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GASTON COUNTY
Local Strengths. Global Success.

GASTON ARC: ANNUAL REPORT CARD

A sunset over a lake with the text 'RESPOND REIMAGINE REVITALIZE' overlaid. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow and long rays of light that reflect on the water. The sky is filled with dark, dramatic clouds, some of which are illuminated from below by the setting sun. The water in the foreground is calm, showing clear reflections of the sky and the sun. The overall mood is serene and hopeful.

RESPOND

REIMAGINE

REVITALIZE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Message from County Manager	03
Chain of Command Chart	04
Board of Commissioners	05
FY 20 Budget Snapshot	06
Financial Results	07
Revenues and Expenses	08
Serving residents through COVID-19	09
Travel and Tourism: 2019 Visitor's Impact Stats	13
Key Accomplishments	15
What's coming in FY 21	25
Glossary of terms	29
Connect with us	30

Notated photos were winners of this fall's Citizen Photography Contest.

Cover Photo: Harley Gaston Bridge, Belmont - Phillip Lewis

Page 1 Photo: Rankin Lake at Sunset - Jenn Phillips



MESSAGE FROM COUNTY MANAGER

The 2020 fiscal year was a year of significant change for Gaston County.

We transitioned from Earl Mathers to myself in the County Manager's chair - the first woman to sit in this seat in our County's history. And while we began work on several of my priorities for Gaston County, this fiscal year saw the beginning of a crisis, the likes of which we haven't seen in a century - COVID-19.

While the pandemic diverted our attention, it did not shake our purpose. That remains to be a County government that is transparent, fiercely protective of taxpayer resources and innovative in meeting the challenges of the future.

Our report is captured in the theme of Respond, Reimagine, and Revitalize. It demonstrates how we tackled the crisis head-on, by providing funding to those most affected, while simultaneously keeping the County on sound financial footing - with a conservative approach to our FY21 budget as we looked ahead to working through a prolonged crisis with no exact end date. We also made significant gains along the way, adding talented staff in critical areas, bringing new services and opening new facilities to our residents, and re-branding our County for a 21st Century approach.

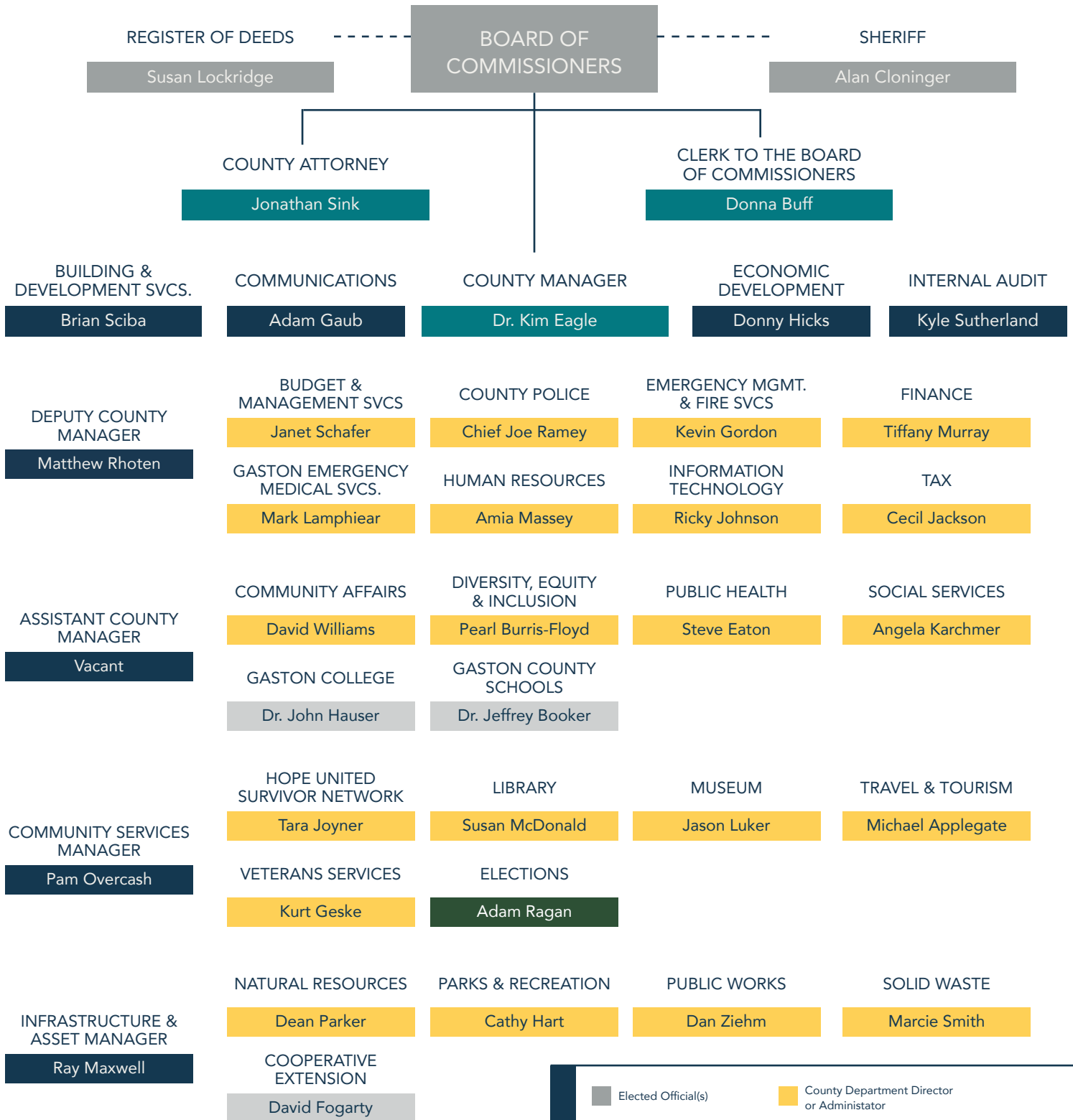
We are in sound financial condition today. This is affirmed by the fact that our bond rating was upgraded to AA+ in FY19. The steps we take and decisions we make each day continue to guide us along the path of strong financial stewardship that puts our County in the best position to emerge from this crisis ready for an era of strong and steady growth.

