



# The State of Chatham County in 2012

## HOLDING THE LINE ON TAXES

With the economy continuing to limit county revenues, the county took major steps to **reduce non-mandated budget items by 15%** in FY 2011-12 while maintaining services and meeting new requirements.

- The county had **no tax rate increase in 2011-12**.
- Staff estimates that budget cuts in 2011-12 **also will help prevent a substantial tax increase in 2012-13**, despite the \$1.1 million annual cost to open the new Judicial Center in 2012.
- Commissioners **reduced their pay** for work sessions.
- The budget adopted for 2011-12 was **\$1.5 million less** than the originally adopted budget for 2010-11.
- Chatham County Schools was the only department exempt from identifying budget cuts.

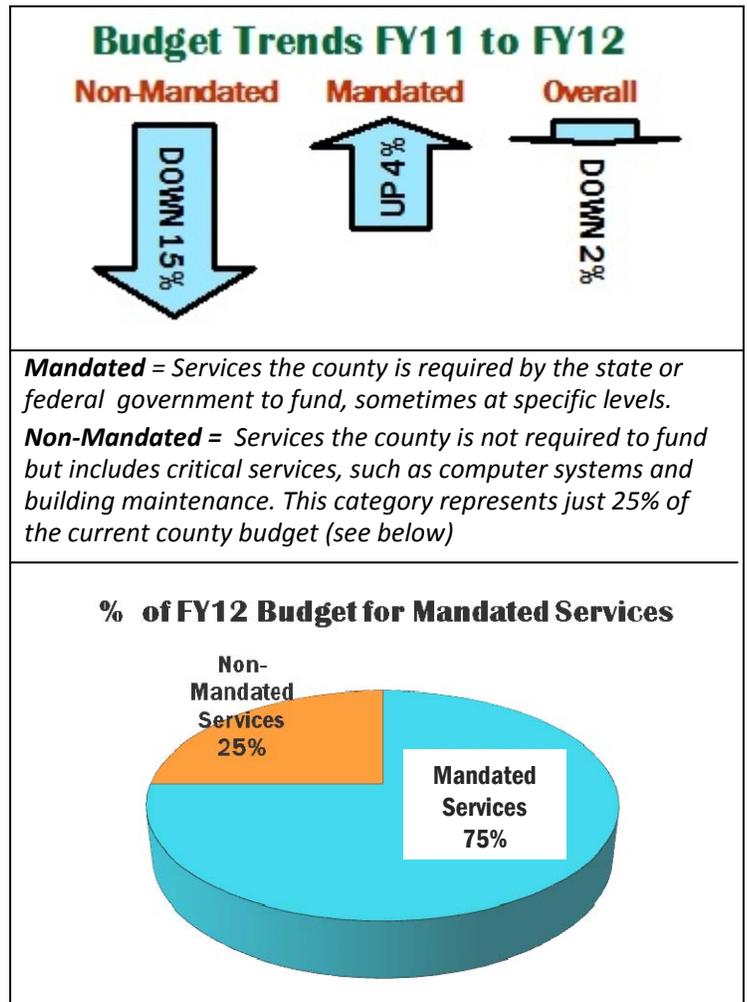
### SINCE FY 2008-09:

- Excluding debt, the county reduced **non-school expenses by 10%**, while school funding went up 2% since 2008-09. Funding for **school operations increased 7%** in this period.
- Some programs and services were reduced or eliminated, but most departments cut unfilled positions and reduced line items, while maintaining service levels.
- During the same period, the county had to increase expenses to open Margaret Pollard Middle School, two community college buildings, a main library and two parks.

## OPEN GOVERNMENT

Chatham County took several major steps during 2011 to provide easier public access to important county activities or records, including a new **Open Government** tab on the county homepage at [www.chathamnc.org](http://www.chathamnc.org) to make it easier to find these resources. The county has received statewide acclaim for these efforts. Online resources added in 2011 include:

- An online channel for viewing Board of Commissioner meetings, with videos also airing on the Time Warner Cable channel 18 on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 6 pm. The county hopes to expand this to Charter Cable in the Siler City area in 2012.
- Monthly checkbook registers (list of all checks and payees).



- Resolutions proposed and adopted by the Board of Commissioners.
- A list of county job positions by salary grade.
- Links to other resources, such as state revenue reports for counties, statewide study of county salaries and benefits and the State Transportation Plan for Chatham County.
- Effective January 2012, all contracts and agreements approved by the Board of Commissioners.

