



## **Semiannual Public Meeting and Board Listening Session**

June 3rd, 2026

### **Kelsey McNamara, Junior, Eugene Ashley High School**

Good evening, everyone, and welcome to the Minnie Evans Performing Arts Center here at Ashley. Thank you for being here for The Endowment's Public Meeting and Board Listening Session.

My name is Kelsey McNamara, I'm a junior at Ashley High School. After graduation, I plan to attend NC State to study criminology or Chapel Hill to study behavioral science. After college, I'm going to commission as an officer in the United States Navy.

Throughout high school, I've experienced firsthand how much this community invests in students and supports us in our educational journeys. One example is the help we receive from the Wilmington Health Access for Teens.

This is a partnership between Coastal Horizons and New Hanover County Schools that provides medical and wellness services in their centers directly on high school campuses, and we have one here at Ashley.

Coming into high school, I struggled with anxiety. Accessing support outside of school was difficult and expensive. Through the WHAT Clinic, I was able to connect with a therapist right on campus, and this helped me stay focused on school while getting the support I needed.

I've also had opportunities through Cape Fear Community College and JROTC (Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps) that have helped me build confidence, develop leadership skills, and prepare for my future. Experiences like these remind me that my community truly invests in young people.

Through Cape Fear Community College, I've been able to dual enroll and earn college credit while still in high school, all while working around my schedule. Taking these classes

has not only boosted my GPA but also prepared me for more advanced coursework and strengthened my time management skills.

I'm grateful to have grown up in New Hanover County with access to these resources and support. Thank you.

Now, it is my pleasure to introduce our senior speaker, Marwa Hizoum. I have admired Marwa's passion, dedication, and leadership since our time together at Myrtle Grove Middle School. I'm excited to see all that she will accomplish in the future. Thank you for being a role model.

## **Marwa Hizoum, 2026 graduate Isaac Bear Early College High School, Strategic engagement and Communications Summer Intern**

Good evening. My name is Marwa Hizoum, and I'm honored to be here, not only as a 2026 graduate of New Hanover County Public Schools but also as a summer intern at The Endowment.

I was born and raised here in New Hanover County, and I recently graduated from Isaac Bear Early College High School, where this fall, I will begin my junior year at UNC Wilmington.

I have been dually enrolled at UNC Wilmington, and I've been taking college courses throughout my high school journey there as well. This was only made possible through the incredible early college pathways available in our school system.

Now growing up in New Hanover County, I've been fortunate to have access to programs, mentors, and community partnerships that have allowed me to explore many career paths related to my interests in healthcare, marketing, and neuropsychology.

However, one of the biggest influences on my journey has been StepUp Wilmington. With their support, I've been given opportunities that have shaped both my personal and professional growth. They opened doors for me to intern with Novant Health's first cohort of high school interns, and they connected me with opportunities to shadow psychologists and other healthcare professionals at many clinics such as Avance Care and Brighter Start Health.

They also introduced me to the YMCA, where I became chair of the Teen Mental Health Advisory Council.

Through all these experiences, I gained valuable leadership and workplace skills that eventually led to my part-time role at the Children's Museum of Wilmington.

Earlier this year, StepUp connected me with The Endowment and encouraged me to apply for an open Marketing and Communications Internship, which I began on May 18.

Through this internship, I'm very confident that I will not only continue to grow but explore my future and give back to the community that has invested so much in me.

Each of these opportunities and the mentors behind them has shown me, and many others, the transformative power of investing in young people early and helping us realize what is truly possible out there for us.

I'm glad you're here tonight, and I'm excited for you all to hear more about The Endowment.

Now, I would like to introduce the Chair of The Endowment's Board of Directors, Shannon Winslow.

A Wilmington native, Ms. Winslow is Director of Strategic Accounts at WebMD Health Services. And Ms. Winslow's leadership is shaped by her lifelong connection to this community, and she is passionate about translating that connection into action in support of our community.

Ms. Winslow has served on The Endowment's Board since the beginning and became Board Chair in 2025 after serving as Vice Chair.

Please join me in welcoming Shannon Winslow.

## **Shannon Winslow, Board Chair, The Endowment Director, Strategic Accounts, WebMD Health**

Thank you, Kelsey and Marwa, for welcoming us and reminding us of why we do this work and why it matters. We are so proud of you, and we cannot wait to see what you do next.

I also want to add that we are so pleased to have Marwa working with The Endowment team as a summer intern. I know the recruitment process was highly competitive, and we had over 50 applicants. So, congratulations, Marwa. Welcome, and thank you for the work you are doing at The Endowment.

Thank you also to New Hanover County Schools Superintendent Chris Barnes, Principal Perez, Principal League, students, and staff for hosting us here this evening at the Minnie Evans Performing Arts Center.

I would also like to thank our county commissioners that we have here this evening, as well as any other elected officials.

Thank you to our community partners, nonprofit leaders, educators, and residents for being here tonight. And thank you for the work that you do every day to strengthen our community.

I would also like to thank those listening to our livestream tonight through The Endowment's website. We appreciate the opportunity to share remarks with you this evening.

Board members, Community Advisory Council members, and staff, thank you for the work you do every day to help make New Hanover County a place where everyone can thrive.

Speaking of our Community Advisory Council, I want to recognize the commitment and contributions of seven outgoing members who are completing their terms this month: Abdullah, Joe, Angie, Kent, Frankie, Gustavo, and Susie. Thank you so much for your service.

We would also like to welcome our newest members: Perry Chappell, Lindy Ford, Rebecca Garcia, Megan Mullins, Dr. Rob Morgan, Roberto Ramirez, and Carson Porter.

Thank you in advance for helping advance our mission and inform our work.

We always begin in the same place: our mission. In a world that is constantly shifting and changing, returning to our mission reminds us of who we are, why we are here, and the impact we are committed to making—to improve the health, education, safety, and economic opportunity of every person in our community.

When we met last in December, we said that we were going to expand our capacity-building portfolio to strengthen our nonprofit organizations and help them become even stronger. They do so much with limited resources, and we know that fundraising has become increasingly challenging.

This month, our commitment continues to take shape. We are pleased to announce today a new investment aimed at strengthening the capacity of local nonprofits to secure critical funding.

This initiative, with innovative funding partners, will support organizations in identifying and pursuing diverse funding opportunities, which include federal, state, and philanthropic grants. It will also provide expert assistance in the development and submission of competitive grant applications.

Through technical assistance, skill-building, and direct support we hope this program will help strengthen the long-term sustainability of the organizations serving New Hanover County.

Our board and team are excited about what lies ahead, and we look forward to the conversation this evening.

But first, you will hear from our CEO, Sophie Dagenais, and her team about how we are translating your insights into meaningful work across our community.

Sophie was named President and CEO earlier this year. Prior, she served as the Interim CEO and Vice President of Programs and Grants.

We are very grateful for her leadership, dedication, and steady hand.

Please join me in welcoming Sophie.

## **Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you, Shannon.

Hi, everybody. It's good to see everybody here tonight. Like Shannon, I want to acknowledge all of you who are here, as well as those who are listening in.

I also want to acknowledge Tara Noland. Tara is a Technical Manager with New Hanover County Schools, 20 years in that position serving our school system. Thank you, Tara, for helping us make this event so very special tonight.

We also want to thank Master Deputy Samantha Macon, who is here tonight. Deputy Macon is a School Resource Officer and canine handler serving New Hanover County Schools, particularly here at Ashley High School.

Thank you both to Tara and Deputy Macon for being here, but above all, for making New Hanover County Schools safe and efficient.

My team and I are very pleased to be here and to share a brief update on the work of The Endowment. We also look forward to your questions, so we'll try and make it brief.

Building on our December presentation, where we previewed our plans for 2026, we have organized our remarks around four key points before opening the floor to your questions: What do we have to work with in 2026? How we are moving from strategy to action and monitoring our progress to goals, and the importance of community engagement in our work across our four pillars.

Throughout tonight's program, I hope you'll see that collaboration and partnership are at the heart of what we do. So, what do we have to work with?

This year, our grant budget is \$58,069,000. Considering our prior-year commitments, our new grant commitments to date in 2026 that are payable this year, and the reserves we

have established, we have approximately \$19.6 million left to pay out on new grants this year.

In 2026, we have awarded 58 grants so far, totaling more than \$17 million, payable through 2027.

And just last week, we announced plans for a grant of up to \$160 million to the county for its ambitious \$320 million plan to construct or renovate educational facilities that will serve the children and families of New Hanover County for generations to come.

As we said last week, when we invest in our schools, we are investing in education, public health, workforce development, community safety, economic resilience, and the long-term well-being of our New Hanover County community.

The Endowment is proud to partner with New Hanover County and New Hanover County Schools to deliver those quality spaces that reflect and inspire our children's full potential.

Where education happens, yes, but also where relationships are formed, where families gather and celebrate, and where neighborhoods find identity and connection.

As of today, since our inception, The Endowment has committed more than \$310 million.

While we are proud to celebrate our commitment to the county in support of our schools, I want to emphasize something just as important: transformational change does not happen all at once, nor in a linear fashion.