Dr. Kim S. Eagle
County Manager





ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



KEY

- Elected Official(s)
- Appointed by the BOC
- Reports to County Manager
- County Department Director or Administrator
- Partner Agency Leader
- Appointed by the State

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



TOM KEIGHER
CHAIR
GASTONIA TOWNSHIP



ALLEN FRALEY
VICE CHAIR
CHERRYVILLE TOWNSHIP



CHAD BROWN
RIVERBEND TOWNSHIP



BOB HOVIS
CROWDERS MOUNTAIN
TOWNSHIP



KIM JOHNSON
GASTONIA TOWNSHIP



TRACY PHILBECK
DALLAS TOWNSHIP



RONNIE WORLEY
SOUTH POING TOWNSHIP



PARTNERING FOR THE FUTURE

The Gaston County Board of Commissioners took a significant step forward in March in strengthening its relationship with its neighbors to the east.

The Gaston and Mecklenburg Board of Commissioners met in joint session in April to discuss common goals, which include regional transportation and sound stewardship of the Mountain Island Lake waters that

supply drinking water to Gaston and Mecklenburg residents alike. It was the first time in memory that the two bodies had met formally in joint session.

Projects such as the widening of Interstate 85 between the two counties, the widening of the Catawba River Bridge and the proposed Lynx Silver Line expansion project were all part of a presentation from staff members.

GASTON COUNTY

FY 2020 Adopted Budget at a Glance



Budget Highlights

- **3 cent decrease in the tax rate**
- Increases in operating allocations for the Schools and College
- 12 new positions (10 for public safety and human services)
- Fulfillment of all debt service obligations, including new debt issued for the purchase of Apple Creek Business Park, the jail infill project, and a new public safety radio system
- Making investments that closely align with BOC priorities

\$228M

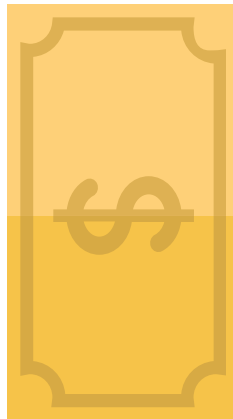
TOTAL GENERAL FUND BUDGET

WHERE DID THE MONEY COME FROM?

The FY 2020 budget was balanced using

▼ \$10M

less fund balance (effectively the County's savings) than the FY 2019 budget AND the lowest tax rate in seven years



73%

Property Tax
\$165.4M Projected GF revenue

14%

Sales & Other Tax
\$32.3M Projected GF revenue

7%

Fees, Licenses & Permits
\$16.0M Projected GF revenue

6%

Other
\$14.6M Projected GF revenue

MORE ON PROPERTY TAXES...

What was Gaston County's *tax rate*?

84¢

Per \$100 of value

Was this a change from *FY 2019*?

▼ 3¢

Decrease from the FY 2019 tax rate of \$.87 per \$100 of value



Lowest tax rate since
2013

WHERE DID THE MONEY GO?

Education

Total investment of \$74.9M



33%

of GF expenditures

Public Safety

Total investment of \$66.3M



29%

of GF expenditures

General Gov't

Total investment of \$37.4M



16%

of GF expenditures

Human Services

Total investment of \$28.7M



13%

of GF expenditures

Other

Total investment of \$21.1M



9%

of GF expenditures



FINANCIAL RESULTS

FY 2020 is encapsulated under the theme of Respond, Reimagine and Revitalize.

While the county started the fiscal year with a three-percent cut to the property tax and on solid ground with a growing local economy, the uncertainty brought by COVID-19 required quick action from county government - which included expenditures.

Gaston County decided to **Respond** to COVID-19 in many ways, including through the CARE Plan, which set aside \$1.125M in direct assistance for individuals or to nonprofits helping individuals affected by the pandemic. Amendments to the general fund appropriated a total of \$13,439,180 during the fiscal year.

County leadership would then **Reimagine** some of its plans to compensate for the needed change in focus. The General Fund's actual expenditures were \$20,958,396 under what was budgeted, while the Health Department expenditures were \$5,385,153 under budget for the fiscal year.

As mentioned above, the County used money to aid its residents suffering from the negative health and economic affects caused by COVID-19. The Public Assistance Fund saw its fund balance decrease by \$1,219,123 mainly to support the funding of the CARE Plan.

The county also continued previously planned work and addressing ongoing needs to **Revitalize** the community, such as overcrowding at the jail and for economic development to purchase property for what is now the Apple Creek Corporate Center.

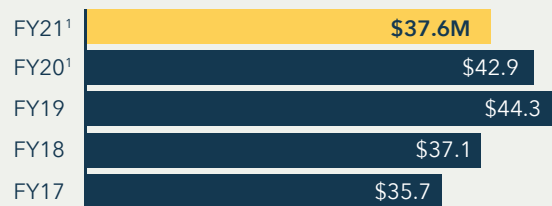
The Gaston County Annual Report Card serves as its Popular Financial Report for the fiscal year 2020, which ended June 30, 2020.

This report is intended to provide a high-level view of the County's revenues and expenditures, with detail on projects and initiatives that detail how tax dollars are being spent. The County desires that its residents have an easy-to-understand document to guide their understanding of financial decisions and expenditures to maintain and grow trust in local government.

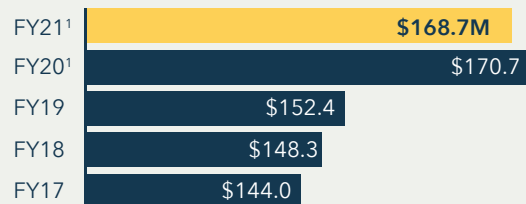
The information for this report is derived, in part, from the County's Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR), which provides more than 200 pages of detailed financial statements, charts and statistical information. The CAFR is compiled in accordance with General Accepted Accounting Principals (GAAP) and was independently audited by Martin, Starnes & Associates, CPAs, P.A.

To review the CAFR, please visit the Finance Department section of the Gaston County website, GastonGov.com/government/departments/finance.

