2013: The State of Chatham County

STRETCHING TAX DOLLARS

Thanks to the hard work of departments and employees, the county has been able to wisely manage resources and improve efficiencies in a tough economy. It allowed the county to avoid property tax increases since 2010-11.

The chart in the upper right shows that the county’s actual spending for general fund operations has remained level since fiscal year 2007-08, despite opening several major facilities. In the same period, the county increased spending for Chatham County Schools to help offset deep cuts in state spending for school operations. See page 2.

SERVICE DEMANDS UP: Even as many departments saw little or no increase in funding, demands for some key services soared between 2008 and 2012. Two examples:
- Calls made to 9-1-1 center, up 77%
- Families & children receiving Medicaid, up 38%

With few staff positions added, higher demands mean workload has increased for some employees. A related trend shows that Chatham County consistently remains well below the state average for the number of employees per 1,000 population. See middle chart to the right. This trend also holds when compared to counties in our population group.

ACHIEVEMENTS: Despite these fiscal challenges, departments and employees continue to shine. See page 3.

JOBS IN CHATHAM…. DID YOU KNOW?

In FY 12 and the first half of FY 13, the Chatham Economic Development Corporation reports:
- Helped create 958 jobs (up from 319 jobs in FY 10 and FY 11 combined)
- Worked with 222 new & existing businesses (up from 129 in FY 10 and FY 11 combined)
- Fostered $135.17 million in capital investments (up from $20 million in FY 10 and FY 11 combined)

In summary, the county had major increases in jobs and private investments from July 1, 2011 to Dec. 31, 2012 compared to the previous two years.
Since 2008-09, Chatham County’s Board of Commissioners increased current expense funding for Chatham County Schools by **16.4%**. This boost in funding helped the school system avoid major layoffs of filled positions due to state budget cuts. Since the recession, just two of 55 eliminated positions were filled.

For the current budget year, Chatham County ranks fifth out of the 100 counties in total spending per student.

**SCHOOL FACILITIES:** In 2008-12, funding for school facilities has varied by year, but the net result is that it has remained fairly steady.

In 2011-12, three school facility projects were completed:
- Upgrades of auditorium sound and lighting system at Jordan-Matthews and Chatham Central high schools
- Removal of asbestos tiles in five schools

**MAKING PROGRESS ON KEY COUNTY FACILITIES**

**HISTORIC COURTHOUSE:** In 2011-12, the county started rebuilding the Historic County Courthouse (below left) that was severely damaged by fire in 2010. The Board of Commissioners approved plans to fully restore the courthouse, including adding finishes that are more in keeping with the original 1881 structure. The grand reopening is slated for April 20, 2013.

**JUSTICE CENTER:** The county continued construction of the new 87,093-square-foot Justice Center and completed it on time and within budget. The facility (below right) opened for court on Jan. 2, 2013. It houses all courtrooms and court officials.

**NEW DETENTION CENTER:** Due to overcrowding and safety issues at the existing Pittsboro detention center, the county initiated development of a new facility on county-owned property west of Pittsboro. Construction should be completed March 2014.

**911 ENHANCEMENTS:** The county renovated a Siler City building to serve as a complete backup 911 Center, which would be used if the main center in Pittsboro should be disabled for any reason. The project was completed on time and under budget using restricted 911 revenues. No county general funds were used. The facility was fully tested with a weather event in January 2013. The county also installed a new 911 phone system to improve redundancy, mobility and security of the network.

**BRIAR CHAPEL PARK:** The county accepted the donation of a 62-acre park in northeast Chatham with existing regulation soccer, football and softball fields. The county used recreation fees paid by Briar Chapel to begin work on needed enhancements, such as

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**SUPPORTING SCHOOLS**

Two times in the past five years, the Chatham County Board of Education has nominated the Board of Commissioners for a statewide award for its continued support of K-12 schools. This positive relationship between county governments and school systems is not widely found across the state.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

- Replacement of outdated indoor bleachers at the three high schools

The school system also made progress on several multi-year projects involving several schools, including renovation of bathrooms, outdoor pavements and roof replacement.

**Continued next page**
fencing and lighting ball fields and adding restrooms and concession facilities. Other improvements will be completed in future years.

**WATER SYSTEM:** Chatham County initiated work to connect to the City of Durham’s water system, which will provide additional water supply for the Northeast Water District.

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**CHATHAM COUNTY’S ALL-STARS**

Below is just a sampling of recognitions, awards or special achievements:

**LEADERSHIP ACADEMY MILESTONE:** For ten years, Chatham County has offered its own award-winning Leadership Academy to help employees develop knowledge and skills to improve their overall performance. All classes are taught by county employees. In 10 years, 157 employees have graduated from the program and many have received promotions. Chatham is the only county in the state offering its own internal leadership program.

**100% REACCREDITATION:** The Public Health Department scored 100% for the second consecutive time in its Reaccreditation Review by the state. In the process, the department successfully met 41 benchmarks and 148 activities. The state performs reaccreditation reviews every four years, which requires extensive preparation for many months in advance.

