



## 2024 ADVOCACY AGENDA



### **FEDERAL PRIORITY ISSUES**

The City of Gastonia seeks funding for major transportation projects, community development, affordable housing, and infrastructure initiatives.



### **STATE PRIORITY ISSUES**

The City of Gastonia will focus efforts on projects and initiatives that support the City's financial well being, economic development, local governance, utilities, transportation, parks and recreation, community development and housing, museum services, and public safety.



### **COUNTY PRIORITY ISSUES**

The City of Gastonia supports projects and initiatives that provide opportunities to partner with Gaston County to improve employment, economic development, transportation, and to reduce homelessness.

# THE CITY OF GASTONIA



## GASTONIA CITY COUNCIL

Left to right (front row): Mayor Pro-Tem Dave Kirlin, Donyel Barber, Mayor Richard Franks (center), Jennifer Stepp, Robert Kellogg  
Back row: Jim Gallagher, Charles Odom

## VISION

The City of Gastonia serves as a model for civic leadership as we engage our community of dedicated neighbors (**Great People**). We share a collective passion for personal safety, economic vitality, inclusiveness, cultural richness and overall sustainability (**Great Place**). Our distinct character is built upon a rich and unique heritage and fueled by enthusiasm for the promise of a brighter tomorrow (**Great Promise**).

## MISSION

To provide fair, competent, responsive, cost-effective services at the highest level.

## CORE VALUES

Accountability • Inclusiveness • Safety • Professionalism • Honesty • Integrity



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## FEDERAL PRIORITY ISSUES

The City of Gastonia seeks funding for major transportation projects, community development, affordable housing, and infrastructure initiatives.

- The City seeks funding from the US Department of Transportation through various established grant programs such as the RAISE Program, Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods (RCN) Program, INFRA Program, Safe Streets and Roads for All Program, rail connectivity, SMART Program, and all programs that provide funding to improve local transportation conditions and rail connectivity.
- The Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina Departments of Transportation are preparing a plan to build a high-speed rail line from Atlanta to Charlotte. The City supports route options that include stops in Downtown Gastonia.
- The City supports working with the Federal Rail Administration to further study intercity passenger rail from Kings Mountain to Charlotte as part of the Corridor ID Program.
- The City supports maintaining the tax-exempt status for local government bonds. Proposals to make government bonds taxable would make local governmental infrastructure projects costlier to local taxpayers and rate payers and may make them less attractive to investors.
- The City supports full funding for Federal Transit Administration programs and efforts to modernize funding strategies to better accommodate on-demand transit, otherwise known as microtransit.
- The City seeks to ensure that projects at the Gastonia Municipal Airport that are included in the Federal Aviation Administration's Work Plan receive high priority and adequate funding.
- The City supports continued funding for infrastructure initiatives in the areas of transportation, brownfields grants, public water and sewer system rehabilitations and expansions, targeted economic development, public safety, and community development Block Grants, and HOME programs that address affordable housing and reduces homelessness.



## STATE PRIORITY ISSUES

The City of Gastonia will focus efforts on projects and initiatives that support the City's financial wellbeing, economic development, local governance, utilities, transportation, parks and recreation, community development and housing, museum services, and public safety.

### FINANCIAL

- The City supports the position that the State should not cut or eliminate State-shared revenues to local governments unless other suitable revenues replace them.
- The City opposes unfunded mandates that are established through legislation or regulation that require additional local expenditures without corresponding revenues.
- The City opposes tax reform or redistribution of revenues that adversely affect the City's revenues necessary for local services.
- The City supports legislation to provide municipalities with authority for additional locally-controlled revenue options and flexibility in the use of those options, including – but not limited to – city-only sales tax, city occupancy taxes, a prepared food and beverage tax, and impact fees for transportation, parks and recreation, and public safety.

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- The City supports legislation that will provide funding for State-level incentive programs necessary to keep North Carolina competitive in its efforts to bring additional jobs and economic development to local communities when competing with projects in other states. This includes the Governor's OneNC Fund, Golden Leaf Foundation, Job Development Investment Grants (JDIG), and other programs that support major industrial site development and downtown development.
- The City supports legislation that provides additional tools for redevelopment of downtown properties. For example, the City believes Chapter 160D could be amended to provide for more flexibility in the negotiation of economic redevelopment agreements and the sale of City properties when addressing urban blight and downtown revitalization.
- The City supports State Historic Preservation Tax Credits and advocates that they not be curtailed. These credits are important economic development tools for Gastonia and the State of North Carolina.
- The City supports the re-establishment of the North Carolina Mills Tax Credit or a similar incentive that will stimulate the market place to restore and reuse large vacant industrial, agricultural and utilities buildings.

