

2026-2030 STRATEGIC PLAN



COUNTY OF CUMBERLAND

Introduction: The Planning Context

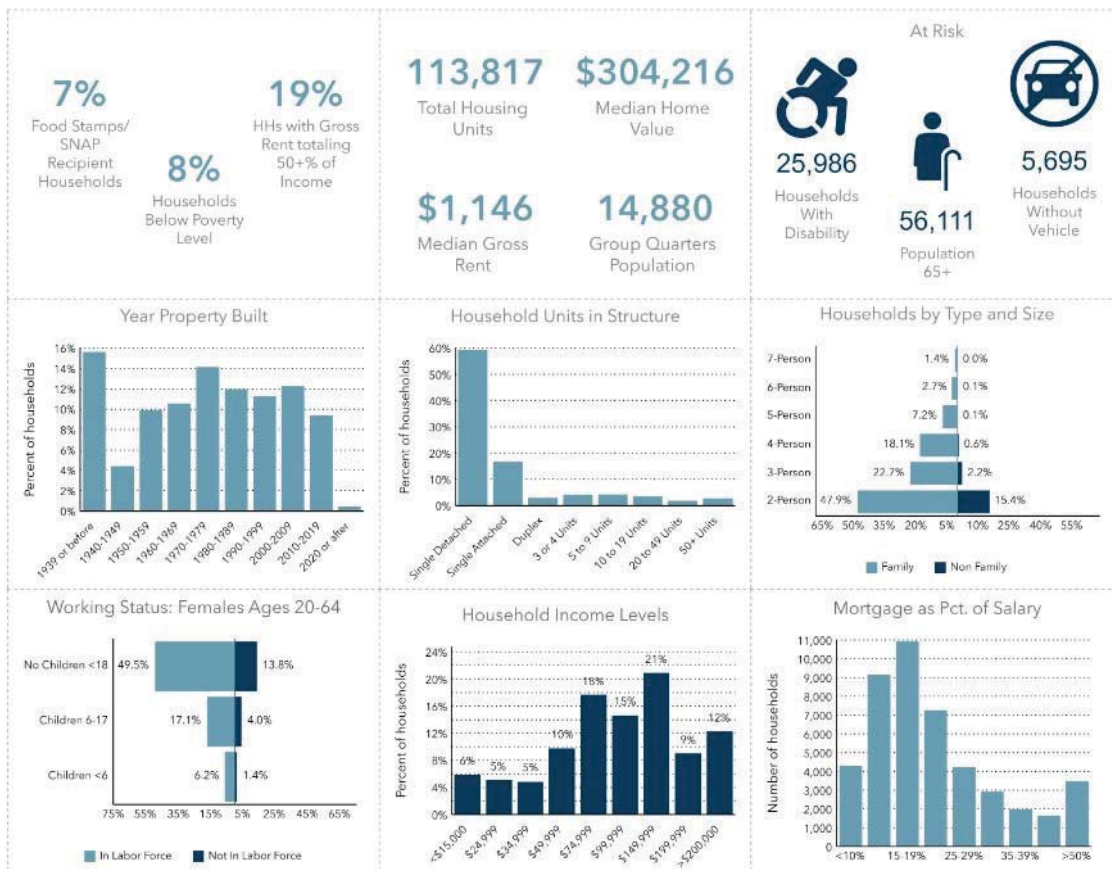
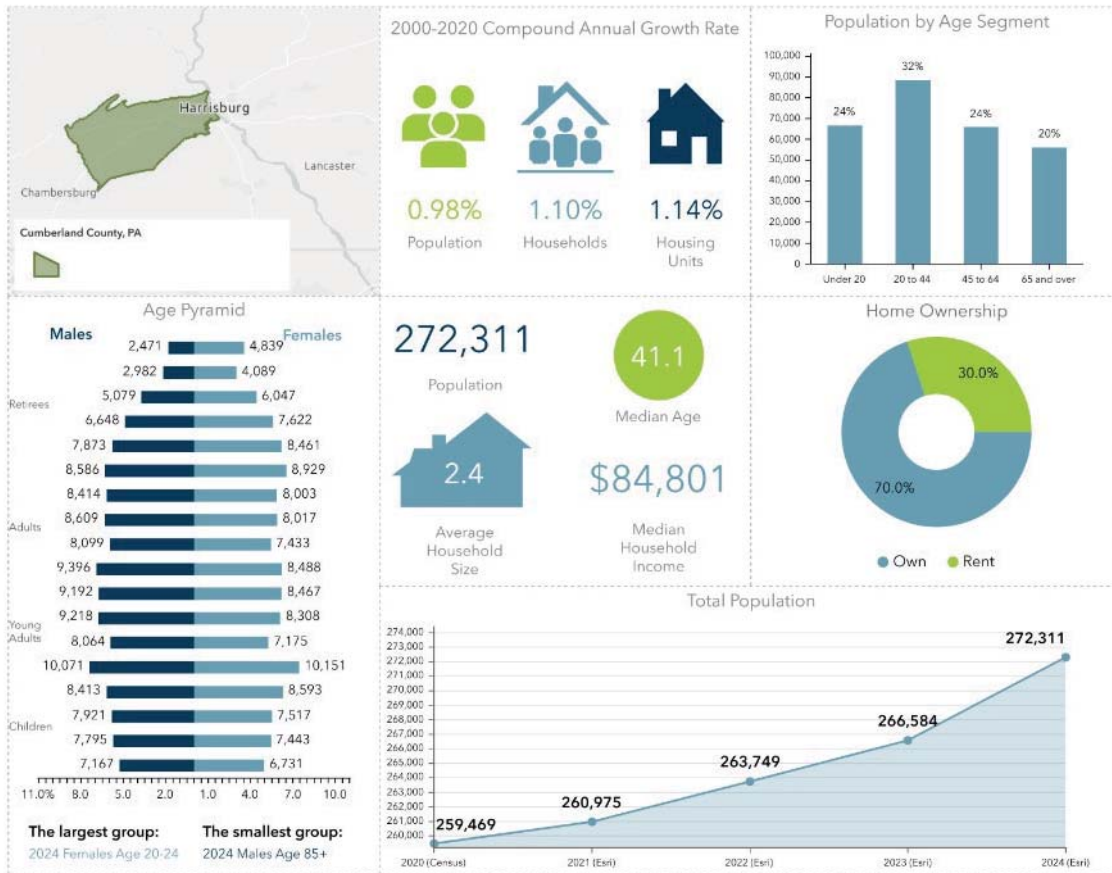
Cumberland County stands at an important moment in its history, shaped by sustained growth, evolving community needs, and increasing expectations for how local government supports quality of life. Home to more than 275,000 residents, Cumberland County has been one of the fastest-growing counties in Pennsylvania, with population growth significantly outpacing both the Commonwealth and the nation over the past decade. This growth reflects the county's strong economic base, desirable communities, and strategic location within the Harrisburg–Carlisle region, while also placing new demands on infrastructure, services, and long-term planning.