SALES TAX REVENUE



PROPERTY TAX REVENUE



REVENUE AND EXPENSES

GASTON COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

STATEMENT OF REVENUES, EXPENDITURES, AND CHANGES IN FUND BALANCES - GOVERNMENTAL FUNDS FOR THE YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2020

	Major				Nonmajor	Total Governmental Funds
	General Fund	Public Assistance Fund	Capital Improvements Fund	Debt Service Fund	Other Governmental Funds	
Revenues:						
Ad valorem taxes	\$ 166,030,558	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 5,284,080	\$ 171,314,638
Other taxes and licenses	32,442,106	-	10,105,045	8,222,301	753,807	51,523,259
Restricted intergovernmental revenues	10,842,678	22,842,412	-	2,364,600	71,705	36,121,395
Fees, licenses, and permits	6,484,384	-	-	-	-	6,484,384
Sales and services	19,980,373	-	-	-	-	19,980,373
E911 surcharge	-	-	-	-	698,276	698,276
Investment earnings	721,706	36,708	1,688,146	63,873	67,120	2,577,553
Miscellaneous revenues	2,087,173	365,881	26,824	-	156,895	2,636,773
Total revenues	<u>238,588,978</u>	<u>23,245,001</u>	<u>11,820,015</u>	<u>10,650,774</u>	<u>7,031,883</u>	<u>291,336,651</u>
Expenditures:						
Current:						
General government	34,216,591	-	-	-	105,769	34,322,360
Public safety	68,813,755	-	-	-	6,368,568	75,182,323
Environmental protection	69,718	-	-	-	-	69,718
Economic and physical development	3,529,470	-	-	-	864,077	4,393,547
Human services	19,328,790	39,922,545	-	-	-	59,251,335
Cultural and recreational	6,064,538	-	-	-	-	6,064,538
Education	57,591,462	-	-	-	-	57,591,462
Capital outlay	-	-	47,436,706	-	-	47,436,706
Debt service:						
Principal retirement	12,991,158	47,203	-	21,580,108	1,329,670	35,948,139
Interest and fees	466,031	1,703	-	9,753,126	-	10,220,860
Total expenditures	<u>203,071,513</u>	<u>39,971,451</u>	<u>47,436,706</u>	<u>31,333,234</u>	<u>8,668,084</u>	<u>330,480,988</u>
Revenues over (under) expenditures	<u>35,517,465</u>	<u>(16,726,450)</u>	<u>(35,616,691)</u>	<u>(20,682,460)</u>	<u>(1,636,201)</u>	<u>(39,144,337)</u>
Other Financing Sources (Uses):						
Debt issued	1,099,727	-	-	-	-	1,099,727
Transfers in	12,770,171	16,707,327	11,643,201	23,212,554	210,000	64,543,253
Transfers out	(50,509,829)	(1,200,000)	(10,963,328)	-	(262,096)	(62,935,253)
Total other financing sources (uses)	<u>(36,639,931)</u>	<u>15,507,327</u>	<u>679,873</u>	<u>23,212,554</u>	<u>(52,096)</u>	<u>2,707,727</u>
Net change in fund balances	(1,122,466)	(1,219,123)	(34,936,818)	2,530,094	(1,688,297)	(36,436,610)
Fund Balances:						
Beginning of year - July 1	<u>55,202,897</u>	<u>17,386,586</u>	<u>124,607,370</u>	<u>9,400,766</u>	<u>7,176,393</u>	<u>213,774,012</u>
End of year - June 30	\$ <u>54,080,431</u>	\$ <u>16,167,463</u>	\$ <u>89,670,552</u>	\$ <u>11,930,860</u>	\$ <u>5,488,096</u>	\$ <u>177,337,402</u>



SERVING RESIDENTS THROUGH COVID-19



Gaston County responded to its residents' needs as COVID-19 impacted the entire community.

IT

Created capability for **490 additional staff** to work from home during the COVID-19 outbreak.

LIBRARY

On average, **22 temporary cards** were issued each week during the first **14 weeks** of the Library shut down. Citizens requested these temporary cards to allow them access to digital content while the Library was closed.



GASTON SAVES

The County launched Gaston SAVES, which stands for Safety, Awareness and Vital Emergency Support. This platform, and its accompanying website, GastonSaves.com, serve as a connection point for the community for information and resources on major events. To begin, Gaston SAVES focused on COVID-19, with a #MaskTogetherGC campaign.

The County is using a portion of federal CARES Act funding it received from the federal government to fund the Gaston SAVES initiative.

The need to launch the campaign before Labor Day weekend was key, given that public health officials knew that COVID-19 doesn't take a holiday. Gaston County saw spikes in cases roughly 10-14 days following both Memorial Day and Independence Day.



“Every decision we make has an impact on us, our families, our coworkers and friends – but also on the whole community, our businesses and schools and our ability to manage this together.”

Steve Eaton
Public Health Director



St. Helen Catholic Church Spencer Mtn | Julie Kiser



SMALL BUSINESS BRIDGE LOAN PROGRAM

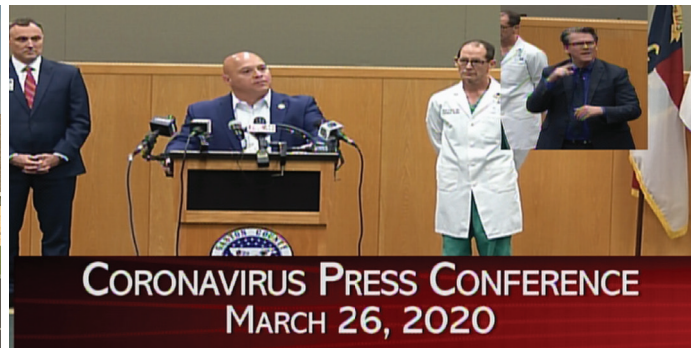
\$500,000
IN LOANS

The Board of Commissioners set aside \$500,000 in loans to be made available to Gaston County businesses with 50 or fewer employees.

Each loan will be up to \$5,000 each, in an effort to serve as many Gaston County small businesses as possible. The loans will be spread over 3 years at a low-interest rate, with payments deferred for the first 12 months.

There are still funds left for small business loans moving into FY21.





CARE Plan

Provided \$2 million to build a new Child Advocacy Center that will allow staff to better serve the more than 300 children who come to them each year that are the victims of abuse.

Added \$100,000 from the County's general fund to its Family Advisory Board. That doubles the amount of money the FAB has available to provide to nonprofits who apply to the board for funding.

Put a \$28.25 million facility for Gaston County Emergency Management, Emergency Medical Services, and Telecommunications along with an \$11.25 million fleet management facility forward as projects the County will seek bond approval from its residents. If approved, those projects would allow the County to continue to infuse money into the economy to keep people working.