It requires a multifaceted approach—bold, systems-level investments; partnerships with community-based organizations and service providers, such as those Kelsey and Marwa referred to earlier in this program; and community-driven efforts.

And that is how we will ensure opportunity reaches every corner of our community.

## **Shannon Wick, Network Associate**

Our Community Grants Program is an excellent example of these commitments coming to life.

Thank you to everyone who applied for a Community Grant this past spring. Forty-one organizations received Community Grants, with individual awards ranging from \$5,000 to \$15,000.

I want to extend a special thank you to our Community Advisory Council members who participated in this selection process and application review.

The Community Grants Program serves as both a rapid funding pathway for eligible organizations across our county and as an opportunity for us to learn more about the work happening throughout our community.

Funding 41 organizations means building 41 community partnerships.

The 2026 program builds on lessons learned from our 2025 pilot, and I hope you will visit our website to learn more about the insights in our newest Impact Report and how those lessons have shaped our 2026 program.

We are looking forward to our fall cycle, which is going to open August 10th.

## **Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you, Shannon.

Speaking of learning, at our December public meeting, a member of the audience asked how we measure impact and track progress.

At the grant level, we work with our grantees to understand whether individual initiatives and programs are achieving their intended goals.

As a team, we want to look at how our pillar investments work together toward those shared outcomes. When appropriate, we look forward to working with our grantees as groups who have aligned goals to support them as mission aligned partners. We'll track population level indicators to set context for our work and help us understand, together with all of you, the real-world conditions that guide us.

Speaking of which, in December we said we planned to develop a dashboard. You can now find that dashboard on our website.

Thank you to our grantee, Cape Fear Collective, for developing this community resource to track population-level outcomes aligned with our mission and goals.

Please visit the dashboard and connect with the other data sources we are tracking along the way.

Building on our Cape Fear Population-Level Outcomes Dashboard, we will soon introduce a complementary resource that goes deeper into birth and early childhood outcomes.

In the coming days, thanks to the leadership of David Stegall, in partnership with NC Child and in conjunction with the Early Childhood Landscape Assessment we commissioned,

please look out for an additional dashboard that offers a more detailed and focused view of outcomes from birth through early childhood in New Hanover County.

These resources are rich, and they are for all of us.

Yes, in December, we also shared plans for several landscape assessments. Some were already underway at the time, and others soon to be launched to help guide our strategy development.

We invited all of you to participate, and if you have done so, thank you so much.

These assessments bring together research, shared learning, and community perspectives.

All are currently in progress and on track, and we are committed to making their findings publicly available. All but one will be completed by this summer or, at the latest, this fall.

They are already informing and shaping our grantmaking.

As part of our Behavioral Health Landscape Assessment, we conducted more than 60 stakeholder interviews, small and large groups, including agency leaders, healthcare professionals, and parents. We mapped 95 organizations.

For our youth development group, we consulted with 96 youth-serving organizations and youth leaders. All of which informed this year's Summer Youth Development Grants.

For the Early Childhood Assessment, we have engaged not only providers but also nearly 80 parents and caregivers.

Last week, we formalized our partnership with CommonWeal and UNC Chapel Hill Professor Ted Zoller to launch our Entrepreneurship and Innovation Landscape Assessment.

As for the Recreational Facilities Assessment, it is well underway. It presents significant opportunities for us to gather countywide perspectives on recreational facilities, assets, gaps, and opportunities.

This includes a countywide, statistically valid survey, as well as a series of convenings and conversations with providers, athletic coaches, parents, and, critically, youth themselves.

We are now deploying that survey countywide. Please look for it and complete it.

Terri.

## **Terri Burhans Senior Network Officer, Community Development**

Thank you, Sophie.

I'm really excited that our Recreational Facilities Assessment isn't just happening in theory—it's happening in real time.

Earlier today, we had the opportunity to meet directly with students right here at Ashley High School and Murray Middle School.

I want to extend a sincere thank you to Mr. Perez and the staff of Ashley High School, as well as Ms. League and the staff of Murray Middle School, for welcoming us and making space for those conversations.

We intentionally scheduled these visits to coincide with today's event because we wanted to ensure that youth voices are not just included but centered in this process.

Their experiences, ideas, and aspirations are critical to shaping what comes next.

What we heard today was powerful.

Students shared what they love about recreation in our community, but they also shared where they see gaps.

They talked about wanting more inclusive and safe spaces, more flexible programming, and opportunities that reflect their evolving interests.

We want to hear from all of you as well.

Thank you for stopping by our table on your way in to learn more about the assessment, share your perspectives, and explore ways to stay involved as this work moves forward.

We have launched the community-wide survey.

Please take a moment to participate by scanning the QR code on the screen or grab a flyer with that information on your way out this evening.

Together, we have a real opportunity to shape a recreation system that reflects the strengths and needs of our entire community, including its young people.

Thank you.

## **Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you, Terri.

At our public meeting in December, we declared several cross-cutting strategies undergirding our pillars to address the barriers that stand in the way of families achieving their full potential.

Workforce mismatches and disconnection, transportation challenges, food insecurity, mental health stress, housing instability, and a lack of affordable childcare.

Our county has strong public leadership, committed nonprofits, engaged educators, and active partners across sectors.

The issue is not a lack of effort, nor is it a lack of will.

The opportunity is alignment—ensuring that these strong assets work more cohesively toward shared outcomes.

## **David Stegall, Director of Education and Community Development**

Speaking of the challenge of workforce mismatches and disconnection, we know that promoting economic mobility is key.

Economic mobility doesn't just impact income. It influences access, opportunity, and overall quality of life.

When we invest in conditions that support mobility, we are investing in better outcomes across education, health, family stability, economic opportunity, and community well-being.

Last month, we announced three new grants totaling more than \$5 million that are designed to support the county's workforce attainment priorities.

The first of these grants is a partnership with three national foundations—Lennar, Charles Koch, and Building Talent Foundation—along with support from Live Oak Bank.

This was to replicate and implement an evidence-based construction trades training and job placement program right here in New Hanover County.

We know transportation is a barrier for many, which is why our collaborative funding investment has embedded a transportation solution designed to optimize access, retention, and completion, ensuring that students have reliable transportation to fully participate in this program at Cape Fear Community College's North Campus.

Additionally, we funded and granted \$3 million to establish the New Hanover County Apprenticeship Accelerator Program at Cape Fear Community College.

And we also funded and granted \$2 million to support the growth and expansion of the Career and Leadership Development Academy.

Let's hear a little about the Career and Leadership Development Academy leaders and students on how this program is already shaping student success, and awareness, and strengthening our community today, and positioning us for an even stronger tomorrow.

## Career and Leadership Development Academy Video 2026

**Michael Lee, Senator District 7:** I think we realized, as policymakers, that it was really important for kids to have a sense of what careers might be out there.

Once you enable a child to have the opportunity to figure out what they love to do, they can translate that into a career.

That career, getting into the workforce pipeline, especially with a program like this, is looking at some of the high-need fields.

They help us from an incubator-type stage when we're talking about middle school all the way through high school, community college, and four-year degrees to help build that workforce out.

**Natalie English, Wilmington Chamber of Commerce:** The Career and Leadership Development Academy is a career exploration program for middle school students.

**Stacey Samuel, 7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at Trask Middle School:** Hopefully, these children do want to stay in our area and use their skills in the future to strengthen our local economy better.

Having that CLDA in their back pocket, each little thing we can provide for them, is just helping set the stage, little steppingstones for them being successful in the future and understanding there's value in all different kinds of careers.

**Laura Brogdon-Primavera, Wilmington Chamber of Commerce:** Jackie Booth, a member of our team, received a phone call from a champion at Williston, and she said, "I just want to tell you how thankful I am for this partnership."

There were students who didn't speak all year and who had not engaged in the classroom all year. But when they went on those trips, they smiled, lit up, raised their hands, and asked questions.

It's nice to pause and understand that what we're doing is making an impact.

## **Leigh Quarles Senior Network Officer, Social and Health Equity,**

Food insecurity is about far more than hunger. It directly affects health, learning, and overall quality of life.

When families do not have reliable access to nutritious food, we see impacts across every stage of life: higher rates of chronic disease, poorer mental health outcomes, challenges in child and maternal health, and barriers to healthy aging.

We also know that communities experiencing high levels of food insecurity often face increased emergency room visits, more hospitalizations, and rising healthcare costs.

In other words, health is shaped by much more than medical care. Access to healthy food is one of the most important foundations for prevention, wellness, and long-term community health.

By improving food security, we can help children succeed in school, support healthier families, reduce preventable healthcare costs, and strengthen the overall well-being of our community.

But lasting progress requires partnership—bringing together healthcare organizations, local government, community agencies, and state leaders to create sustainable solutions.

That is why, alongside our ongoing multi-year food investments, we announced a grant in January in partnership with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services to support the Sun Bucks Summer EBT Program in 2026.

This program will serve more than 15,000 children in New Hanover County and unlock nearly \$1.85 million in food benefits, helping children return to school this fall healthy, focused, and ready to learn. And in April, we announced a grant to New Hanover County to

support a new initiative using technology to address food insecurity across all eight food deserts in the county.