## CUSTOMER-FRIENDLY PERMITTING

### Pre-Application Meetings:

The Chatham County Economic Development Corporation (EDC) met with businesses and found that the county needed to clarify its permitting process. In 2011, the county initiated weekly meetings between county staff from several permitting departments and business owners **before any permit applications are filed**. The meetings help future applicants understand the overall process and identify potential permit problems early so they can be addressed. Business owners have access to an array of resources in one room. Town planning staff, the EDC and other groups are involved as needed.

Thus far, 54 businesses, ranging from an adventure park to an afterschool language program, have participated. If all currently active plans move forward, these projects could create over 250 jobs. To schedule a pre-application meeting, contact Sybil Tate (919) 545-8365 or [sybil.tate@chathamnc.org](mailto:sybil.tate@chathamnc.org). For more information, visit [www.chathamnc.org/planning](http://www.chathamnc.org/planning)



Brendan and Leslie Cox (top right) visit with several county service representatives during a pre-application meeting. The Coxes are planning a new restaurant in Pittsboro.

### Streamlined Subdivision Process:

In March 2011, planning staff presented options to the Board of Commissioners to reduce the steps and time involved in gaining approval of new subdivisions. In September 2011, commissioners approved the following changes:

- Reduced the number of steps and overall timeframe for major subdivision approval, including a new timeline for review by the Planning Department and the Technical Review Committee. The Planning Board Review was capped at **2 months instead of 4 months**, while the Board of Commissioners review period was reduced from **5 meeting to 4 meetings**.
- Reduced the timeframe for first plat approval a total of **5 to 8 months**.
- Increased the number of lots triggering an environmental impact assessment from **25 to 50 lots**.
- Replaced a review by the Environmental Review Board with a peer review paid by the applicant.
- Allowed non-residential subdivisions of five lots or less to follow the less complex process for minor subdivision applications rather than the major subdivision process.
- Exempted agricultural developments without residences from paying the Recreation Fee.

**Zoning:** In 2011, the Board of Commissioners amended the Zoning Ordinance so that properties zoned for general use do not have to complete an environmental assessment. The changes also removed the Environmental Review Board from the environmental review process. The county expects more changes to the Zoning Ordinance in 2012 to simplify rezoning requests.

## HISTORIC COURTHOUSE

On Oct. 3, 2011, the Board of Commissioners awarded a \$4.41million bid that allowed the reconstruction of the **Historic County Courthouse** to begin. The courthouse, built in 1881, was badly damaged by fire in March 2010. Insurance coverage is expected to cover the cost of reconstruction, which should be completed by **late fall of 2012**.

## EXPANDED LIBRARY SERVICES

### E-Books:

On Nov. 1, 2011, the Chatham County Public Libraries launched **e-INC Library**, which provides free downloads of e-books and audio books for cardholders. Patrons can use various devices, such as computers, iPods and Kindles, to download books. This service is particularly valuable to patrons who have trouble getting to branches, because it provides access to a huge array of books from their homes or workplaces.

### Expanded Hours:

In response to requests from patrons, Chatham County expanded hours at all three branches on Saturdays and weekday evening hours at Chatham Community Library in Pittsboro. However, county officials hope to identify funding to continue these expanded hours after July 1, 2012. For more information on public hours and services, visit [www.chathamnc.org/library](http://www.chathamnc.org/library)

## CHATHAM'S VISITORS SPENDING MORE

An annual state report released in August 2011 showed that despite the slow economy visitors to Chatham County spent \$25.03 million in 2010, **an increase of 4.6%** from 2009. In that period, the county's tourism industry directly employed more than 160 people and generated nearly \$480,000 in tax revenues, equal to **nearly one penny** on the property tax rate.

## BUDGET AWARD

For the first time in 14 years, Chatham County received the **Distinguished Budget Presentation Award** from the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) for its 2010-11 budget presentation. The award required the county to meet extensive nationally-recognized requirements that are more difficult for smaller entities like Chatham to meet. The county will continue to use this budget presentation format.

## LET'S TALK TRASH!

Chatham County joined with Central Community College (CCC) and Chatham Conservation Partnership in hosting its first Let's Talk Trash! event on April 30, 2011 as part Earth Day, focused on giving residents and businesses information on the many ways they can reuse, recycle and compost waste and reduce litter. Held on the CCC campus, the event involved more than 40 local businesses, artists, and nonprofits in programs and activities. WNCA broadcast live during the event. No event is planned for 2012. For more information on reuse and recycling, visit: [www.chathamnc.org/recycle](http://www.chathamnc.org/recycle)



Contractors prepare the elevator shaft during the early stages of rebuilding the Historic Courthouse in Pittsboro.