Finally, Gaston County's Department of Health and Human Services is providing \$1 million to allow for donations to organizations helping residents in the following seven areas:

FOOD

RENTAL /
HOUSING
ASSISTANCE

VEHICLE
PAYMENT
AND REPAIR

DAYCARE
SUPPLEMENTS

HOMEBOUND
CLIENTS

PRESCRIPTION
ASSISTANCE
FOR INDIVIDUALS
NOT ON MEDICAID
OR MEDICARE

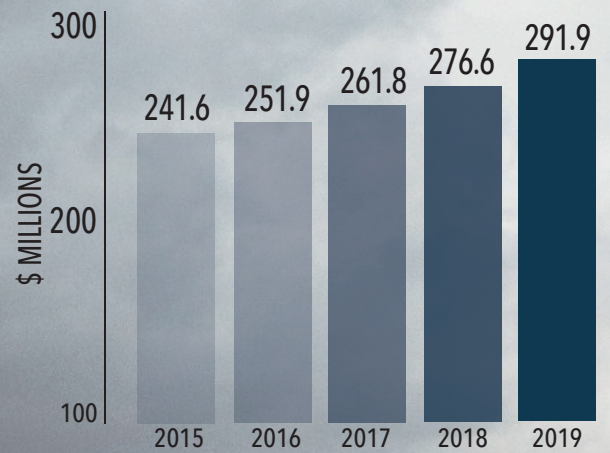
COMMUNITY
ASSISTANCE
FOR FOSTER
CHILDREN
AGES 18-21



TRAVEL AND TOURISM: 2019 VISITORS' IMPACT STATS

Visitor Spending in Gaston County

Visitor expenditures in Gaston County have risen from \$241.6 million in 2015 to \$291.9 million in 2019 a change of \$50.3 million or 20.8%



Domestic Visitor Spending

Spending by domestic visitors in Gaston County increased 5.55% from 2018.

\$291.94
MILLION



Gaston County is #17 among North Carolina's 100 counties in spending by visitors.

Gaston County Tourism Industry Statistics



2019
Payroll

\$49.14
MILLION



2019
Employment

2.08
THOUSAND



2019
State & Local Tax Collected

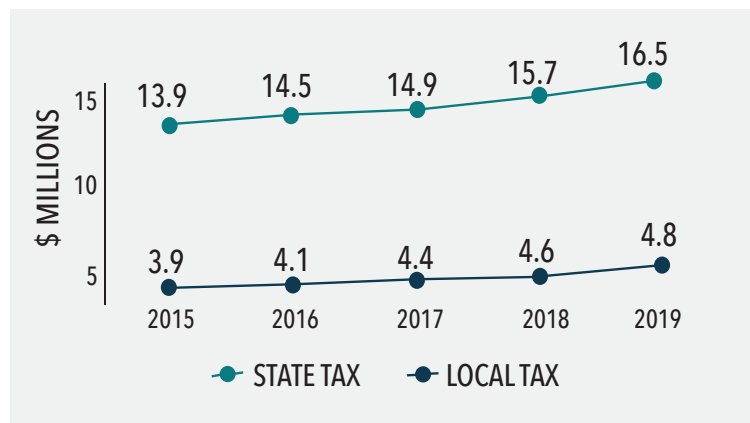
\$21.27
MILLION



2019
Tax Savings per Resident

\$95.49

State & Local Tax Collected from Visitor Spending



Westfield Mall Carnival | Jenn Phillips



KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Respond, Reimagine and Revitalize:
Our accomplishments during 2020 focus on this theme.

NEW CORPORATE PARK STRENGTHENS GLOBAL REACH

After more than 5 years of work behind the scenes in partnership with the City of Gastonia, the County officially broke ground at the Apple Creek Corporate Park on June 23. The County acquired 15 different parcels of land to make the corporate park a reality.

The project already has an announced tenant: GNT, USA. The company is building a food processing plant that will result in 40 new jobs for the area. As many as 10 other projects can be located in Apple Creek, depending upon the facility's size and scale.



OTHER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WINS

American & Efird has announced reinvesting in Gaston County at their Gastonia location. A&E is the largest supplier of sewing thread and specialty yarns in the US and the second largest supplier globally. A&E currently operates five locations in Gaston County.

The Board of Commissioners authorized the purchase of 93 acres in Cherryville and for due diligence to begin in February 2020. The EDC has been working for several years to study the potential for the development of a business park on the site.

Dry Pro Foundation and Crawlspace Specialists announced its new headquarters location in Belmont at 130 Performance Drive. This location will also establish Dry Pro's marketing, sales and production location. The total expected investment is \$1.5 million. The company intends to create 125 new jobs.

Rochling Engineering Plastics broke ground on a 75,000 SF warehouse expansion, adjacent to its existing facility in the Gastonia Technology Park. The addition of a new logistics center will provide the space to support growth and better service customer needs while freeing up space on the production floor.

Dymax Corporation announced the purchase of approximately 16 acres in the Gastonia Technology Park from KRM Development. The company plans to invest up to \$21.5 million to construct an advanced manufacturing facility and create 59 jobs within 5 years. The proposed average annual wage is \$59,814. The EDC has been working with the consultants since November 2018.

It's another step in recruiting businesses from around the world. In fact, Gaston County has been so successful in bringing in businesses from Europe, the Middle East and beyond that Southern Business and Development Magazine recognized Gaston County as a Foreign Direct Investment Cluster.

In total, more than \$370 million has been invested in all Foreign Direct Investment Projects in the County, leading to the creation of more than 1,000 jobs - most of which pay more than the County's median wage.



MARKETING MAKEOVER

2020 was a big year for the County's branding, as it rolled out a new logo and tagline.

Historically, the County has used its seal, which was created in 1969, as its main icon and symbol. Before 1969, the County used a modified version of the North Carolina state seal. The Gaston County seal will continue to be used on the County flag and official documents.

The new logo is a result of work with Waxhaw-based community branding and communications agency, Haven Creative, to craft a symbol that represents the multi-faceted nature of the County's past, present and future.

The golden sun and skyline represent the business and economic growth occurring in the County, while the teal river plays a dual role - paying homage to the textile mills that were once plentiful throughout the County while recognizing the outdoor water activities that residents, and visitors alike, enjoy.

The slogan, "Local Strengths. Global Success." was adopted from the County's Economic Development Commission, giving the nod to Gaston County's success in attracting manufacturing and tech firms from Europe, the Middle East, and indeed, across the world.

This branding effort is just one part of a larger project being shepherded by County Manager Dr. Kim Eagle to incorporate a more unified effort between the County and local economic development groups to attract business and future residents to the area.



GIMME SHELTER

It was a long time coming, but May saw the opening of the County's new Animal Care and Enforcement Animal Shelter.

The sparkling new facility has more room for staff and animals alike and sound barriers to help keep the animals calmer in a new environment. There is also expanded medical facilities to care for

the animals and more space for prospective owners to meet animals they are looking to adopt.