It is a practical, solution-oriented effort designed to make accessing healthier food easier and more convenient for eligible residents.

## **Mary Vail Ware, Director of Social and Health Equity and Community Safety**

We've talked a lot tonight about listening, learning, and implementing. Youth voices are central to this work.

This spring, we continued our listening tour with youth-serving nonprofits, education and government partners, and youth leaders to better understand what's working, where gaps persist, and what young people say they need most to thrive.

We are grateful to everyone who trusted us enough to participate and who honored us by sharing their experiences.

Special thanks to the young people who spoke with honesty and clarity. Your perspectives provided a clear call to action. Your honesty, courage, and transparency in naming both challenges and hopes are essential to our work.

Youth voices reflect not only the present realities, but the future of our community.

We are thankful for your willingness to speak, listen, and envision what's possible.

For more on what we heard, I invite you to visit our website and review the key learnings highlighted in our published report.

Now, let's watch this video together. It gives young people the floor to share their priorities and what they need from us as a community to achieve their goals.

Let's listen.

## **Video 2026**

I am Johanna. I am a 10th grader, and I go to Ashley High School. My name is Madeline Woodhouse, and I am a 17-year-old senior at Glo Academy. I'm Thomas Jackson, I go to Myrtle Grove Middle School and I'm 13 years old. I feel most like myself when I'm on theater

stage, because the people around me care just as much about theater as I do, and that makes me feel welcome and really at home.

I'm looking forward to this summer's football workouts, hanging out with my friends, and working my job this summer. I'm excited to go to the beach and work, play soccer, and helping my grandma with her business. Outside of school. I like to hang out with friends. I like to go shopping, I like to help my mom cooking with cleaning, and I like to play video games.

I love playing sports because it just brings me joy, happiness. I'm able to be myself and feel a sense of peace as soon as I step on the court or the field. I volunteer frequently at the food bank, in the kitchen, or in the market. I've recently gotten into paddle boarding. I love learning, I'm a nerd. It's great.

Something that gets in the way is probably time management. Balancing friendship in school and work is difficult for me. Time and money and just not having enough resources. I hear a lot of students complain that they don't have solid or reliable transportation options. Everybody is so judgmental when they don't have this, or they don't have that or the color of their skin, I feel like that should stop.

A lot of us worrying me right now, going through high school and eventually college is working towards a good job that's going to support me and future endeavors. Taking AP classes next year is probably when I'm most worried about. It's just stressful thinking about the future because there's so many different options, and I'm just not sure what I'm really what I want to do yet.

Teens are worried about where they can find a safe space, and some of them also struggle a lot with mental health. A lot of teens are struggling with substance abuse. Something that keeps me going when times get tough is the support of my peers, my family and my friends. They have so much love and support for me that I just really want to uphold that for them, so that keeps me fighting.

I have a great support system my friends, my family, my student counselor. She helps me a lot going through classes on what I should take. One thing that has really helped me in school is the STAY program. I'm able to work on college prep, and that helps me deal with my scheduling and athletics and academics in one class.

I wish everyone had access to sports and clubs so they can get their mind off stuff, so they don't have to be focused on school all the time. I think teachers need more resources and support to be able to help us as students better, more relevant courses in the school system, to help me with my future. To have more interactive and active learning experiences, rather than just staying in a classroom and giving the piece of paper.

I feel like there's not enough mentors, whether it's I'm having a problem at school, I don't understand the homework or I'm having a problem socially, a mentor can help you. Having somebody by your side and in your corner, it really is a good feeling. It just like pushes you the most. What I'm most excited about in the future. I want to be financially stable, financially successful so I can live my life to the fullest.

Next year I'm hoping to get into this welding program at Cape Fear where I can become like hopefully a better welder and that's my career. One thing that I'd like to see in the future is inclusion and support for female athletes, just like me. Education is important, especially within you.

We are the next generation. We are the future.

## **Mary Vail Ware, Director of Social and Health Equity and Community Safety**

They're pretty great. Yes, you are the future.

Economic opportunity, education, mental health, mentorship, safety, sports, transportation and time management. We hear you and your voice matters.

## **Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you, Mary Vail. And that's why we're here tonight, to hear from all of you. We'll now pivot to our board listening session and I would like to invite the chair of our board, Shannon Winslow, and our vice chair, Bill Blair, to join me.

Please do stay with us for the remainder of the program, as we do have a few invitations and important announcements to make at the conclusion of our Q&A.

We are now going to transition into our public Q&A. In listening session, we have microphones set up down front. When you approach the mic, please introduce yourself and let us know if you are representing a specific organization, because we want to ensure that we have time to hear from as many as possible of you as possible.

Tonight, we ask that you please keep your question concise.

We are eager to hear your thoughts and feedback.

## Board Listening Session

### **Question from Fred Bingham, New Hanover County Resident**

I'm not representing anybody but myself, so I just have a question.

I was wondering how much The Endowment spends on overhead relative to the amount of money that you provide to organizations for their work.

### **Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you for that question.

As I mentioned earlier, our grant budget this year is nearly \$59 million.

As for our operating budget—I have the chair of my Finance Committee staring at me right now, and he's smiling—it is approximately \$8 million to cover both the staff and operations, as well as the consultants we use to augment our work.

### **Shannon Winslow Board Chair, The Endowment Director, Strategic Accounts, WebMD Health**

I will also add that we benchmark those costs against other foundations as a percentage of our overall budget, and we are aligned with—or perhaps even slightly below—those benchmarks.

So that is being managed very effectively.

We appreciate the question. That's a great one.

### **Question from Sady Isles, New Hanover County Resident**

Hey, my name is Sandy Isles, and I am a parent of children in New Hanover County Schools.

My question for you is, New Hanover County Schools has approximately \$2.5 billion in capital needs.

Last week, you announced a grant of up to \$160 million to go towards paying off the debt for the school bond, should it pass.

So, I have a two-part question: What happens if the bond does not pass? And two, do you have plans to support additional capital needs not outlined in the bond, such as additional repairs for Williston and a building for Isaac Bear Early College?

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you so much for that question, Sandy.

In answer to your first question, I would first like to clarify something.

Our \$160 million grant to the county is to support the county in the initiative. The county has decided that it will likely utilize our dollars to help cover the debt service on that bond issue that is before all of us as citizens of New Hanover County.

So, in answer to your question, if the referendum does not pass, if there is no bond issue, there will be no \$160 million grant as it is tied directly to the county's initiative.

As to your second question, relative to other needs, there are so many needs in our community that we are aware of, and this is a starting point.

Like everyone else, we must calibrate our investments. We can't put all our dollars to a single purpose because the needs of our county are many.

And so, if we pay too much attention to one need, then we can't pay attention to others, such as early childhood education, mental health, community safety, and more.

So, I'll pause there for now. I hope that answers your question.

**Rob Morgan, Assistant Superintendent for Operations, New Hanover County Schools;  
Newly Appointed CAC Member**

Hi, good evening, I'm Rob Morgan, Assistant Superintendent for Operations for New Hanover County Schools and a newly appointed CAC member. That's purely coincidental. That's not why I'm up here.

But to Ms. Isles' point, yes, a lot of the things that we see in the schools are facility needs. A significant part of my day, every day, is spent trying to prioritize and reprioritize the needs that we see.

I just wanted the chance to say thank you for offering to step in with that grant funding option, that partnership with the county. If for no other reason, it feels like a significant amount of support coming from a significant community endeavor.

And so, I think it's really important for folks to hear that we are also aware of the facility conditions that people talk about and bring to our attention.

It is something that we work on year-round. I can't tell you how many times people say, "Oh, you're so excited to have the summer off." I haven't had a summer off in over 20 years, because that's about how long it's been since I was in a classroom.

But the good news is, when folks leave, we do have the opportunity to get in there and help address facility needs and concerns.

And I just think it's really great that you all have stepped in in that way, and I want to thank the county as well. The county commissioners and their staff have always been very supportive of the things that we're doing.

So, thank you all. I appreciate the chance to say this and have a great evening. Thank you.

**Shannon Winslow Board Chair, The Endowment Director, Strategic Accounts, WebMD Health**

Thank you, Dr. Morgan, and congratulations on your CAC appointment.

**Lee Johnson, Planned Parenthood South Atlantic Representative**

Thank you so much for the opportunity to be here tonight. My name is Lee Johnson, and I have the privilege of working for an organization that is funded by the Endowment. You support a Teen Mom program here in New Hanover County that is funded through the Endowment and is supported and operated through Planned Parenthood South Atlantic.

And we want to say thank you for supporting the teens that are moms, who are also graduating from Isaac Bear High School, graduating with dual degrees, and using the wraparound services as they continue their health care education at Cape Fear Community College that is now available to them.

This is a program that has existed in New Hanover County for more than 20 years and provides a lot of the services that you, as an Endowment, want to see happen in the community—the generational change.

And on behalf of Planned Parenthood, thank you for including us in the conversation. Thank you for including us as part of the health care that is provided in this organization, in this community, to teens all the way up through menopause at our health care center.

