request for Proposals, seeking \$20.2 million in ARPA funding. Staff recommended 49 proposals totaling

\$10,383,139 to move forward for funding. Contracts are now being finalized and distributed to the successful groups an end date of December 31, 2024.

We awarded funding in seven focus areas that aligned with the County's ARPA framework, and we note them on the screen.

Please visit our ARPA page, located on our Durham County website, to see the full list of the nonprofits who will be working to transform our community in these vital areas.

In an effort to holistically address community safety, our Board supported the establishment of a new department. It is the Community Intervention and Support Services Department. This new department brings together three program areas that were previously operating separately... Bull City United, My Brother's Keeper, and Project BUILD.

The Department's focus is to provide coordinated and programmatic support and systems-level strategies, in partnership with the community, to promote resident and community safety and prosperity. In September 2022, the department hired its first director, Krystal Harris. Here are a few highlights from each division.

Bull City United entered into an Interlocal Agreement with the City of Durham to expand its work to reduce gun violence in census tracts that were experiencing higher firearm related incidents. The staff was expanded from seven to 25. Bull City United received a Byrne-Justice Assistance Grant under the Department of Justice in the amount of \$250,000. Through this grant, this division will utilize this critical community project to examine cross-systems approaches to address gun violence and offer recommendations for promising practices and sustainable solutions.

My Brother's Keeper secured a program manager, after the position had been vacant for nearly two years. Durham My Brother's Keeper is now utilizing the national MBK model to continue the work to improve life and career outcomes for young boys and men of color.

Project BUILD received an additional \$25,000 from Juvenile Crime Prevention Council Reallocated funds to expand skill building opportunities for its participants. Beginning last month, the program implemented curriculum-based group sessions for its participants.

The County is partnering with the Boys and Girls Club of Durham and Orange Counties to expand tutoring services, including an initiative that collaborates with Durham County Library operations to expand homework help through in-person and remote learning options.

The Boys and Girls Club of Durham and Orange Counties was recently recognized by the national headquarters, Boys and Girls Club of America as one of the highest

performing clubs in the Southeast Region. There are over 3,700 Boys & Girls Clubs that serve more than 4.4 million youth across the nation.

For two consecutive years the Boys and Girls Club of Durham and Orange Counties has been identified by the national office as the BEST in North Carolina, for two consecutive years in student performance. Durham County's investments in this operation will expand evidence-based support services for youth and their families.

Last fiscal year, Durham County Government and the City of Durham established an Interlocal Agreement to expand community-based programming coordination by the County's Community Intervention and Support Services Department. The Hayti Reborn - Justice Movement serves as an "umbrella organization" that works in concert with existing community partners, to help develop and coordinated strategies that interrupt the cycle of violence, while concurrently increasing the health and prosperity within marginalized communities.

The organization will coordinate with a network of nonprofits that will provide services to job seekers including former justice-involved and/or gang-involved persons. In January, our Board allocated \$2 million to leverage federal funds awarded by Congress in the amount of \$700,000, to support the Hayti Reborn - Justice Movement efforts. We must thank former Representative David Price for ensuring that these funds were approved so that this important work can now continue.

In other efforts to address community safety needs, Durham County Sheriff Clarence Birkhead collaborated with celebrated Hillside High School Drama Director Wendell Tabb to produce a play called, "State of Urgency." The goal of the play, which was performed for an entire week, was to address school gun violence and engage in honest dialogue about the reasons and remedies for the troubling escalation in school gun violence, occurring locally and across our nation.

I will hasten to add that Governor Roy Cooper named our Sheriff to the North Carolina Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice, and to the Governor's Crime Commission. With those appointments, our Sheriff is using his influence to address key issues, legislation and policy changes to help improve our safety and quality of life.

We will continue our focus on working collaboratively to help reduce incidences of crime and violence across our community.

The work around Durham County's Master Aging Plan is positively moving forward. Much like communities everywhere, Durham is experiencing a growing number of older adults and those adults are living longer. Our Board is committed to bringing resources to bear to ensure that our seniors age with dignity and enjoy a comfortable lifestyle in their golden years.



The Master Aging Plan steering committee is in the process of convening the livability working groups to address:

- Community Support and Health Services
- Senior Hunger & Nutrition
- Social Participation/Respect and Social Inclusion/ Elder Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation
- Housing

As committees are being formalized, action plans with strategies to address the key components will soon emerge. That final plan will have responses addressing social isolation, safety and emergency preparedness, communication and information sharing, accessibility, memory care, racial equity, socio-equity status and more.

