Gaston County

FY 26 - 28

Strategic Plan

Revision adopted August 26, 2025

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Letter from the County Manager

Board of Commissioners, residents, and staff:

Gaston County continues to grow and change, and with that growth comes the responsibility to remain intentional in how we serve our residents. The FY26-28 Strategic Plan reflects the next step in our journey of building a stronger, more resilient, and more collaborative organization.

The update process was both thorough and all encompassing. Following the start of Phase 1 work with Centralina Regional Council in Fall 2024, the Board of Commissioners provided important direction through workshops and briefings beginning in January 2025. Beginning in March 2025, department directors and key staff participated in workshops and strategy sessions designed to refine our mission, vision, and values. All County employees were asked to contribute their insights through surveys and focus groups, ensuring that the perspectives of those who deliver services every day were incorporated. In addition, our community offered valuable input at the *Get to Know Gaston* event.

Through this process, we established five goal areas — Workplace Culture, Efficiency & Effectiveness, Civic Infrastructure, Sustainable Growth & Economic Diversification, and Talent. These priorities will guide future budgets, foster collaboration across departments, and connect daily work with long-term goals.

The FY26-28 Strategic Plan is not a static document. It is designed to adapt as challenges emerge, and opportunities arise. Most importantly, it keeps us focused on our shared vision of making Gaston County a model of intentional collaboration, innovation, and efficiency among local governments.

I am deeply grateful to our Board of Commissioners, County employees, and community members for their role in shaping this plan. Together, we are building a stronger foundation for the future of Gaston County.

Respectfully,

Matthew (Matt) Rhoten
County Manager

Gaston County Board of Commissioners

Chairman
Chad Brown
Riverbend Township

Vice-Chair
Cathy Cloninger
Dallas Township

Jim Bailey
South Point Township

Allen Fraley
Cherryville Township

Bob Hovis
Crowders Mountain Township

Tom Keigher
Gastonia Township

Scott Shehan
Gastonia Township

Development

Why Strategic Planning?

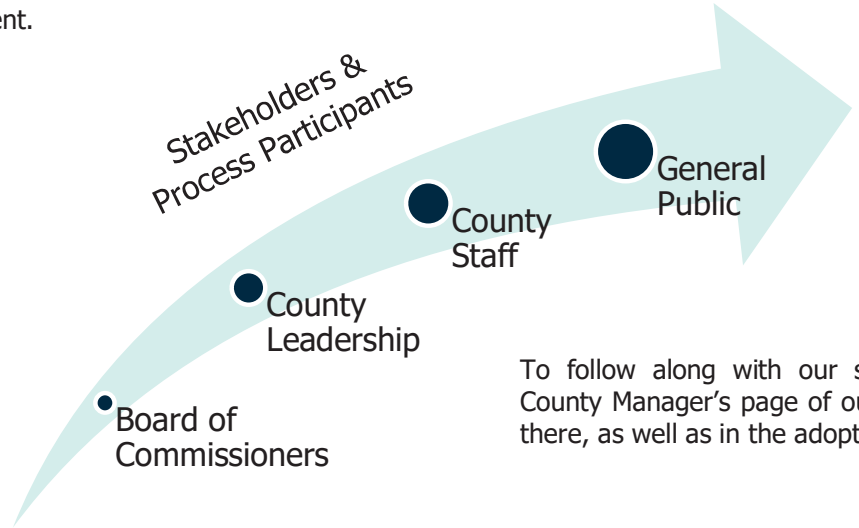
Gaston County has initiated work in organizational strategic planning with the approach that:

- A high-performing county government will achieve even better results for county residents when adopting a culture of strategic thinking.
- County employees can do their best work when they can put their considerable talent, expertise, experience, and creativity behind a well-defined strategy.

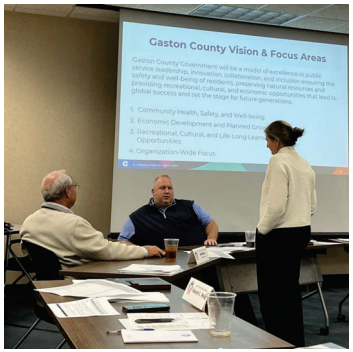
Update Process

In his first year as County Manager, Matt Rhoten oversaw the FY26-28 Strategic plan update reflected in this document.

This intensive, collaborative process was guided by Centralina Regional Council in partnership with the County Manager's Office and Financial and Management Services department. It involved the Board of Commissioners, County leadership, staff at all levels, and the general public though workshops, focus groups, an organization-wide employee survey, and the Get to Know Gaston event which is pictured on the right of this page.



What Changed?



The development of a strategic plan is not the end but merely the beginning. As mentioned in the previously adopted version, the FY26-28 Strategic Plan is intended to be a dynamic document and may include additions and revisions over time necessary to meet the ever-evolving needs of Gaston County.

This most recent effort resulted in updated vision and mission statements, updated core values, and updated goal areas and strategies for achieving them. For a quick summary of what's included in this plan, please see pages 6-7.

Next Steps

Following the Board's adoption of this updated plan in August 2025, the County will continue its strategic planning work. This will involve finalizing the reporting structure and metrics that will measure our progress and creating departmental plans that detail the work going into each strategy in alignment with this plan.

To follow along with our strategic planning efforts, please visit the County Manager's page of our website. Annual metrics will be published there, as well as in the adopted budget books for each fiscal year.