My question—I'm getting to it—is all that you are doing within the community and the wraparound services, there are many different organizations that work together. And a lot of these organizations, while their missions may be rooted in the same positive generational change, sometimes there's not always an alignment on other things with other organizations.

And you guys do so many partnerships and work together. How do you find yourselves working with transparency in the community to make sure that the root cause is being addressed by everybody who needs to be at the table?

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you, Lee, for that very rich question.

You know, at The Endowment, we recognize that sometimes, first of all, we have to adopt a bit of a both-and approach. You know, the clearest example of that is putting food on the table for our families and leaning in and doing that because it is just not acceptable to even think of a family that does not have the nutrition and the food that they need.

At the same time, it is really important to also understand why there is a need to help put food on the table for our families.

And so, that's a really big part of the work as well.

So, we will not supplant ourselves, our styles, or our points of view in the leadership of the organizations that serve this county, but we do want to do our part to help support them, to help encourage them to work together, be they in this category or in that category.

And we look forward to doing more and more of that as we are able to do that.

**Ann Stapleton, New Hanover County resident**

I'd be interested to hear more about mission related investments, about thinking about ways to make the whole of the endowments and serve us in this county.

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you so much, Ann. Very, very good question.

Mission-related investments are highly efficacious tools. Many foundations around the country do deploy those tools. We at The Endowment are very familiar with them. Our board is familiar with them.

As you know, The Endowment is five years old, and so what we are really focused on at the moment is solidifying that grantmaking tool of ours in that toolbox of ours.

You know, over time, we look forward to examining how we may also deploy the tool that is a mission-related investment. And for those in the audience who may not necessarily discern the difference, a mission-related investment is that tool in the toolbox of foundations where they may actually not make a grant from their grant budget, but rather utilize a portion of their corpus to make an investment in something, realizing a return, be it a market return or something less than that.

But thank you for that. And I think I can speak for all of us when I say that, in time, perhaps we will get to that.

**Liz Gage, executive director of Dream center for Arts Education**

Hi, I'm Liz Gage, I'm the executive director of Dream Center for Arts Education. As funding streams change and many people look to the endowment to fill a lot of the gaps in in funding streams, how is the endowment looking at creating a more robust culture of giving or culture of philanthropy in Wilmington?

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you for that, Liz. Wonderful, wonderful observation.

First, I think we will do our part. I think in December; you may recall that it was I who mentioned a desire on our part to develop partnerships with other funders as well.

You know, The Endowment is not the only funder, and there are many other funders, including in New Hanover County, large and small funders outside of New Hanover County, in the region and in the state, even nationally, who may wish to coexist with us right here.

And I think the more we do that, and the more we champion that, and the more we invite people to come in and work with us—because we cannot go at it alone, we cannot go at it alone.

**Shannon Winslow Board Chair, The Endowment Director, Strategic Accounts, WebMD Health**

I'll just add, with what I shared with the announcement this evening, we're very excited about the partnership to get additional monies into New Hanover County, particularly partnering with an organization that can help secure additional funds or grants, rather.

So, I think that's where I'm very proud of seeing The Endowment lead and come out and create additional—I'm going to call it pathways—for those local nonprofits.

So, I think that that is a step in the right direction, and we're really proud to lead in that area. Thank you.

**Shannon Smiles, Executive Director of Smart Start of New Hanover County**

Good evening. I'm Shannon Smiles, Executive Director of Smart Start of New Hanover County. I'm on day 16—so new.

Very excited to hear more about the nonprofit support, as we have limited funding sources, but very excited to hear and see and be a part of the work with Early Care Pathway in your strategic plan, because it starts younger than the dropout rate with high schoolers.

It starts with high-quality childcare centers, affordable childcare for our working-class folks, which impacts the revenue and workforce of our community directly.

There is a three-year waitlist for good, high-quality infant and toddler care. People can't go to work because they can't find childcare. So, thank you so much for letting us be a part of that and hearing more about supporting nonprofit agencies.

And another part of that is, I'm just curious, with the committees and the work that you're doing, how much more effort and strategies are going to be put forth so that we can get our families back to work and get our kids in good, high-quality facilities.

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you. Thank you, Shannon, and congratulations, and thank you for your service.

I would like to also, Tyler, I believe we received a comment and a question on our website from Randall, and they are related. And so, why don't I address both comments and questions together.

And so, first, yes, as you know, our board and The Endowment have made early childhood education and childcare an absolute priority.

As you also know, we do have a landscape assessment that is ongoing now. We are approaching the final stages of that assessment, which will likely tell us things that you already know. In fact, Smart Start has been involved in conversations regarding that assessment.

I think you can expect some smart strategies coming out of that work. I think you can expect that these strategies will engage many of you, and we look forward to doing that.

We don't have a plan tonight, but we are very mindful it is a priority. And you are so right—this is not an issue that belongs to only one part of our community, but rather the entire community across all sectors.

Thank you.

**Kassie Rempel, New Hanover High School Advocates**

Hi. Thank you. I am Kassie Rempel. I am from the New Hanover High School Advocates, and I'm not here speaking specifically for them tonight. I'm here to make an appeal.

But first, I want to thank you, Ms. Dagenais, Ms. Winslow, and Mr. Blair, and the entire Endowment team, the board members, staff, and your chief administrative officer, who does so much to make it run so smoothly.

Yes, there is a great need in our school facilities and this document from August 18th outlines a need of over \$600 million in the facilities that does not include phases two, three, and four for New Hanover High School. The phase approach that the school board members so graciously accepted, thank you, Tim Merrick, as a consequence of the facility study that our county commissioners graciously funded last year.

So, there is a great need. My appeal tonight is because, yes, The Endowment is doing what it can, and it's doing such an admirable job in supporting our schools. My appeal is to the county.

First, let me thank you for putting the bond on the ballot. I know there is still a formality about that, but absolutely, you all have worked so hard for years to get this bond on the ballot, and it is so important, and we are so grateful for that.

The appeal is to ask for the \$116 million that The Endowment has pledged to have that go in addition to the \$320 million that the county has approved. Eric Cradle is here tonight. He has done so much work on figuring out what that cap should be, and it's a cap that should remain because it allows the county to keep our favorable credit rating.

But the \$116 million can be in addition to, instead of paying down debt. That is my appeal—to use your words tonight, Ms. Dagenais—to benefit the long-term well-being of New Hanover County, not just the property owners, but the children and the entire county.

So please, to the commissioners, to the county, please, if you are able, consider strongly making this \$116 million investment alongside the bond which you have already approved.

And thank you again to The Endowment for making this possible.

**Shannon Winslow Board Chair, The Endowment Director, Strategic Accounts, WebMD Health**

Thank you.

**Tim Merrick, member of the New Hanover County Board of Education**

Thank you so much for having me, for having us, for having a conversation with the community, which is what I think the community has been asking for. And you listened, and I appreciate that.

My name is Tim Merrick. I'm on the school board. And while I absolutely can echo what Kasey has said—of course we want a whole \$600 million, don't we? We do know that there are limits.

My question really revolves around the confusion that I'm afraid a lot of our community members have right now. They say, well, you want us to pass a bond for \$320.5 million for the schools. We get that. But then we just hear that The Endowment is going to give \$116 million. So, shouldn't the bond be \$204.5 million instead?

And I think I understand the idea of paying down the debt, but I'd like you to take this opportunity to address the community and explain to them exactly what's happening, because they're thinking we get this extra money, but it's not going to the schools. And I know that it's ultimately in service of that, but I think we need an explanation that they can understand.

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you, Tim. I'm happy to help do that, and I would encourage everyone to also confer with our county partners. Obviously, you know, we worked with them to organize and structure this grant.

Here is what we know. Generally speaking, even around the nation—and certainly in the state of North Carolina—jurisdictions will borrow, go out to the markets, and issue bonds every 12 years or so.

The county right now is paying on a bond issue that is approximately 10 years old.

And so, when the county issues these bonds, it will be paying on two debt loads. For most of us, that's like having two mortgages, right?

And so, what we are doing is enabling the county to afford that debt load for the first 10 years of this new bond issue. Our \$116 million will help do just that.

And therefore, the \$116 million is helping the county get out there, put more money into the infrastructure, and not delay, because you still have that first mortgage to pay.

Thank you, Tim.

**Tim Merrick, member of the New Hanover County Board of Education**

If I just play devil's advocate for a while, first of all, I'm just grateful that you're doing this, so please don't take this the wrong way. But I think people can say, well, then is it really for the schools? Is it really for the county? Is it really for everything that the county pays for? Is it really money that's going to pay down infrastructure costs and school costs?

And it does not take away my appreciation.

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Yeah. Well, thank you, Tim. I'll answer that from the perspective of The Endowment.

This grant is not only contemplated by our founding documents; quite literally, our founding documents contemplated this type of a grant specifically. But this is all about, for us, it's about education first and foremost.

How dare we expect our children to try to learn in an environment where the HVAC may be broken, right?

So, for us, this is about education first and foremost. Moreover, however, if in the process of making our grant we are helping to contain costs and minimize the burden on the families of New Hanover County, then we are also advancing our mission to promote the economic stability of those families.