Census data show a county that is becoming larger, more diverse, and older. Nearly one in five residents is age 65 or older, and the median age continues to rise, signaling increasing demand for health, human services, and age-friendly infrastructure. At the same time, Cumberland County's population diversity has grown steadily since 2010, with increases across multiple racial and ethnic groups and nearly one in ten residents speaking a language other than English at home. These shifts underscore the need for inclusive, accessible services that reflect the lived experiences of all residents.

Growth has also brought economic opportunity alongside affordability pressures. Cumberland County households earn incomes above state and national averages, yet rising housing values and rents are creating challenges for workforce recruitment, first-time homebuyers, and residents on fixed incomes. As more people choose to live and work in the county, balancing economic vitality with housing availability, transportation capacity, and environmental sustainability has become increasingly complex.

To better understand these dynamics, Cumberland County partnered with BerryDunn to conduct an environmental scan as the foundation for this strategic plan. The scan highlighted several consistent themes: the need to modernize county operations, address long-term fiscal sustainability, strengthen workforce capacity, and plan proactively for continued growth. Community and stakeholder input reinforced the importance of transparency, collaboration, and ensuring county services keep pace with changing expectations while remaining fiscally responsible.

Our county is responsive to this moment. This strategic plan provides a shared framework to guide decision-making, align resources, and focus efforts on what matters most to residents, today and in the years ahead. Grounded in data, informed by community voices, and shaped by a clear understanding of current conditions, the plan reflects Cumberland County's commitment to stewarding growth, strengthening trust in government, and building a resilient future for all who call the county home.



What is a Strategic Plan?

A strategic plan is a comprehensive roadmap that outlines an organization's long-term vision, goals, and the specific actions needed to achieve them. For Cumberland County, a strategic plan serves as an essential guide for aligning county resources, staff efforts, and departmental priorities with the needs and expectations of residents and stakeholders. It defines clear objectives, sets measurable performance targets, and establishes timelines for implementation, ensuring that every initiative supports the broader mission of serving the community effectively and efficiently.

In practice, Cumberland County's strategic plan is both a management tool and a communication resource. It provides a framework for decision-making, helping leaders anticipate challenges, allocate resources wisely, and respond to emerging trends. By regularly reviewing and updating the strategic plan, the county ensures ongoing improvement in areas such as public safety, technology, infrastructure, and service delivery. Ultimately, the strategic plan reflects the county's commitment to collaboration, accountability, and continuous enhancement of services for all residents and visitors.

Timeline of the Process





We are pleased to present the Cumberland County Strategic Plan for 2026 – 2030, a guiding document crafted specifically for the continued excellence and effective operations of our county government. This plan is the result of thoughtful collaboration across all departments, designed to serve as our unified vision for advancing service delivery, strengthening internal processes, and helping to ensure the well-being of both our staff and the community we serve.

Developing this strategic plan represents an important step in aligning our internal priorities, resources, and performance measures. Through open dialogue with employees and departmental leaders, we have identified the core strategies that will address the needs of our workforce and support the essential functions of county government. Our planning was grounded in transparency, accountability, and the commitment to foster a workplace that is innovative, inclusive, and responsive.