**TOURISM SPENDING UP:** An annual statewide report showed that Chatham tied for first place among all 100 counties for the highest increase in tourism spending in 2011. Domestic tourism in Chatham County generated an economic impact of $27.73 million in calendar year 2011, up 10.8% from 2010. State and local tax revenues from travel to Chatham County amounted to $2.07 million, a $33.02 tax saving per county resident.

**RURAL TOURISM:** The Pittsboro-Siler City Convention & Visitors Bureau is one of three CVBs across the state to receive grant monies to be part of an innovative rural entrepreneurship program, People-First Tourism, a program developed by a professor at N.C. State University.

**VOTER TURNOUT:** Chatham County Board of Elections effectively managed the 2012 General Election, which had the highest voter turnout in the state at nearly 77%. Many voters (69%) voted early at one-stop locations, which operated smoothly under substantial pressure.

**EMERGENCY OPERATIONS HONOR:** Chatham’s Emergency Operations Director Tony Tucker received the 2012 Colonel Phillip Nichlos Award from the N.C. Emergency Management Association. This top statewide award recognizes his career achievements in emergency management.

**SHERIFF’S LEADERSHIP:** Sheriff Richard Webster was elected and served as President of the N.C. Sheriff’s Association in 2011-12.

**BUDGET AWARD:** The County Manager’s Office received the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) for its 2012-13 budget presentation. Most award recipients are in larger jurisdictions. The requirements are stringent and subject to change every year.

**FINANCIAL REPORTING:** Chatham County has earned the Government Finance Officers Association Award for Excellence in Financial Reporting every year since 1989.

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**TOP RECYCLING PROGRAM:** Solid Waste & Recycling won the 2012 Outstanding Rural Recycling Award for both North and South Carolina. The award was presented by the Carolina Recycling Association. From the left are: Sonya Gilliland, solid waste coordinator; Denise Gaines, administrative support specialist I; Jeff Mitchell, vice president of operations for Lankford Protective Services, which oversees the guards at the county’s collection centers; Dan LaMontagne, county director of Solid Waste & Recycling; Captain Sandra Fogleman, site coordinator for Lankford Protective Services; and Sam Lankford, president of Lankford Protective Services.
PERMITTING ASSISTANCE: In 2010, the county initiated pre-application permit meetings for potential businesses to help them understand requirements and troubleshoot issues early in the process. Thus far, more than 120 businesses or individuals have used this opportunity. The county also developed an online bilingual checklist to help residents better understand what is required for various kinds of building permits.

RECREATION REGISTRATION: In October 2012, Parks and Recreation Department launched a new Rec Trac online service where residents can register and pay for recreation programs and reserve park facilities.

TAX COLLECTIONS: Effective Feb. 1, 2012, the Chatham County Tax Office began collecting property taxes for the Town of Siler City. Residents will receive just one property tax bill for town and county taxes. The county already collected property taxes for residents of Pittsboro, Goldston and Cary. The Tax Office continued its excellent tax collection rates, with the overall collection percentage for 2011-12 (97.83%) exceeding the previous year (97.73%).

ELECTRONICS RECYCLING: The county expanded its electronics recycling program in support of the state banning the disposal of televisions and computer equipment in landfills after July 1, 2011. E-Cycle Stations at the 12 Collection Centers collect electronics up to 50 pounds and TVs/monitors up to 25” diagonal.

FAMILY HISTORY: Chatham Community Library’s volunteers began offering special help on Thursdays for those doing research on family history, including helping them use the library’s databases.

FOOD SAFETY: Environmental Health trained food establishment managers on the new state Food Code, which impacts county inspections of facilities. They also enrolled in the voluntary FDA National Retail Food Program Standards, a quality improvement program, and received grant funding to support this work.

HOMES IN NEED: Two grants will help at least 37 low-income residents make critical repairs or upgrades, such as installing indoor plumbing.

SPAY & NEUTER: Animal Control reports that its focus on subsidized spay/neuter of pets combined with similar efforts by local rescue groups has helped reduce the surrender of pets by owners by 17%.

HEALTHY LIVING: Public Health is partnering with neighboring counties in a Community Transformation Project, a grant-funded program. Decreased tobacco use, access and affordability of healthy foods, and safe places for physical activity are key targets for Chatham.

CHRISTMAS WISHES: This past year, 110 sponsors and 56 financial donors helped Social Services provide special support for more than 250 children in foster care or who are otherwise at risk.

AUTOMATED SOCIAL SERVICES: The state has initiated a new automated case management system for Social Services, resulting in major work at the county level. Chatham is one of three counties across the state selected to be a pilot site for the next phase.

MISSING CHILDREN: The Emergency Communications Center is now a certified partner of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

POULTRY FARMERS: Cooperative Extension helped poultry farmers impacted by the closing of poultry processing plants. For example, they helped 75 pullet and broiler farms secure new contracts.

4-H IN SCHOOLS: Cooperative Extension’s 4-H program partnered with several county schools to offer programs on healthy eating and physical activity as well as animal science. Teachers reported that 75% of students’ science grades increased at least one grade.

SMALL FARMS & SPECIALTY CROPS: Cooperative Extension continues to foster the growth in small farms and specialty crops. Its popular Growing Small Farms website expanded its resources and had more than 23,000 visits last year.