**Ryan Estes, Coastal Horizon Center Representative**

Good evening, Ryan Estes with Coastal Horizon Center. First, I just want to thank you for your time this evening. Thank you for supporting our mission, graciously being visionaries. I'd be remiss not to acknowledge our CEO and president, Margaret Walsh Starkville also joining us this evening. And so, as a team, we are incredibly thankful. So, my question is this for you, Sophie.

And it feels a bit like sandwiched and juxtaposed with the previous conversation. So, as we know that the county previously eliminated funding and the endowment picked that up as a one-time last year for nonprofits, there's many levers that we have, or few levers that we have, that can do transformational work. One of them is our tax rate.

We are the second lowest tax county in the state. We still don't have a state budget. So, there are few levers at play right now doing transformational work. And I'm wondering how you use your positional power and authority within the community to ensure that we're able to do transformational work, and also not locking in The Endowment to having to pick up the tab of things that could also be done through reevaluating if we want to raise the tax rate as a community, if we want the bond to go.

So, I'm just curious how you collectively are thinking about it and how you're gaining that information from the community to make your decisions. Thank you.

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you, Ryan, for that question. You know, for The Endowment, I would say first of all that we talk a lot. I think our community talks a lot about housing affordability. One of the greatest factors in housing affordability is that property tax rate, right. So, for us, it is looking

at those multiple levers and trying to be as smart as we can be with a cadence that is also very responsible.

And so, you're going to see us making grants of different sizes to different organizations, you're going to see us calibrate our portfolio so that we have a good sense that we are and can move the needle. And as I said earlier, we believe that it's a multifaceted approach. It's those big, bold moves with the larger systems.

But at the same time, it's working very closely with our community.

**Shannon Winslow Board Chair, The Endowment Director, Strategic Accounts, WebMD Health**

Ryan, I'll also add one of the opportunities and one of the roles that we've been proud to play is being a convener. And that is something that we have talked about when we look at the groups that either have been a collaborative focus group, and even earlier this evening when you saw all of the different landscape analysis that we're doing right now, all of those analyses, part of that process was talking to community members that have expertise in those areas, stakeholders, county government, etc.

And so again, what we are finding and what our community is finding is that they're finding some duplicity areas where one person or one organization can be stronger than the other. So, you had asked how we can leverage the good of the endowment. That is something that there's been tremendous progress on, and we continue to have momentum in that area.

But that's, you know, we've gotten tremendous feedback on that, so I just wanted to call that out because I think that's important.

**Dr. Chris Barnes, Superintendent, New Hanover County Schools, Career Leadership Development Academy**

I must explain why I cut in line. Next door is the Career Leadership Development Academy, as part of our agreement and work with the Chamber of Commerce, where every seventh grader is allowed to see and visit real-world job opportunities that they'll experience when they graduate. And The Endowment just fully funded that for the next three years.

So, I must go hand out big checks next door to yours. Sorry, I got ahead of myself two years. I just wanted to level set for a second before I must go back to that. I want to say that this investment in the endowment and the bond is a significant move forward for this county. For me as superintendent, I must be a good steward of the money that we're given, and I must think about how much money can we reasonably and feasibly do in a ten-year period.

And I think that having a way for us to get a bond that's bigger than this district has ever seen before, and working with the commissioners and The Endowment to lower the burden on the tax rate to the individual homeowner is a win-win situation for everybody. So just for level setting, I just wanted to say thank you for your investment in public schools. Thank you, guys, for voting for the bond in November, and thank you to the commissioners as well.

Thank you.

**Dr. Robin Hamilton, Chief Academic Officer, New Hanover County Schools**

Thank you, Doctor Barnes.

I'll go ahead and say ditto. What Doctor Barnes just said, and I am Doctor Robin Hamilton, and I am the Chief Academic Officer for New Hanover County Schools. I'm here to just thank The Endowment for the support and your investment in the educational success and the lives of the children of New Hanover County schools.

Our point of contact, David Stegall, has been a valued partner to me and to our district, and we certainly appreciate him and his tireless work. Through this partnership, we have been able to strengthen our early literacy through funding from The Endowment for Early Literacy Facilitators. We are seeing great growth and outcomes and the fruit of their labors, and we're so happy and proud of that.

The Endowment has most recently funded up to 12 specialist school-based specialists for us, and those positions will begin in schools this fall. And those positions will be working in the areas of improving attendance, academic outcomes, behavior, and graduation rates. And we are also looking forward to how these positions will improve the difference in our schools, our outcomes, and the lives of our students.

So, staff and our school communities are deeply committed to improving educational attainment, enriching the lives of our students, and promoting the overall well-being of our community. So, we certainly appreciate you all and the work you all do, your tireless commitment to helping us bring about the best our community can be. Thank you so much.

**Natalie English, President & CEO of Greater Wilmington Chamber of Commerce**

I'm Natalie English with the Greater Wilmington Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Wilmington Chamber Foundation. I don't have a question, so confession: I'm here to observe. I've been at every public meeting The Endowment has had since its inception. I'm a geek, so I follow everything that you all are doing, along with a lot of other organizations in town.

Sitting here tonight and reading recent grant announcements, I think you all are doing exactly what was intended when Novant Health purchase our hospital and brought more and better access to health care, and that you are also the strategic, transformational ideas that were in everybody's nomenclature when The Endowment was formed, you all are living into that. It's hard to see sometimes in one year's announcements or even in one organization's announcement.

But when I think about the Career and Leadership Development Academy in the building next door, alongside the work that you've invested in helping develop a stronger pipeline of health care workers in our community, and I could go on and on, and then of course facilities for New Hanover County Schools.

Keep up the amazing work. I know it hasn't been easy, I know how many hours many of you have spent doing this work, and I say thank you.

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you. Natalie.

**Claire Kiley, New Hanover County resident**

Good evening. My name is Claire Kiley. I'm a resident of New Hanover County. First, thank you for your courage in having a meeting with so many members of the public present.

But I just wanted to say, because as an arts manager for more years than I care to admit, it's my ongoing job. Even though I'm retired, I keep working at making sure that when funding is available, the arts are adequately represented.

The slideshow is lovely, but I don't see any part of what you're doing set aside to address performing arts or visual arts. I realize the CAM is getting funding and there have been some small funds given or small grants given to organizations.

But just to put the word in there, the arts are not in great shape necessarily in New Hanover County or Wilmington—they need help. And some arts organizations I've spoken to, and I said, “Well, why don't you go to The Endowment?” “Oh, they don't give money to the arts.” And there isn't a part of our culture that needs us more but is so reflective and so important to our well-being and to our cultural identity.

And this is Wilmington as a city, and New Hanover County is famous for an historic theater, a National Landmark historic theater, and there's so much to give. There's so much creativity in this community, but just a little more outreach, possibly to the arts organizations, and let them know more that you are able. There is funding available for

theaters and dance companies, am I correct? What part of your organization would that fall under?

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you, Claire. A couple of things, one of the last grants we announced in December—maybe it was November—Terri is here—was, in fact, a significant grant for Italian Hall. We also announced in December that we had set aside funds for the Arts Council as our partner to help us smartly deploy, with a focus on the arts organizations of New Hanover County, some of The Endowments resources.

You may also notice that as part of our Community Grants program, we have made grants to those arts organizations that use the arts for purposes that go beyond the arts—for example, education, right? So, you can certainly expect that to continue. We know how important the arts are.

They are certainly part of the fabric of our county and, like so many other things, contribute to the overall well-being of the county.

**Suzanne Wertman, project manager for the Coastal Journalism Hub**

Good evening and thank you. My name is Suzanne Wertman. I am the project manager of Coastal Journalism Hub. I'm a nurse, a midwife, a mother, and I've been a resident of New Hanover County for 20 years. I am going to say something different than what everybody else has said and say: do better. You need to do better.

Yeah, go ahead, you can clap. Yeah. Yep, yep. Yeah, this format really doesn't facilitate vulnerability and honesty. So, you can talk to me about that later.

I'm good at facilitating those kinds of conversations, we had one last night with community health workers in Wilmington and they can tell you exactly what we need for people to be healthy in this town. We don't have to do a landscape analysis, we don't have to talk to consultants, the people in the communities that are being under-resourced on purpose know exactly what they need. They need to be able to get around. They need money.

In Flint, Michigan—I don't know if y'all saw the story. It was remarkable to me; it blew me away as a nurse midwife for the last 28 years. Cash for pregnant women leads to better outcomes for babies. Cash. Just cash.

They got \$1,500 midway through their pregnancy and then \$500 a month unrestricted for every month in the baby's first year. You know what happened? Lower ER rates, lower rates of preterm birth.

Right now, the slide that you put up about the dashboard—we could fix that. We don't have to hem and haw about it. We could give people cash; it would be easy. It's low impact on you, and it works for people. Trust the people. They need this money. They just need money.

Thank you.

**Shannon Winslow Board Chair, The Endowment Director, Strategic Accounts, WebMD Health**

Thank you. I do want to just address what you said about the landscape analysis. We've been very clear and very transparent about the fact that we're going to be data driven. I, too, work in health care, and it is very important. Opinions and feedback, while some may be true, you know, we must have a way to evaluate those.