All of this is part of that department's ongoing goal of raising the number of animals adopted.



1,708

ANIMALS ADOPTED



15,688

ANIMAL CARE CALLS

Camelot Meadows Bamboo Forest | Bob Mulholland



MORE THAN JUST MEDIA

In February, Gaston County re-established its Public Information Office after a nearly 12-year hiatus. Former newspaper editor and television news producer Adam Gaub stepped into the role and helped launch various new communications platforms.

One of those is the County's new video series, Eye on Gaston, which takes residents behind the scenes of key County projects and events.

AN EXPERIENCED HAND

As part of an overhaul, Charlotte Fire Deputy Chief Kevin Gordon was hired by Gaston County to head up and reorganize the County's emergency management office.

Now reorganized into the Office of Emergency Management and Fire Services, Gordon is leading efforts to improve training, flesh out emergency planning documents and make sure the County is adequately prepared for whatever hazards may come our way.

Emergency Management was one big piece of the County's COVID-19 response. They worked closely with their state counterparts and area businesses to make sure County employees and local municipalities had the personal protective equipment they needed to do their jobs while remaining safe.

VSO KEEPS VETERANS' WELL-BEING FIRST

While the total number of GC veterans decreased from 2018 to 2019 (from 14,121 to 13,948), the number of GC veterans receiving health care from the VA system rose from 4,944 to 5,017.

In 2011, approximately 24% of the veterans in Gaston County received health care from the VA, but in 2019 it was about 36%.

With the exception of an annual grant of \$2,000 - \$2,500 from the State, the Gaston County VSO is 100% funded by the County.

The VSO currently has about 8900 "active" client files, and approximately 60,000 "cold" files from folks who have not been to see us since 2012.

The VSO maintains paper files dating back to the creation of our office in 1946, for veteran/surviving spouses dating back to the Civil War.

More than 83% of VSO operations budget is spent on transporting veterans to their VA medical appointments.

VA payments to/on behalf of Gaston veterans more than doubled (on a per capita basis) between 2011 and 2019, from \$4062 per veteran in 2011 to \$9688 in 2019.

Total VA expenditures for Gaston veterans (including direct compensation and pension payments to veterans, and the cost of VA health care):

2011 = \$71,748,000

2019 = \$135,137,000

HUMAN RESOURCES SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS

Completed the Safety and Health Policy and Procedure Manual for Gaston County

Implemented Merit Pay System

Created Fellowship Program

Created New Mission Statement

Established Gaston County Multicultural Affairs Committee

FY21 GOALS

Conduct Classification Compensation Study

Conduct Organizational Health Audit



TRAVEL & TOURISM MILESTONES

Published 2020 Visitors Guide

Upgraded Gateway Signage

Published Arts & Culture Promotional Book



READING AHEAD

Mt Holly, Dallas, and Stanley Branch Libraries have been undergoing renovations since May. Renovations include ADA compliant restrooms and service desks, new carpeting, new furniture and fresh paint. These locations should be reopened in the Fall of 2020.

The Library hosted an international exhibition titled, "Maurice Sendak: 50 Years, 50 Works, 50 Reasons." This memorial exhibition celebrated 50 years since *Where The Wild Things Are* was published and featured 50 original works by Maurice Sendak. Over 2,200 people visited the Library for this exhibit.



More than
100,000
individuals
have a Gaston
County Public
Library card

During the first three months of each year, most second graders in Gaston County take a field trip to the Library and get a tour of their local branch or the Main Library and get to participate in a story time. This is an exciting time for these kids and many of them will come back to the Library with their parents to get Library cards and/or to show the Library to their parents. As a result of these second grade field trips, over 1,100 children's Library cards were issued during these first three months of 2020.

Library staff provided job and career assistance to citizens over 3,500 times in Fiscal Year 2020.

In the time between 2013 and 2018, Gaston County Public Library increased the number of programs 189.7% and Library patrons attending these programs increased 176.3%. As a result of increased programming along with other agency's efforts, Kindergarten Readiness went from 25% DIBELS to 42% DIBELS during this same time period. Additionally, third grade end-of-year scores increased from 39.4% to 52% from 2013 to 2018.



GREAT OUTDOORS & IN



Received a \$250K Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) grant for Dallas Park improvements

Gaston County Senior Center reaccredited as a Center of Excellence

Hosted a Red Bull Qualifier at the George Poston Park Pump Track

Completed a soccer field, dog park and fitness pavilion at Dallas Park

Implemented a career path designed to expand the career ladder, encourage higher levels of education, and improve the level of service provided to the citizens

Expanded community outreach, teaching approximately 500 people Stop the Bleed and CPR, in addition to high school sporting events, health fairs, and continuation of other long term programs such as our Explorer Program and Kids Academy

Developed several employee engagement initiatives including a winter coat drive for the homeless, PB&J drive to support the Guardian ad Litem's program, Thanksgiving and Christmas sponsorships, and the inaugural Trick-or-Treat with a Paramedic program


Participated in trial of body worn cameras for paramedics to increase first responder and patient safety

