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## **COUNTY'S RECOMMENDED FISCAL YEAR 2017-2018 BUDGET PRESENTED TO COMMISSIONERS**

NEWTON, NC – Catawba County Manager Mick Berry presented his recommended Fiscal Year 2017-2018 budget to the Catawba County Commissioners during their May 15 Board meeting. The full budget recommendation may be viewed online at <http://www.catawbacountync.gov/budget/17-18/budgetmain.asp>.

The recommended budget, which maintains the current property tax rate of \$0.575 per \$100 of valuation, totals \$259.2 million (a 1.9% increase from the current year, excluding debt for Catawba Valley Medical Center). Due to continued growth in retail sales, building permit activity and business investment, the budget projects growth in both property tax revenue and sales tax revenue. This growth in revenue allows for implementation of the Board of Commissioners' strategic plan.

In his presentation Berry acknowledged the Commissioners' leadership in undertaking a community-wide strategic planning process, noting their policy direction served as the foundation for his recommended budget. The budget details specific investments aimed at enhancing quality of life while maintaining the second lowest tax rate among neighboring area counties and sixth lowest of the state's 27 urban counties.

A sampling of the major budget investments highlighted during Berry's presentation to the Board includes the following:

- Education: \$1.3 million in support of the collaborative K-64 initiative aimed at strengthening students' career readiness and bolstering the workforce pipeline, 3% growth in per-pupil funding levels, increased support of Catawba Valley Community College, and funding for a range of school capital and construction projects to ensure the physical school environment is conducive to student learning;
- Economic development: funding for development of a speculative building in partnership with the City of Claremont and the Economic Development Corporation, increased business incentive payments driven by tax base expansion and corporate investment, continued focus on setting aside funds for future economic development opportunities, aggressive pursuit of Park 1764 development in partnership with the City of Hickory, and staffing expansions in key development-related positions such as building inspectors, environmental health inspectors, and landfill personnel;
- Water and sewer infrastructure: over \$8.45 million in project investments including water lines for Highway 16, sewer lines for Highway 150, and – consistent with the Board's tradition of proactively planning for the future – \$1.3 million for future project set-asides;
- Community health and safety: a Community Relations Sergeant staff position for the Sheriff's Office to supervise School Resource Officers, increased hours for a staff position focused on ensuring the County's veterans receive access to available services, operating costs for the recently expanded Justice Public Safety Center (including 911 telecommunicators, court bailiffs, and associated support staff and operating expenses), and planned capital expense related to a 320-bed jail expansion towards which the County has been saving for nearly a decade; and
- Parks: \$445,000 dedicated to refreshing the County's existing Riverbend, Bakers Mountain, and St. Stephens Parks and accelerating planning for Mountain Creek Park located in southeastern Catawba County.

The Commissioners will hold budget hearings for County departments and outside agencies Monday, May 22, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the 1924 Courthouse in Newton. These hearings are open to the public.

On Thursday, June 1, the Commissioners will hold a Public Hearing to accept citizen comments regarding the recommended budget. This hearing will begin at 7:00 p.m. at the 1924 Courthouse in Newton.

The Commissioners are scheduled to vote on budget adoption at their Monday, June 5 Board meeting, which will begin at 9:30 a.m. at the 1924 Courthouse in Newton.

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