And that's what we've invested in as a board. It is our fiduciary responsibility to make sure that we are stewarding the money for this community.

**Suzanne Wertman, project manager for the Coastal Journalism Hub**

But here's evidence in a place that's super under-resourced, that's had lead poisoning for years.

**Shannon Winslow Board Chair, The Endowment Director, Strategic Accounts, WebMD Health**

I'm very familiar with that. I've worked with them directly. I'm very familiar with that. What I'm saying is we have landscape analysis. There's a purpose for that. And we are going to promise to the community that we are going to steward the money well, and we're going to use data-driven insights to make sure that we're using this money the most appropriate way to get the results for and on behalf of the community.

**Suzanne Wertman, project manager for the Coastal Journalism Hub**

I would also be remiss if I didn't say something on behalf of our media partners. They're not here tonight, and they're not here because they keep getting stood up, and there's like a firewall between the endowment and the media. I'm just telling you what I hear when I talk to the people that I work with, okay?

And y'all got to do better with that. If you want to be transparent, as you say you are, the media folks don't feel it. And if the media folks aren't feeling it, I don't know how the rest of the community is feeling about it either. So, thank you,

**Shannon Winslow Board Chair, The Endowment Director, Strategic Accounts, WebMD Health**

Thank you, I'd like to also address that with regards to the media. This tonight is a community session for the public, and we welcome all the comments, we welcome constructive feedback, and quite frankly, we welcome and look forward to hard questions.

Tonight, what we said is this is about the community. The media partners are invited. In fact, the media, they're citizens just like we all are, and they have every opportunity to come tonight and to ask questions. So, the media is all invited to ask questions.

And I will also say for these community sessions, we have worked very hard to publicly publicize these. We have put them out. Most all—not all, but most all—the media has carried it. We're so gracious, WECT, WWAY, Biz Journal, Port City Daily—those all put this out.

It is also being live streamed, and so again, I think that by evidence of what I just said, we have been extremely transparent because those that are not transparent, they do not publicly go out and have the invitation like we did and live stream it.

So again, thank you for your feedback. But I will disagree that we have done a phenomenal job of making sure that we get that out and invite the dialogue.

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Suzanne, I'll just add to that that this is a public meeting. Everybody is welcome. I would like to take note of the fact that WWAY did show up, and so anyone can be here tonight.

**Suzanne Wertman, project manager for the Coastal Journalism Hub**

Oh, don't misunderstand me. I know that it wasn't that they weren't invited. I'm just—yeah. The other piece I just want to invite you to is: if this is a true transparency thing, we're covering solutions to close the 17-year life expectancy gap in New Hanover County. We're ranked as the seventh most inequitable county in the country.

And I would love for you all to talk with us at the Coastal Journalism Hub about those ways that we can have a more equitable society here. Thanks

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you.

**Alan Norman, President of the Port City Playwrights**

Two things, if I may, quickly. I'm Alan Norman (?), president of the Port City Playwrights, and I want to thank you for indeed providing some money to the Arts Council, which in turn gave us a grant to just finish up our ten-minute miscellaneous show at Thalian recently.

But here's my question.

Mention was made of housing affordability, and that made me think of insurance costs going up. Obviously, health equity is also part of your portfolio. In a previous life I worked on environmental matters, so I'm wondering to what extent—speaking about landscaping a bit, landscape assessments—to what extent is the foundation, the endowment beginning to look at how climate change may have effects on housing affordability, health equity, and so forth?

Or is that not something that you all are looking at quite yet? Thank you.

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you so much for that. I'm sorry I didn't catch your name.

**Alan Norman, President of the Port City Playwrights**

Oh, Alan Norman, port city playwrights.

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you so much. What I will say is very interesting observation, thank you for sharing that with us. And the answer is, as of yet, we have not considered that.

**Sierra Washington, New Hanover County resident**

Good evening. My name is Sierra Washington, and I am a resident of New Hanover County. Just a quick question: you've said publicly that your commitment to food security and the Northside remains unchanged, even as you've ended your grant tied to the grocery store project on the Northside.

Given that other communities have used charitable dollars to support cooperative grocery stores as clearly documented responses to food deserts, what specifically makes it impossible or too risky for this endowment to use similar charitable dollars as tools for the Northside? And will you share that reasoning in writing with the community?

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you, Sierra.

There are many things that we can do to promote a food security agenda in New Hanover County, and I know we've talked a fair amount about that, and we continue to be curious about solutions. We will continue to explore how we may be helpful, including with the recent announcement that Lee described earlier as it relates to grocery stores.

For us specifically, we cannot use The Endowments resources to fund a grocery store operation. The Internal Revenue Service has issued private letter rulings on that. We are

happy to share them with you. In fact, I think that we've had that conversation with you, we can have it publicly, but apparently, and this is counterintuitive, grocery store operations are not a charitable purpose.

Now, that doesn't mean that the endowment cannot be helpful. We can be helpful. We can find ways to be helpful. But I want to answer your question directly, and given your question, I also want to be very open about it and one who wants to talk about it. If you'd like your council to talk to ours, let's have it.

The IRS has spoken. The last thing anybody in this room wants is for us to compromise our status.

**Sierra Washington, New Hanover County resident**

I think if I can follow up, as some folks have, on their questions, we have spoken about this privately and we've spoken about things publicly. And I'm grateful for your team for being willing to have those conversations with us.

I think a point of clarity is that we have never asked the endowment to fund grocery operations for the Northside Food Cooperative, or any food access matter on the Northside.

We've only asked you to help with the funding of a building for Food Solutions and the Northside, and we have offered to connect you with foundations and endowments in other cities that have been able to work with nonprofits and food cooperatives to make grocery stores happen in their neighborhoods. And that hasn't been taken up on.

And I'm grateful for the partnership. And still to this day, I am grateful for what y'all have done for our team. And again, I'm standing here as a resident of New Hanover County, but I just wanted to note that.

And if there's still an opportunity to connect you with those folks at other foundations and endowments who have offered their time and resources to speak with you all, I would like to make that happen.

Thank you.

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you, Sierra. I will go ahead and add a bit of information. Thank you for allowing me to do that. The same goes with the construction of a grocery store. And I know that my team and I have introduced you to some resources that have led you to that conclusion.

I know many foundations who have participated in the erection of grocery stores around the country, and they have done that largely through mission-related investments in partnership with community development finance institutions. The Endowment has not yet done that.

As I said earlier, someone asked, “What about mission-related investments?” We have been focused, five years into our existence, on solidifying that grantmaking operation. Someday, I hope—I can never get ahead of my board, as you know—but I hope that we may look at mission-related investments.

That is a very different tool. Thank you.

**Jeffery, New Hanover County resident**

Thank you all for your time. My name is Jeffrey. One basic question, my understanding is the grant The Endowment has given away approximately \$1 million in its five-year history. So, this upcoming \$116 million grant is going to dwarf substantially any amount, any individual grant to this point. So, this is significant.

My question is about the balance of the equities, and I'd like a little bit of insight into how it was determined to give property owners a tax break when the needs are so manifest in other areas.

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you, Jeffrey.

Our grants to date: 421 of them, \$194 million since inception. So, it doesn't take away, by the way, it does not at all take away your comment, but I just wanted to give the information.

And so, look, you know, the grant to the county for our schools fulfills our mission in so many different ways. I don't like to repeat myself, so please indulge me, but there will be different types of grants that we will make over the years.

That grant is about \$11 million a year, \$11.6 million a year, for ten years. And so, this endowment, over time—right now, we are at \$58 million a year in grants—it will not be long until we have much more than that to give every year.

And so, if we can, we deploy all of our dollars every year. You can count on that, and you can count on the fact that it will be deployed in New Hanover County.

It will look different, I can tell you that of those 421 grants, I believe the math is Some of them were under \$250,000. I actually looked at those numbers.

My question is about the balance of the equities. Why debt relief for property owners versus the lower-income portion of the county?

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Well, you know, it's our grants. There are plenty of grants out there that work directly for our low-income populations. That's where they are directed. We will do that in any number of ways.

And the fact is that all our families having security with their homes is equally as important. No one is more important than the next person, and our mission allows us, in a discerning way, to help everyone in our county.

And that grant, first and foremost, was to promote the education of all children in New Hanover County. And yes, it did help to contain those costs to the benefit of the higher-income residents.

Well, I think you're making some assumptions there. I think property tax rates raise everybody's cost of living, including homeowners and non-homeowners. Rentals go up.

**Jeffery, New Hanover County resident**

I'm not sure how many welfare recipients own property.

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Well, we can look at the populations that we serve and that our organizations in New Hanover County serve. And I think we can demonstrate that so many of them are served by our grantees.

**E.J Hanley, New Hanover Resident**

I'm E.J. Hanley. I'm a resident of the city. The county has backed away from funding affordable housing, citing the endowments' ability to invest, in this issue or there any current plans for grants or landscape analysis on that front?

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

E.J., thank you. Thank you so much.