We thank the steering committee for taking on this important issue and look forward to the results they will bring forth.

Nationally, Black women are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes compared to white women, and Durham is no exception. This Board continues to prioritize Black Maternal Health, and our Public Health staff and community partners have worked to improve systems to better address the needs of our Black birthing community.

Expectant mothers with pre-existing health conditions are being given blood pressure monitors. Continued steps are being made to ensure that Durham is a breastfeeding-friendly environment for all families, such as encouraging employers to provide lactation spaces. To further increase maternal health support, we're actively seeking a Women's Health Nurse Navigator to better align this work and looking for funding to staff in-house ultra-sonographers and doulas at our Maternal Health Clinic.

Durham County Department of Public Health continues its collaboration with Born in Durham, that is focused on maternal and infant health outcomes with a goal of eliminating perinatal inequities in Durham County. Durham County Department of Public Health has partnered with Guilford County Health Department, NC Department of Health and Human Services and other key stakeholders to convene a regional Black Maternal Health and Infant Mortality Conference on April 14-15<sup>th</sup>. Certainly, we will continue reaching out into the community to strengthen existing partnerships as well as establishing new partnerships to continue the pursuit of a healthy community by focusing on the women and children of the Durham Community.

Durham County is currently exploring ways to ensure more entry points for uninsured or underinsured residents who typically may not have access to mental well-being supportive services with licensed clinical professionals. We are working on such plans

through partnerships with faith and community-based organizations, which are central in Durham County. I am excited to note that very positive conversations are taking place with potential funding partners who are supportive of this concept, and we hope to launch this program very soon.

Durham County hosted a Public Input and Information Session on the National Opioid Settlement on March 20, where subject matter experts shared their knowledge and experience with the attendees and answered questions. A diverse group of stakeholders came out to listen and to provide valuable feedback.

The feedback gathered from this session and a community survey which closed at the end of January will be used by the County Commissioners to prioritize how to spend \$11.6 million in funding over the next 18 years from the settlement. It will also guide decisions on how we address the opioid epidemic, support treatment, recovery, harm reduction, and other life-saving programs and services.

The Long-Term Homeowner Relief Program was created to assist residents who are at or below 30% of the area median income with their tax payments. In its first year, the program received 339 viable applications. Of that total, 200 applications were approved, and \$142,952 helped our target homeowners. I'm delighted to note that this year, the program received a 28% increase in applications. With the program closeout complete, the total households assisted were 338 for a total of approximately \$357,000. Certainly, this is a benefit to these homeowners that we want to continue.

Our economic development successes continued. Since the beginning of the new year, the Board has approved three new incentive-based community partnerships:

- Catalent
- Eli Lilly
- Kempower

Collectively, these three partnerships total more than \$530 million dollars in new investment and 902 new jobs to Durham County, bringing in more than \$2 million dollars, on average, in tax revenue annually over the first five years. In sum, all three companies have made aspirational commitments of more than \$42 million dollars in new spending with minority and women owned firms.

Kempower, an electric vehicle charging company, will be bringing more than 360 jobs that are accessible to high school graduates and associate degree holders, paying an average wage of \$50,000 plus benefits. They are also working with Durham

Tech on innovative new programming to develop a pipeline to train students and plug them into these new jobs within a growing industry.

Eli Lilly's expansion will support an increased demand for their products that treat diabetes and create a minimum of 100 jobs. The company estimates that approximately 90% of the jobs created by this project will be entry-level roles that can be hired with Durham Tech's BioWork Certificate, or a high school education. All jobs pay an average wage of \$56,000 plus benefits.

Durham County and the City of Durham partnered with Carolina Small Business Development Fund to provide low interest loans to Durham small businesses that were impacted by the pandemic. The loan fund pairs access to capital with technical assistance so that eligible applicants have the best opportunity for success.

To date, the loan fund has:

- Awarded 52 loans totaling more than \$1.2M
- 73% of those firms are minority owned
- 48% of those firms of women-owned

Earlier this month, our Board approved funding to purchase the Streetwise MBA program offered through Interise, Inc. With a small investment of \$57,000, this program will continue another phase of the County's initiatives to support our community small business owners. Using resources, education, and support over a seven-month period, this is intended to help sustain and grow their businesses. Small businesses, located in some of our low to moderate income communities, that are minority owned will be the audience for this program. We will bring in resources to equip them for success and help them build capacity and master the tools needed to apply for local and state government contracts.