SERVICE ON THE FRONT LINE

CALLS FOR SERVICE

 **51,917**

GEMS Emergency Dispatches

 **2,649**

Suspected COVID individuals transported between March and Dec. 1 by GEMS

 **73,418**
Gaston County Police

139,877
CALLS TO
911 • **97.78%**
ANSWERED IN 10 SECONDS OR LESS

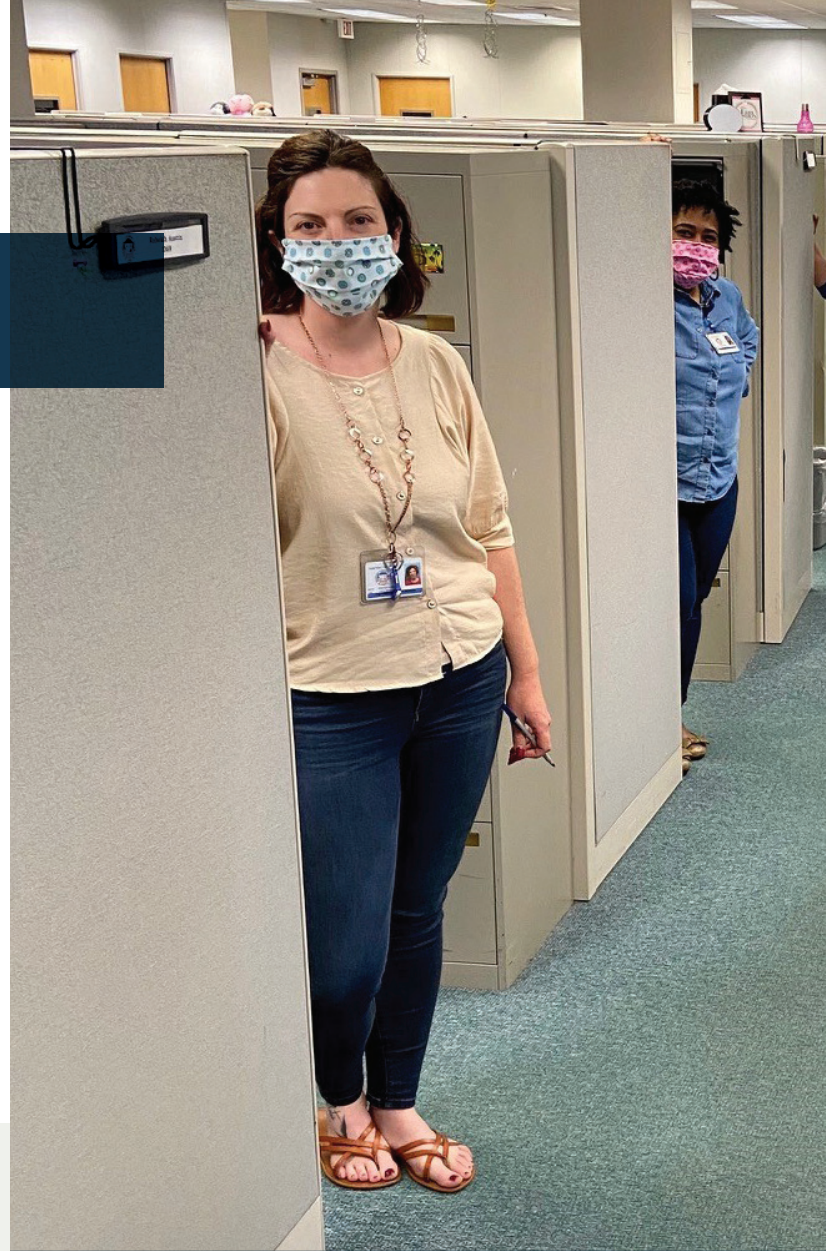


LIFE-CHANGING SERVICES

CLINICAL SERVICES

In response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, DHHS developed a Telemedicine program for certain Maternity and Family Planning patients. The program is continuing to expand, and will continue post-COVID-19.

To improve access to and consistency of our reproductive health services, DHHS entered into a contract with Upstream USA to provide training and consulting services with all Family Planning and Maternity program staff.


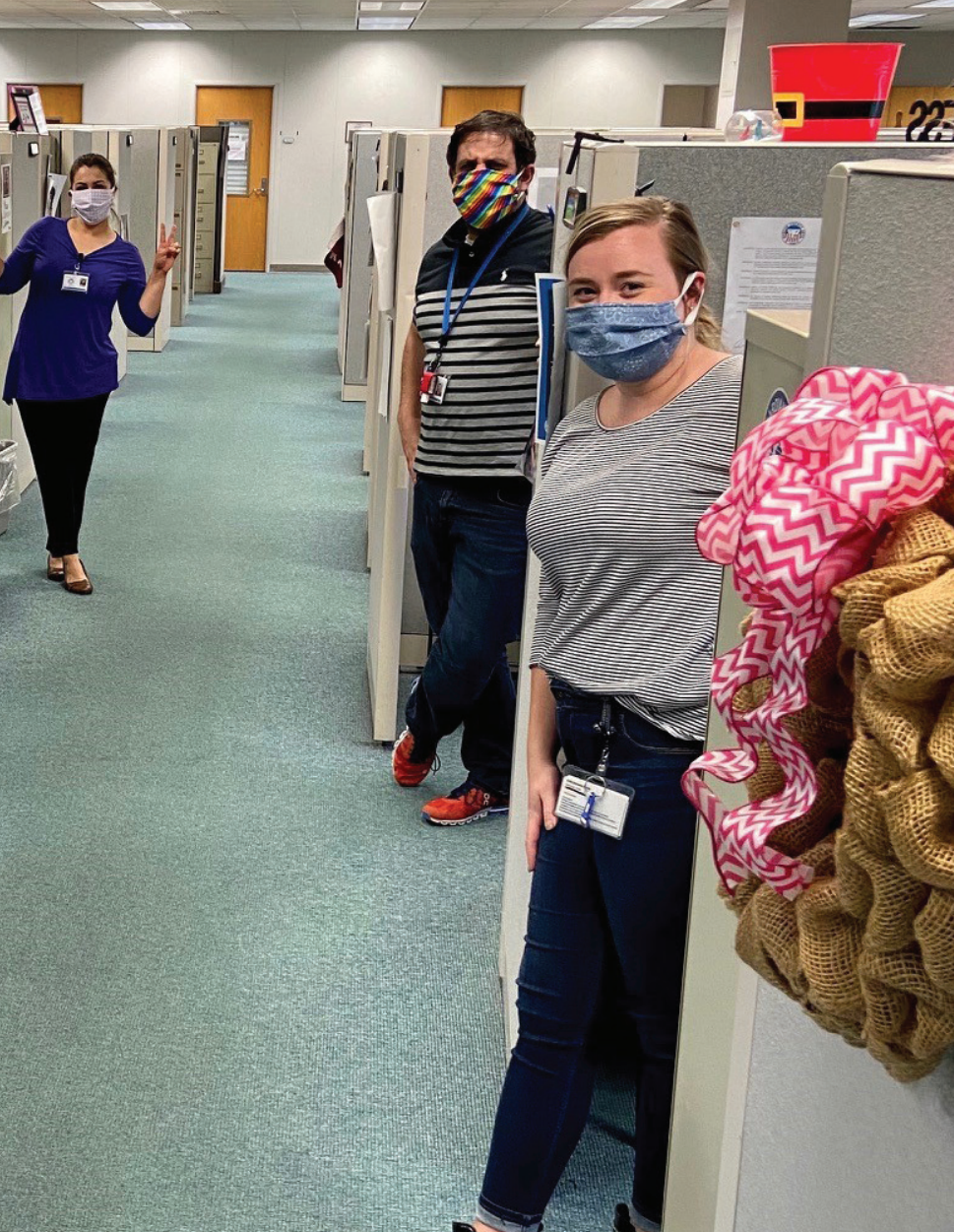


ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

In FY 20, responded to COVID-19 calls and guided numerous businesses.