Yes. So, housing affordability—I mentioned earlier 421 grants, \$194 million, excluding the \$116 million grant committed to the county. Nearly a fourth of that is in housing. So we have a lot going on in housing right now. Some of those grants were not made this year. They were made last year or the year before. But those funds are working for us right now.

Also, you may have heard me say before, you know, housing affordability, yes, is certainly about containing housing costs, be they housing production costs, for example. But it is also, for us, about other ways to help promote housing affordability. Education, workforce development, and the like are some of the strategies that we want to be looking at so that we can also help the families who are within those walls of those homes, right, thrive, grow, and prosper.

**Carl Brown, New Hanover resident**

My name is Carl Brown, and I was born here in New Hanover County. I graduated from Williston Industrial High School, the greatest school under the sun, back in 1953.

And I've been fortunate enough to get an excellent education, all over the world. I've worked, and I've returned home to work for a community college and retired from that.

But I'm very, very concerned about how these funds are being dispersed with no accountability to the community. I think, personally, that you should have an annual report to the community advising us in terms of how the grants were utilized—did they accomplish their goals, and if not, what are the consequences?

Secondly, with the Board of Education, if you're going to submit funds to them, I hope you're instituting some means by which you can monitor how the funds are used and the quality of the results. Because historically, we've had bonds in this town. In fact, we had a significant bond, and I can't recall—because I'm an old man now—in terms of how they were utilized.

But the school system now has decayed, and we've got to put some criteria on them. If you're going to give them additional funds, there should be clarity on how the funds should be utilized and hold the administration as well as the board accountable. And if we don't put some checks and balances in there, I'm sure the community is not going to be satisfied with the utilization.

And again, I appreciate all of you working for the fund, and I hope that you utilize the funds from the sale of the hospital effectively. Because you were able to get those funds because the community supported New Hanover when it was initiated, and it became one of the best hospitals in the area.

And I really, really appreciate everything all of you are doing. But please, let's continue to improve our community because it has the potential to be the best in New Hanover County, and our school system needs to be ranked number one.

Thank you.

**Brenna Flanagan, member of media, Port City Daily**

I'm Brenna Flanagan and I'm a member of the media. I'm from Port City Daily. I wanted to follow up on the question about the food co-op. Can you tell me when The Endowment learned that there was an IRS restriction on supporting grocery stores, and then why that was not shared with the public or media when news of The Endowment pulling the grant came out. Excuse me for my voice.

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you for that question.

So, a couple of things. We did terminate our grant last year, as you know, and the reason for the termination of the grant was the change in the project scope. And, you know, to Carl's point, we have grant agreements, and they do make clear how our monies are to be spent and under what timeline.

And, you know, we try to be as exacting while being flexible on that front. But there was an example where the project became something very, very different. And so, we terminated our grant. We then turned and made a separate grant of a very different amount for a very different purpose, but nevertheless to try to continue to support food security solutions in the Northside and elsewhere.

So, there is that.

Having said that, I came to the endowment last year, as you may remember, in January of 2025, and I have been very curious about a number of things. I came to the endowment with a good knowledge of mission-related investments, for example, and I conducted some research and consulted with counsel so that we could begin to imagine, okay, if not that, then what? If not working with my team, if not Northside Co-op now, if that project does not materialize, what may we do to be helpful?

And it is in the context of that research, with counsel, legal counsel, advisory, formal advice by the law firm that represents the endowment, that we discovered that. So, I'm going to say, I know it was after I arrived because it was my own curiosity, including as part of eventually wanting to think about a mission-related investment portfolio.

But that's the answer. Thank you.

**Carrie, Child Mental Health Advocate**

Hey there. My name is Carrie CIP, and I'm a child mental health advocate, mental health advocate, and member of the media from the standpoint of being editor at large of Pace's Connection, which is a 62,500-member social networking site that is dedicated to

preventing and healing child abuse and neglect, and promoting positive childhood experiences, which are shown scientifically to help prevent adult mental illness.

I have great news. Governor Josh Stein has signed a proclamation proclaiming June as being Whole Child Health and Wellbeing Month for 2026, and in it he talks about: whereas only 37% of North Carolina's children ages 3 to 5 years are on track, healthy, and ready to start school; only 41% of North Carolina fourth graders read at or above grade level; and 1 in 5 North Carolina children have endured 2 to 3 adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and 1 in 10 have endured more than five ACEs, which can have negative and lasting impacts on health, well-being, and development. And whereas North Carolina has made meaningful strides in recognizing all of this, they are, as I said, proclaiming this as Whole Child Health Month—it needs to be the decade of the child. That's what we went in with: like the decade of the brain, the decade of the child, looking at all of this.

But I wonder, and I honestly don't know if part of what is happening with this, if we are working with the local business community, because the health and well-being of children depend so much on the financial health and well-being of their parents. We know without a doubt from tons of studies that child abuse and neglect and domestic violence increase at the end of each month when people are waiting for paychecks and waiting for pay stubs and waiting for whatever funds come in. We know that SNAP funds being cut has made tremendous impacts on the health and well-being of people.

I look at policy, and I know that every business represented in this room and in this county each day makes decisions that take families closer to child abuse and neglect or further away.

We have \$7.25, and our national income hasn't gone up since 2009—the minimum wage. What are we going to do in New Hanover County to lead businesses to own their responsibility in the incredible inequity?

We've got a two-tiered mental health system. Rich people can get mental health care. Poor people can't easily. Medicaid doesn't cover many of the services that could be a tremendous support to people who are struggling, and then what we see is multigenerational child abuse and neglect. What we see is multigenerational addiction, poverty, unemployable teenage pregnancy. The way to bust this cycle is to start paying people a living wage.

There's a wonderful organization that comes out of the Early Childhood Endowment that is Family Forward North Carolina. They are rewarding businesses that actually are paying a living wage, that are paying for paid family leave, that are helping with health insurance, that are providing some supports for childcare.

What are we going to do about that whole big picture here? Because at the end of the day, not taking businesses into account and their help—being a Black pregnant woman in the United States of America would be the most terrifying thing I can think of right now because the abuse, the lack of care, the racism in the medical system, not having any paid family leave, having to go back to work two or three weeks after you have a child, and then not having childcare.

What are we going to do as a community about that? Because that's a root cause. So, thank you for letting me ask this question, but it's huge and it's fundamental and it's on all of us.

**Shannon Winslow Board Chair, The Endowment Director, Strategic Accounts, WebMD Health**

Well, I'll say thank you. What you described are all true. And I think about, and we as a staff and a board think about the role that we can play in mental health. As you said, or as many of you know, we had a strategic refresh last year.

And when we look at the health and equity pillar, mental health is one of our top priorities. We are completing a landscape analysis there and so that will be an area that the endowment can play a role in helping.

I know you talked about wages and things of that nature. That would be a more difficult play for us, but as for the things that you described, there are some places where we can assist and will assist in that area.

That would be great because the bottom line is sad and scared mothers have sad and scared babies who go to school and are sad and scared, and they disassociate or get in trouble, don't do well in school, hit that school-to-prison pipeline, and boom. All we do is keep putting money in the pockets of the private industries that make money off prisons. So that's it. Thank you.

**JC Lyle, Wilmington City Council Member**

Hi, I'm JC Lyle, council member for the City of Wilmington. First, thank you all for what you do professionally and as volunteers; it is some heavy lifting. And what a burden to be placed on you all. So, thank you for all the effort and thought you put into this important work.

I didn't come here to speak, but some people will tell you I've never met a microphone I couldn't like, so here I am.

But I wanted to give you an opportunity to address rumors that may still be out there—that to get a grant or any kind of funding or support from the endowment, the county

government and the city government must be involved as grant makers as well. So, I just wanted to give you that opportunity to clear that up.

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you for giving us that opportunity. Some of us did read about that, and I was at a conference recently and was invited to demystify some things about philanthropy. And instead of talking about philanthropy writ large, I took the opportunity of demystifying the myths that you just shared with everyone.

And all I will say is we could not be more transparent. Anyone can go on our website. You will see every grant, the dollars, the purpose. If you want a copy of the grant agreement, call us—if you can't get it on our website.

There is absolutely no truth to what has been said. There is no such pattern of behavior at the endowment. There wasn't before I arrived, and there is not one since I have arrived.

And that is—I hope you can help us get the truth out. Because if we can say unequivocally something is not true, that is not true.

**Shannon Winslow Board Chair, The Endowment Director, Strategic Accounts, WebMD Health**

JC, thank you for asking that. It is interesting that that took hold in the past couple of weeks—quite interesting. But I think that, you know, citizens can see we've had a lot of grant announcements.

We had another group yesterday. So, you can certainly see it becomes apparent very quickly that, when you look at it, you obviously know it's not that partnership.

So, we continue to approve grants. We're thrilled to do it, and I appreciate you letting us have the opportunity to address that.

Thank you, JC.

**Rob Zapf, County Commissioner**

Good evening, Rob Zapf. In the spirit of demystifying, Sophie, I think it would be really helpful for a lot of people in this room to first understand how do you come to the endowment for a grant if you have an idea? And second, could you just walk us through the process and how we have 13 directors there and their input?