Our Board supports our on-going outreach to underutilized businesses, with targeted quarterly training and networking events. Many of these events have been collaborative efforts with the City of Durham, Durham Public Schools, The Institute, and other organizations. For larger construction projects that are managed through Construction Management at Risk construction teams, coordinated efforts occur to co-host informational bid, pre-bid and outreach sessions.

In February, Durham County Commissioners and staff traveled to Washington, D.C., for the annual Legislative Conference of the National Association of Counties or NACo. Great things took place at that conference, but I'm most proud to announce that Durham County became a founding member of Counties for a Guaranteed Income. This initiative includes 15 founding counties and 18 founding board members, including myself and Commissioner Nida Allam. Commissioner Allam spoke eloquently at the White House with President Biden's staff regarding funding

for a national Guaranteed Income Program and sharing important points about how much families need this assistance.

Counties for a Guaranteed Income follows in the tremendous success of Mayors for a Guaranteed Income (MGI), founded by former Mayor of Stockton, California, Michael Tubbs.

So now our goal as founding members of CGI, is to implement cash-based policies at the local, state, and federal level. Those of us in county government will join this effort and receive technical assistance for new pilot programs across the country. This extra money can be critical to help with food, utilities, and household expenses for children or even paying down debt.

At the end of it all, our Board of Commissioners priorities are reflected in our annual budget. Our approved budget is \$793,563,860. The property tax rate remained unchanged at 72.22 cents per one hundred dollars of valuation. Durham Public Schools received \$177,151,627 in funding, an increase of \$10.95 million from last year's budget.

Pre-K support received additional funding of \$880,000 for Pre-K expansion, increasing total annual funding to \$6.4 million. The approved budget provided \$9,743,434 for Durham Technical Community College, an increase of \$789,268. Durham County is focused on providing educational support at all levels.

In addition to providing salary increases for our employees, our budget additionally supported efforts to recruit and retain "hard to fill" positions such as nurses, EMT's, General Services employees, Sheriff's Office employees and youth home employees.

Staff is currently preparing for this year's budget process. Our board met in a Budget retreat a few weeks ago to hear important information about the current economic climate from our Budget and Finance staff, our Tax Administration, and well-known economist Dr. Michael Walden. I recall Dr. Walden addressed three key issues... The Labor Market, Inflation, and the Recession.

Without getting too much into the weeds, we all remain aware of the financial uncertainties that we are seeing as we work to recover from the COVID pandemic. Our current economic climate is facing challenges, but I am confident in our Tax, Finance and Budget team. I will simply say that we continue to be financially well managed. Durham County has a healthy fund balance to help us weather any significant economic downturn or unexpected needs. Most importantly, we will remain good stewards of our dollars as we move forth.

Again, I ask you to please follow our budget process in the coming months. We are set to receive the Manager's Recommended Budget on May 8<sup>th</sup> and will conduct the Budget Public Hearing on May 22<sup>nd</sup>.

As I wrap up my remarks, let me address one more issue. Mayor Elaine O'Neal along with city staff, this Board and our county staff and Durham Public Schools Education Board Chair Bettina Umstead and DPS staff are working in concert to collaborate on better engaging our youth in productive work and recreation efforts.

Durham City and Durham County are working to provide paid summer employment in many of our departments to help our young people gain valuable work experience and develop skills. The City, the County, and Durham Public Schools are working together to host job fairs. An upcoming job fair is being held on Saturday, April 22<sup>nd</sup> at Walltown Recreation Center. Seasonal and year-round positions are available for youth aged 16 and up and this is only one example. The City, the County, and Durham Public Schools are committed to enhancing or creating as many summer activities as possible through Parks and Recreation and other venues including non-profits, to give our children places to play, learn and be safe during the summer months. If you have ideas, jobs, internships or would like to help, please let us know. Our youth need us to provide opportunities that will be positive and productive for them.

On behalf of our Board of Commissioners, it has been my pleasure to work on projects and initiatives that improve the quality of life for all our residents. I eagerly anticipate continuing and expanding the innovative work that must be done to ensure that Durham County remains on top of the list of high performing local governments.

Thank you for your attention and have a great evening.