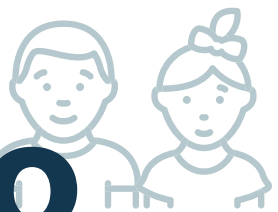
For FY 21, received the 2nd direct federal five year grant from CDC. This grant will allow EH and UNCC to analyze and interpret data collected from Healthy Wells. This will allow us to better inform citizens of possible concerns regarding their private well.

Also in FY 2021, as part of the FDA Program Standards, Food and Lodging adopted a more robust QA program that requires each staff to have a field QA review as well as an in-office paperwork review. This will allow Food and Lodging staff to continue to improve the program.



79,644

Meals provided as part of meals on wheels program (nearly 10K more meals than in FY 2019)



358

Average number of kids in County's care each month for foster system

COMMUNITY HEALTH EDUCATION

Operated a COVID-19 call center that offers accurate information and support to the community

Served WIC clients remotely and saw an increase in WIC participation

Provided COVID-19 education to community members at Second Harvest Food Bank's weekly giveaway at Mt. Zion Restoration Church

Conducted telehealth visits for home visiting programs

Guided and supported childcare centers navigating the pandemic

Assisted the Communicable Disease team with COVID-19 response by conducting contact tracing and case investigation

Continued the work of the Health Equity Team under the leadership of DHHS' first Manager of health Equity Outcomes



WHAT'S COMING IN FY21

MAKING TAX PAYMENTS EASIER

Knowing COVID-19 has changed the way many people interact, the County is renting a vacant bank to use for drive-through tax payments. There will also be a dropbox for cashless payments.

It's one more way the County is looking outside the box to provide services to citizens safely while working through a pandemic.

NEW SAVVY CITIZEN PODCAST



In the first quarter of FY21, the Public Information Office rolled out another method for keeping citizens informed - a podcast dubbed Savvy Citizen. Budget Manager Janet Schafer and PIO Adam Gaub co-host the podcast, which tackles both difficult issues like election misinformation and COVID-19's health effects, while also hitting on lighter subjects that show the human (and sometimes humorous) side of local government.

Download the podcast on [Apple Music](#), [Google Play](#) or [Audible](#).

AN IMPROVED NETWORK OF SURVIVOR SERVICES

It's a part of County services we wish we didn't need to provide, but at the same time, recognize it is all too critical for many of our residents.

What started as a plan in 2018 for a centralized resource for survivors of abuse came to fruition with the development of the Gaston County Family Justice Center in April of 2020, which was rebranded as the Hope United Survivor Network, a new department in Gaston County Government aimed to contain survivor services across the lifespan. The Hope United Survivor Network encompasses The Lighthouse and Cathy Mabry Cloninger Center, a domestic violence shelter under the leadership of Tara Joyner.

The mission is to offer survivor led services by bringing agencies to the individual, therefore removing the burden of safety on the victim. Hope United provides a coordinated response to childhood and adult survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and elder abuse by partnering with a variety of local resources, including law enforcement, legal aid, victim advocates, childcare, transportation and mental health providers as they aim to help victims navigate barriers, obtain safety and increase accountability of offenders.

481

Total intakes for the HUSN in our first 6 months

45

Average survivors a month in our first 6 months

160

Survivors provided emergency shelter in imminent danger of domestic violence (a reduced capacity due to COVID)

330

Child forensic interviews

1,987

Calls to Crisis Line



UP IN SMOKE

As part of a state-leading initiative, Gaston County on July 1st rolled out a comprehensive tobacco-free policy that bans the use of cigarettes and any tobacco products – including e-cigarettes and vapes – on public property.

The rule was passed unanimously by the Health and Human Services Board and the Gaston County Board of Commissioners in the Spring of 2019. In the run-up to July 1, 2020, the Department of Health and Human Services used the time to do advertising and outreach campaigns to prepare the community for the change.

“I think it speaks volumes that this policy was passed unanimously by the Board and we are thrilled with the support from our Board of Health & Human Services, local municipalities, and community citizens – especially local youth – who helped us bring this important piece of legislation to our County.”

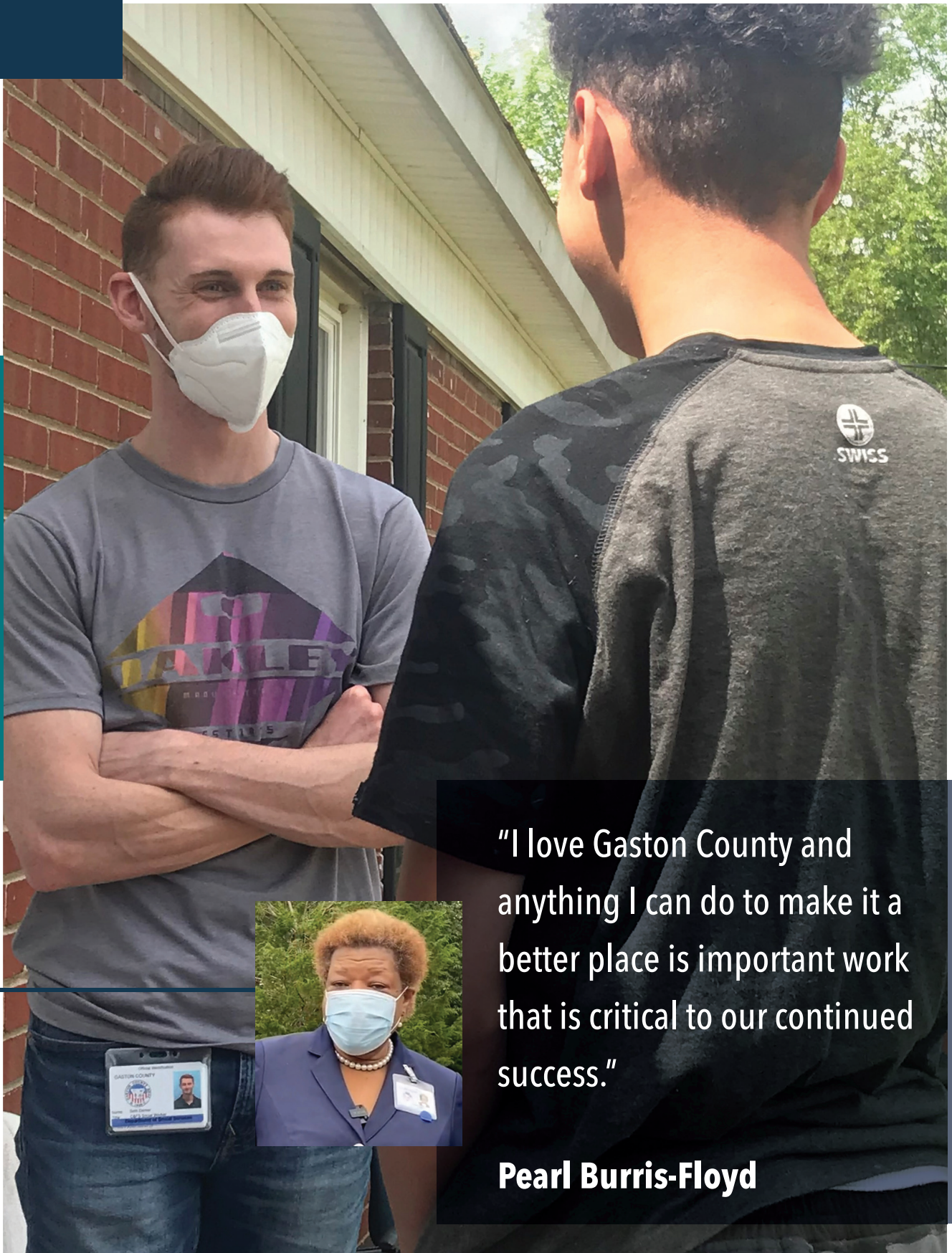
Tracy Philbeck
Commissioner, Dallas Township