I'm afraid if somebody dropped in and didn't know anything about it, they'd think that Sophie is making all these decisions from top to bottom. Yet I know that you are not. Could you explain to all of us how the process works?

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you, Commissioner Apple. No, I do not make those decisions. First of all, there are many, many, many people involved in the process.

So, first, if any organization wishes to explore a grant by the endowment or a partnership with us, please call us, email us, call us. All of the information you need to do that is on our website. We welcome ideas—good ideas, other ideas. If nothing else, by calling us, we learn. All right, so that's number one. Just call us. That is the best way to explore a grant or a partnership with us.

Having said that, there will be different pathways to a grant from the endowment. And sometimes it will be just that we will receive a call or a letter of interest, and we will—because we respond to all the calls, we respond to all the emails, we respond to all of the inquiries, I say that with assurance.

And so sometimes we will react to an idea that is presented to us. I also want to acknowledge the fact that my team is out there, not only because they've been out there for the last many years cultivating relationships with grantees and other partners, but because they are also going out there and being very proactive about discovering what is happening in New Hanover County.

And from time to time, we will absolutely invite applicants. We will invite organizations to apply for a grant. Now, just because my team invites them or Sophie invites them does not mean they will receive a grant, because, as you point out, we have a process.

So, first, whether it is someone who is coming to us and we are reacting, or if we are being proactive, a lot of work goes into cultivating that relationship and the application. What are we trying to do? And as part of doing that, we understand from the organization the capacity of that organization, the mission of that organization, is there alignment with our strategic plan.

Let's say for the moment that yes, yes, yes, and there is alignment, and so we are prepared to make a recommendation to our board. We make a recommendation to our board, and it first goes through our grants committee, which happens to be chaired by Bill Blair. Do you want to take over from here?

**Bill Blair, Vice Chair, The Endowment President, Blair-Squire Management LLC**

Yes. So, the staff brings it to the Grants Committee and there's five of us, and we sit down with the staff and we kind of socialize and go through it.

We look at everything from the request. We also look at the outcomes and expectations, and we take all of this into consideration. And the Grants Committee, with the support of the staff, comes up with the recommendation to the full board. And that is a separate thing we do, it's not done simultaneously, it's done separately.

And we come up—sometimes we send some grants back to the staff and they tweak it a little bit, and sometimes they prove that their recommendation was good to start with. So, it's a pretty good collaborative effort. But it's serious work.

It's not, you know, we don't sit around at the endowment and drink a beer and talk about grants. It is a real process and it's a serious endeavor. And this has all been improved greatly in the last year. The process is streamlined and very efficient.

Everybody is encouraged to do the work on the grant's evaluations well in advance of the meetings, or everybody gets called out in the meeting for not being prepared. So, it's kind of serious. It's real stuff.

And it is helped when, when the grants that are evaluated go to the full board. The board is confident that they've been evaluated by us on the grants committee and the staff thoroughly.

And it's been a pretty healthy process so far. So far, it's been pretty good.

**Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you, Bill. And to clarify, thank you, Commissioner, for the question. And just to clarify, when Bill says it's a separate process, what it means is everyone is always involved. It's just it goes to the Grants Committee first, with a little bit of back and forth sometimes.

And then the recommendation goes from the Grants Committee to the board. Staff is involved every step of the way.

**Tyler Newman, VP, External Affairs**

We had a couple of questions that came in prior to the meeting, and I wanted to pose those to y'all. One is from Patricia. I'm interested in knowing whether the endowment is spending down the principal with all these grants, or are you just using the interest gain on the investments to fund grants? I hope you are not spending down the principal.

**Shannon Winslow Board Chair, The Endowment Director, Strategic Accounts, WebMD Health**

I will say we are not spending down the principal. That is the beauty of the definition of an endowment, meaning that it will exist in perpetuity. In order for that to happen, we cannot spend down the principal we were given originally, with multiple tranches from the county.

Thank you. New Hanover County: \$1.3 million. And we have now had commitments of over 300 checks cut, of over 100.

And we are very close to, or sometimes teetering, at \$171.8. So, I'm happy to report the corpus is extremely strong and growing.

### **Tyler Newman, VP, External Affairs**

The last question was from Penny: What emerging workforce and economic trends does the organization believe will most impact New Hanover County over the next 5 to 10 years? And how can health care, business, and public sector leaders collaborate now to proactively prepare residents for those changes?

### **Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you so much for that question. Yes, if Dr. Guettabi were in the room, he would probably give us a pretty good tutorial about some of these challenges. And some of them are what we've talked about tonight, which is to say the mismatches of our workforce in New Hanover County versus the needs of our employers.

And so, part of the work is to examine those needs and to do what we can to invest in aligning our workforce to those needs.

And, you know, nationally, sector-based workforce development partnerships are working very nicely. And here in New Hanover County, with the grant that the endowment made three years ago now—in its third year—the health care Career Pipeline grant, that is a good example of a sector-based workforce development partnership and strategy, where you have public sector partners or educational partners, philanthropy, and employers working together. So that's certainly a good example right here in New Hanover County.

Also, we just talked about tonight. David talked about a similar example—replicating a strategy and a program that has worked very nicely elsewhere, which is to say aligning that part of our workforce who is interested in the construction industry to the demands of our construction employers here in New Hanover County.

So, we are doing that right now. Part of the entrepreneurship and innovation landscape will look at various sectors that are experiencing growth in New Hanover County, and we can already imagine the possibility of working with our business partners and employers, our

educators, with support from us and hopefully other funders, to continue to replicate those kinds of strategies.

And I do believe that—thank you for that comment, thank you for that question—I think that is certainly something that we'd like to look at.

## **Tyler Newman, VP, External Affairs**

Alright. Thank you. This concludes our time for the Q&A this evening. Thank you for your thoughtful questions, your candor and your continued engagement. If we did not get to your question this evening, or if you have additional feedback to share, please reach out to our team in the coming days. I know we've got a couple more slides from Sophie.

## **Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

So, before we end, just a couple of updates. This is the third year of the endowments three-year grant to bolster and promote our county's health care workforce pipeline.

Later this summer, we look forward to hosting dynamic conversations with our partners—Cape Fear Community College, UNCW, New Hanover County Schools, the Chamber of Commerce, Novant, and North Carolina Health Talent Alliance—to provide some updates on the work that is going on there. So please stay tuned for the details of that event.

Also, the endowment looks forward to serving as a host community partner for the 2026 NC IDEA Ecosystem Summit, which is North Carolina's only statewide convening focused on entrepreneurship. The event will take place here in New Hanover County, November 12th and 13th, and we hope that hosting this summit in New Hanover County will help reinforce our position as a leader in entrepreneurship by creating those connections among entrepreneurs, investors, and the organizations that support them.

For more information about that, please be in touch with Terri Burhans. And for now, I would like to invite Kathleen Saldivar to share a mission-critical operational update. Kat.

## **Kathleen Saldivar Grants Technology & Operations Manager, The Endowment**

Thank you, Sophie.

We're excited to be moving to a new grants management system, Temelio, to better serve you and improve your overall user experience.

As part of our shift to the new system, we will no longer accept new letters of inquiry through Flux, which will close on June 26th.

If you have an active grant or upcoming report or payment, you will receive direct communication from us with clear guidance on next steps.

Our new system will be fully operational in early August, and we are committed to supporting you throughout the transition.

Most importantly, there will be no interruption to your grants. All active grants will continue without disruption, with the support of your grant officer.

For new applications or inquiries about working with the endowment, start by reaching out to anyone on the program and grants team—David, Mary Vail, Terry, Leigh, or Shannon.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to me for technical support and thank you for your partnership.

## **Sophie Dagenais, President & CEO**

Thank you, Kat.

Our grantees are in very good hands, and the idea here is that we think it is important to deliver a good customer experience, and that is how we view our grantees. And we felt it was important to share, while we had a few of you in the same room, that we are about to change our software system, and so be patient with us.

But the good news is no interruption of service. Just call us. If you try to go on Flux, it's probably not going to work in July, but that's okay. Everything else will work. Just call Kat.

So, thank you, Kat.

And so, to all of you, please stay connected for the latest updates from us. We do have a newsletter. We're on social media. Visit our website or just call us.

And as I hope you do see, the work of the endowment is the work of a fantastic team: Marwa, Elizabeth, Shannon Wick, Kat, Eileen, David, Terri, Leigh, Maryville, Amber, Tyler, Christine, Gabby, and Crystal, with support from Chris and Pat and Gabriel and Farhana. And this work doesn't happen without all of you.

And for tonight, we also want to thank Worth Crawley, who really helped us with the production of tonight's program, and so we're grateful to him.

I want to thank the board for their leadership and guidance. I want to specially thank our chair, Shannon Winslow, and you, Bill, as our vice chair and chair of our Grants Committee. We work ever so closely together, as you can imagine. So, I thank our board.

I also want to thank the members of our Community Advisory Council for your partnership and support, because that too is invaluable. And last, but not least, I will thank you—everyone who is here, everyone who is not here.

We thank you for all you do, and we look forward to seeing you this summer.