- The City supports the State continuing to fund a strong film incentive program and consider public policy that positively impacts film jobs in our state.
- The City supports efforts to revitalize the P&N Rail Line for commuter rail and appropriate freight usage.
- The City supports the City of Charlotte's bid for federal recognition to become a Tech Hub and ways to collaborate with Charlotte and other regional, state, and federal partners to be a vital part of the emerging tech hub community in Charlotte.
- The City supports the revitalization of vacant and abandoned properties with appropriate funding.
  - *Many towns and cities do not have funding to address abandoned properties.*
  - *These properties affect surrounding home and business property values, economic development opportunities and crime rates.*
  - *With funding and additional legal tools, such as those allowing for properties to be more easily condemned, these properties could serve to address local housing needs*

## LOCAL GOVERNANCE

- The City supports the reestablishment of the non-partisan plurality election model used by the City under NCGS 163-192 that allows all Gastonia citizens to vote for each member of the Gastonia City Council.
- The City supports amending state annexation laws to allow cities to close doughnut holes and restrict all water and sewer expenditures to areas only within public rights-of-way and easements.
- The City supports a system of spirituous liquor sales that maintains a local referendum about the decision to sell, preserves local control over the location and density of outlets, and preserves the local revenue stream.
- The City seeks authority to criminally enforce City regulations for the towing and booting industry (such as mandatory signage, procedures to tow or boot, business hours' operation, and mandatory acceptance of credit cards).

- The City supports state regulations that prevents abusive price gouging and extortion that occurs in this industry.
- The City seeks to reduce pressure on property tax payers by expanding locally-controlled options for revenue generation.
  - *Property taxes remain the primary revenue stream over which municipal governments exercise control.*
  - *A lack of diverse, local tax options can affect economic growth, as well as cause large swings in revenue based on economic changes.*
- The City supports legislation clarifying a City’s right to establish a tree ordinance and opposes legislation impairing the right of a City to protect its tree canopy.
- The City supports amendments to the North Carolina Open Meetings Law that will clarify when and how elected officials can participate remotely in City Council meetings, even when the City is NOT operating under a Governor’s Executive Order or a local State of Emergency. These amendments should include the situation when a majority of the Council is able to meet in person but one or more Council members cannot be physically present and still wish to participate via telephone or video conference in voting on certain matters. The City acknowledges that votes on certain zoning and quasi-judicial matters may not be appropriate to be included in such amendments.



North Carolina General Assembly Building

## UTILITIES

- The City supports the cooperative interconnection of water and wastewater utilities through partnerships and contractual negotiation, and encourages the General Assembly to enact legislation which provides fiscal and regulatory incentives in support of such initiatives. Conversely, the City strongly opposes State legislation which would compel the transfer or sale of utility systems or that curtails the ability of municipalities to secure no interest loans and grant funding opportunities for regional water and sewer interconnections.
- The City supports full funding for the State Revolving Loan Fund (SRLF) of the NC Department of Environmental Quality.
- The City supports full funding of the NC Land and Water Fund (formerly the NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund) for stormwater and water quality projects.
- The City supports local government authority to build broadband infrastructure in order to partner with private providers, and provide additional funding to help close the digital divide.
- The City seeks additional state funding for utilities and infrastructure through the American Rescue Plan Act.
- The City supports science-based PFAS drinking water and wastewater regulations and the funding of treatment upgrades for the removal of PFAS from drinking water and wastewater.
- The City supports the construction of properly built, operated and maintained stormwater infrastructure that helps create a safe and livable community by preventing dangerous flooding and by keeping our water clean.
- The City supports the vigorous enforcement of existing stormwater and soil erosion regulations, and given the number and severity of flooding problems experienced by our residents as well as those just outside our City limits, we believe additional regulations and resources for enforcement are warranted.