COMMITMENT TO EQUITY

The new role of Equity and Inclusion Officer was a priority for the County Manager to ensure that Gaston County is a place where all feel welcome and have an equal chance for success. Former State Legislator and County Commissioner Pearl Burris-Floyd took on August's role, moving from a part-time support role for the Child Advocacy Center.

Her job is to leverage best practices and resources within the government and the community-at-large. More specifically, she'll work to build upon ongoing work to foster an even stronger culture of inclusion where individuals from all racial and ethnic identities, ages, nationalities, social and economic status, sexual orientation, religious, political and ideological perspectives, and physical and mental abilities are able to thrive, be engaged, and excel.

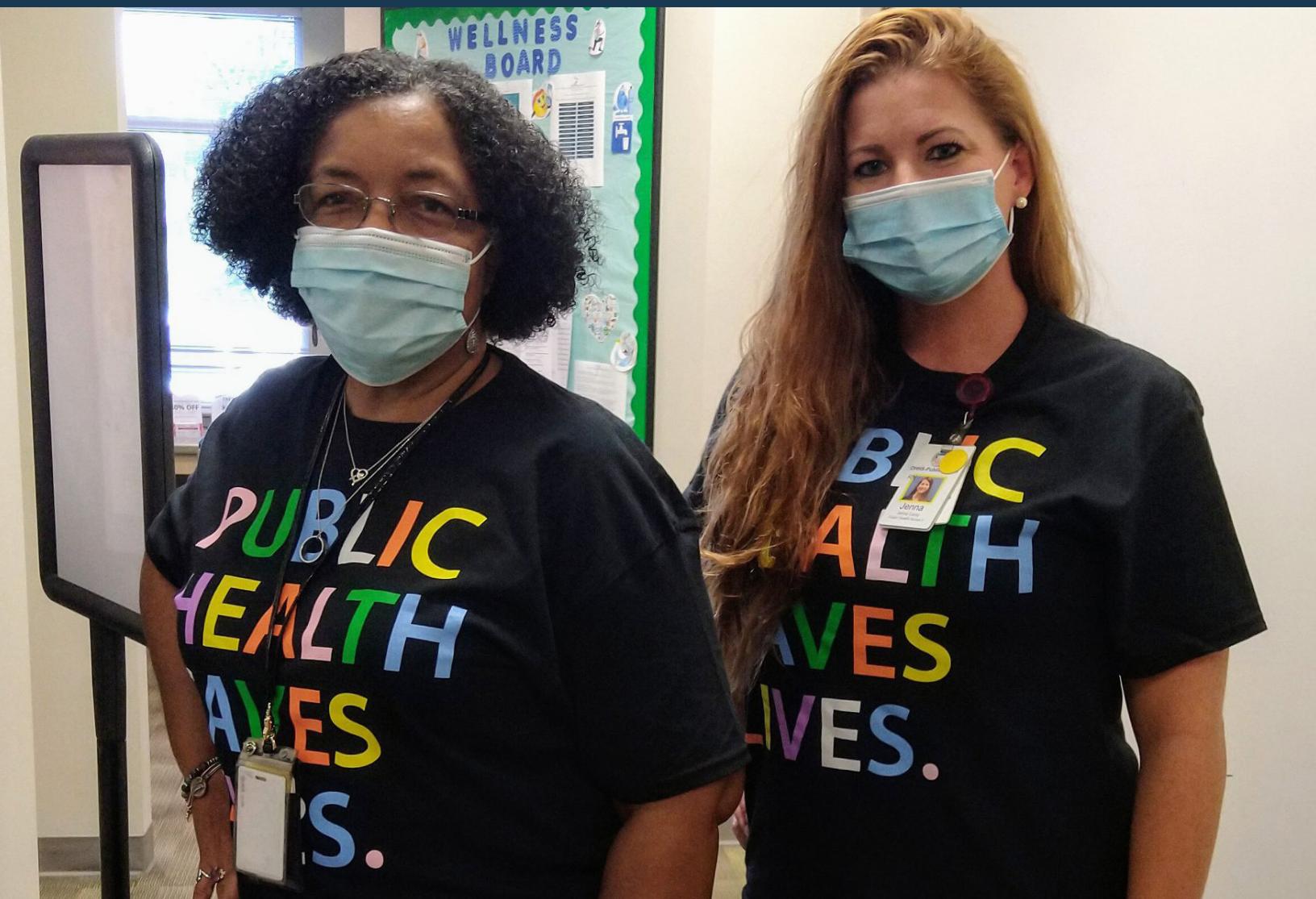
Burris-Floyd will lead the development of an equity and resiliency strategy for Gaston County. This six-to-nine-month process will bring together a wide variety of stakeholders to conduct a comprehensive analysis of existing plans, accomplishments, challenges, and opportunities and an action plan for implementation.



"I love Gaston County and anything I can do to make it a better place is important work that is critical to our continued success."

Pearl Burris-Floyd





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