Foundations

Activate & Keep in Front of Staff
Build connection to employees' day-to-day work

Vision
Describes a desired future – what you aspire to

Mission
Defines today's work that is aligned to a clear "why"

Values
Actions and behaviors that define culture and support the mission

How to live the mission, vision, and values

Educate & Tell the Story
Clear talking points and messaging that the local and global are connected and mutually supportive – county services create a great quality of life that attracts investment, investment creates tax revenue to support those services

Embed into Culture & Systems
Identify early actions to build trust and support culture change
Examples: build into appreciation systems, integrate into in internal communications, monthly values focus, embed into performance evaluations

Framework

Goals → **Strategies** → **Implementation Actions**

Strategic framework for action that is mission-aligned and strives toward the vision (long-term, multi-departmental)

Specific pathways for achieving the goals (short-term)

Steps to implement each strategy on an annual or ongoing basis

Content adapted from Centralina Regional Council

Vision

Gaston County Government will be a model of intentional collaboration, innovation, and efficiency to expand local opportunity and attract global investment.

Core Values

We Value Collaboration
through engagement, compassion, and respect for all.

We Support County Employees
through a focus on communication, well-being, mutual respect, and development.

We Value Accountability & Transparency
through integrity, trust, and responsiveness.

We Value Quality & Innovation
through creativity, flexibility, and continuous improvement.

We Value Our Resources
through stewardship and efficiency.

Mission

Service-Driven. Intentionally-Led. Resident-Focused.

Goal Area	1 Workplace Culture	2 Efficiency & Effectiveness	3 Civic Infrastructure	4 Sustainable Growth & Economic Diversification	5 Talent
Desired Future	Engage employees and develop connections between their work and the mission.	Make the best use of resources to support each other and improve service delivery.	Support partnerships with the community and our cities/towns to guide actions and innovations.	Implement plans, enhance transportation and mobility, strengthen educational systems, and diversify tax base for future resiliency.	Attract, develop and retain employees.
Goal	**Grow a culture where employees feel valued, have a strong sense of belonging, and have pride in their work.**	**Improve community well-being and pursue opportunities through operational excellence and increased efficiency.**	**Foster civic infrastructure and innovation in support of a resilient community.**	**Build a resilient economy and plan for sustainable growth.**	**Attract and retain employees who embrace a shared vision of organizational excellence.**
Strategies	Assess and refine the employee appreciation strategy to provide multiple mechanisms for demonstrating appreciation that are consistent and affordable. Utilize the culture survey, employee action council and other feedback mechanisms for continuous improvement in priority areas. Enhance organization-wide communication to transparently share information on County priorities, progress and policy direction from the Board.	Improve intentional collaboration and information sharing across departments through consistent communication, technology use and convening/meetings. Assess department facilities and services for opportunities to improve efficiency, optimize space utilization and complete internal process improvements. Enhance grant development and external fundraising to increase revenue for strategic projects and initiatives.	Develop and implement a decision-making framework to guide the County's role in supporting non-profits and community partners. Strengthen engagement and partnerships with other government partners (local, regional, state, federal) to address local and county-wide needs. Support capacity-building efforts in partner non-profits and community organizations to improve their long-term sustainability.	Guide growth and development through the implementation of county-wide plans, infrastructure investments and proactive engagement with municipalities. Develop effective partnerships to improve transportation and expand mobility choices. Enhance services and programs that strengthen cradle-to-career learning.	Develop and implement county-wide systems to support employee development and advancement, including career paths, succession plans and professional development. Invest in skills development, mentoring and coaching to support department managers and supervisors. Refine the performance evaluation system for consistency and fairness; move to ongoing process instead of annual. Collaborate with departments to enhance recruiting and onboarding for consistency and effectiveness.

Workplace Culture

Grow a culture where employees feel valued, have a strong sense of belonging, and have pride in their work.

Strategies

Assess and refine the employee appreciation strategy to provide multiple mechanisms for demonstrating appreciation that are consistent and affordable.

Utilize the culture survey, employee action council and other feedback mechanisms for continuous improvement in priority areas.

Enhance organization-wide communication to transparently share information on County priorities, progress and policy direction from the Board.

Efficiency & Effectiveness

Improve community well-being and pursue opportunities through operational excellence and increased efficiency.

Strategies

Improve intentional collaboration and information sharing across departments through consistent communication, technology use and convening/meetings.

Assess department facilities and services for opportunities to improve efficiency, optimize space utilization and complete internal process improvements.

Enhance grant development and external fundraising to increase revenue for strategic projects and initiatives.

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Civic Infrastructure

Foster civic infrastructure and innovation in support of a resilient community.

Strategies

Develop and implement a decision-making framework to guide the County's role in supporting non-profits and community partners.

Strengthen engagement and partnerships with other government partners (local, regional, state, federal) to address local and county-wide needs.

Support capacity-building efforts in partner non-profits and community organizations to improve their long-term sustainability.

Sustainable Growth & Economic Diversification

Build a resilient economy and plan for sustainable growth.

Strategies

Guide growth and development through the implementation of county-wide plans, infrastructure investments and proactive engagement with municipalities.

Develop effective partnerships to improve transportation and expand mobility choices.

Enhance services and programs that strengthen cradle-to-career learning.

5

Talent

Attract and retain employees who embrace a shared vision of organizational excellence.

Strategies

Develop and implement county-wide systems to support employee development and advancement, including career paths, succession plans and professional development.

Invest in skills development, mentoring and coaching to support department managers and supervisors.

Refine the performance evaluation system for consistency and fairness; move to ongoing process instead of annual.

Collaborate with departments to enhance recruiting and onboarding for consistency and effectiveness.

Gaston County

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Strategic Plan

For more information about Gaston County's strategic planning efforts, please visit gastongov.com/317/Managers-Office.