## TRANSPORTATION

- The City supports the Catawba Crossings transportation project. Improving connectivity from Gastonia to Charlotte-Douglas International Airport and its Intermodal Facility is a key transportation and economic development priority. Bridge crossings of the Catawba and South Fork Rivers are a high priority transportation goal in our region.
- The City strongly supports the extension of light rail, intercity passenger rail, and rapid transit from Charlotte to Gastonia, including daily passenger rail service that will extend from Charlotte to Gastonia. This includes the full utilization of the P&N Rail Line.
- The City supports legislation that would allow (for all non-federally funded interstate highway projects) for the reimbursement of utility relocation projects to be phased in over a period of five years. NCDOT should allow municipal utilities with adequate, functioning, and existing underground lines within State road rights-of-ways to remain in place for NCDOT road-widening projects.
- The City supports the NCDOT-funded project to widen Interstate 85 and partner with NCDOT to ensure that the City has input in the planning and construction of improvements, including aesthetics.
- The City seeks legislation to ensure that the amount of Powell Bill funds or a similar model funding source appropriated by the State are sustained and distributions to municipalities are increased and grow over time.
- The City supports an increase in State funding to support public transit and transportation development and operations.

## PARKS & RECREATION

- The City supports the continued funding of the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund Grant Program (PARTF Grants).
- The City supports the continuation of allocations for the Recreational Trails Grant Program (RTP Grant).
- The City supports Crowder’s Mountain State Park and increased funding for future improvements.
- The City supports Mountain Island Educational State Forest and increased funding for future improvements.
- The City supports the mitigation of the former landfill site located adjacent to Interstate 85 North and Sims Legion Park. This includes the total replacement and improvement of existing recreational areas that are impacted by the mitigation project.

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & HOUSING

- The City seeks legislation that provides additional tools and financial resources to address safe and affordable housing.
- The City seeks financial resources for programs and partnerships that address homelessness.
- The City supports the adoption of the Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act, which has the potential to put more vacant property back into use – and to do so by treating property owners fairer with fewer court-ordered forced sales and with a streamlined process to sort out ownership interests. These vacant property situations are particularly apt to arise in properties handed down from one generation to another without a formal will left by the original owner.

## MUSEUM

- The City supports full funding and inclusion in the Governor’s Budget for the NC Science Museum’s Competitive Grant Program, an important program that allows the City’s Schiele Museum to provide high quality science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education programs to students in Gastonia, Gaston County and throughout the region.

## PUBLIC SAFETY

- The City seeks public safety grant funding and flexibility of usage.
  - *More effective and equitable policing can be achieved by additional funding of community policing programs, as well as the allocation of more funds toward alternative programs that seek to address mental health calls and other issues through non-uniformed personnel.*
- The City seeks additional funding for the continued improvement of the Charlotte Area Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) communications system in partnership with regional and federal partners.
- The City supports legislation providing additional post-employment benefits to public employees that includes a funding mechanism to fully support the cost and liability of the benefit, and supports the study of existing post-employment benefits, such as special separation allowance programs to ensure that the liability of providing the benefit is not solely borne by the last employer.
- The City seeks improved statewide funding and support for Law Enforcement Officer (LEO) training focused on use of force, mental health and de-escalation skills.
  - *Highly-publicized incidents of police use of force in recent years have underscored the need for enhanced and expanded law enforcement training.*
  - *Improved training is needed to build trust and legitimacy in the community while serving the public in a professional and equitable manner.*
  - *Numerous studies show that additional and effective training focused on conflict de-escalation can significantly reduce police use of force.*
- The City supports increased resources for the NC Department of Justice Criminal Justice Standards Division to expedite the onboarding of police recruits.

## COUNTY PRIORITY ISSUES

The City of Gastonia supports projects and initiatives that provide opportunities to partner with Gaston County to improve employment, economic development, transportation and address homelessness.

- The City seeks to partner with Gaston County and area non-profit organizations to reduce homelessness.
- The City seeks to partner with Gaston County on the acquisition and development of additional property for industrial use and job creation.
- The City seeks to partner with Gaston County on mutually beneficial studies that include economic development, transportation issues, and other items of interest.
- The City seeks to continue to partner with Gaston County to fund and construct strategic utility extensions.
- The City supports a countywide initiative to provide necessary funding for transportation improvements that includes funding for mass transit.
- The City seeks Gaston County financial support for the Schiele Museum.
- The City seeks to partner with Gaston County related to Downtown Beautification efforts, specifically around publicly owned spaces and include public artwork.
- The City seeks to partner with Gaston County to increase travel and tourism through capital projects and strategic marketing.
- The City seeks an increased level of service for animal control enforcement in Gaston County.
- The City supports the vigorous enforcement of existing stormwater and soil erosion regulations, and given the number and severity of flooding problems experienced by our residents as well as those just outside our City limits, we believe additional regulations and resources for enforcement are warranted.
- The City supports the per capita distribution method of sales tax over the current ad valorem distribution method selected by Gaston County.