The strategic plan is centered on fostering a collaborative environment where partnerships within, across, and beyond county government drive positive outcomes. The plan was developed keeping the Cumberland County Top-Down Model in mind. The county plan drives department plans which, in turn, drive individual performance goals and objectives. This model provides employees with the means to trace the work they do up to the goals and objectives found in the strategic plan. This plan is intended as a living document, subject to regular review and refinement to meet the evolving needs of our workforce and community. By embracing collaboration, innovation, and ongoing learning, we reaffirm our shared commitment to professionalism and public service.

On behalf of county leadership, thank you to everyone within and beyond county government who took the time to meet and discuss county government with our consultants. Also thank you to DCED for financial support. The preparation of this strategic plan was financed in part through a Municipal Assistance Program grant as administered by the Governor’s Center for Local Government Services, Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development. We encourage all staff to engage with the plan, share feedback, and actively contribute to the realization of our goals. Together, we will ensure Cumberland County government remains a model of effective, collaborative, and responsive public service.



Mission, Vision, Values

Our Mission



Cumberland County provides essential services that respond to community needs and promote well-being, while maintaining a financially sound foundation.

Our Vision



A thriving, safe, and sustainable county that leads the region through collaboration and balanced growth.

Our Values



Results

We focus on achieving measurable outcomes that improve services, strengthen operations, and make a positive impact for the people of Cumberland County.

Stewardship

We manage public resources with integrity, ensuring financial responsibility and environmental sustainability to protect the county's future.

Equity

We uphold fairness in all that we do, ensuring county services, opportunities, and decisions reflect the diverse needs of our community.

Commitment

We dedicate ourselves to serving the people of Cumberland County with excellence, accountability, and integrity.

Collaboration

We lead through teamwork and innovation, fostering connections that inspire creative solutions and enhance county services.

Compassion

We lead with empathy and treat diverse needs with respect and dignity.



Stronger Together



Current State

Cumberland County strives to engage its community through various outreach initiatives, yet feedback from residents indicates that these efforts, while well-intentioned, are often perceived as outdated. Many community members, particularly the younger population, report low awareness of available county services, highlighting a gap in communication effectiveness. This signals a clear need for the county to adopt more modern and creative strategies for public engagement, utilizing innovative channels and approaches to better connect with all segments of the community and help ensure that essential information reaches those who need it most.

There is a growing interest among residents to participate in county government; however, many are unsure how to get involved or where to begin. Additionally, Cumberland County recognizes the importance of cultivating stronger relationships with state and federal officials, and collaborative partners to better advocate for local priorities and secure resources that benefit the community. By addressing these gaps and striving to be a regional leader, the county can build trust, enhance transparency, and empower community members to actively contribute to local governance.

Objectives

1. Engage stakeholders and other intergovernmental partners with open communication to promote broad public participation in strategic initiatives.
2. Foster and strengthen legislative partnerships to ensure the county's interests are represented in the local, statewide, and federal decision-making process.
3. Launch a community awareness campaign aimed at increasing the public's understanding of county services functions, and engagement opportunities.
4. Administer an annual community-wide survey to identify community trends and priorities to improve existing resources and service delivery.
5. Evaluate our partnerships regularly to help ensure programs meet the needs of our residents.

Our Goal

Lead regional collaboration by fostering strategic partnerships, driving policy innovation, and deepening public engagement to deliver responsive and effective public services.



Service that Sets the Standard

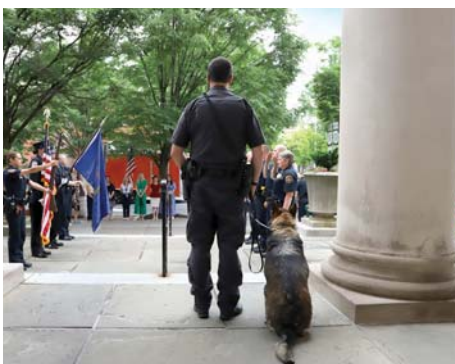
Current State

The county is currently facing several significant challenges that impact both its operational effectiveness and the quality of service provided to residents. One major issue is the need for additional office space, as existing facilities are insufficient to accommodate staff and evolving program requirements. This shortage impacts daily operations and influences customer service and employee morale, as current work environments are compact and outdated, which can affect productivity and overall staff satisfaction.

Furthermore, as the county workforce continues to age, there is an urgent need to develop comprehensive succession plans and implement cross-training programs to help ensure continuity and prepare for future staffing needs. Innovative recruitment strategies will also be essential to attract new talent and maintain a high-performing workforce.

In addition to these workforce and facility concerns, there are substantial opportunities to leverage information technology, including artificial intelligence, to enhance productivity, streamline internal operations, and improve customer service delivery. However, the county must also address the challenges presented by an outdated county code, which currently restricts flexibility in how services are provided and funded .

As the community changes and residents' needs evolve, it is critical for the county to modernize its service delivery approaches, update policies, and utilize technology-driven solutions to remain responsive and effective. Embracing innovative tools and revising governing frameworks will position the county to better meet future demands and deliver services that set the standard for excellence.



Objectives

1. Leverage technology to improve internal operations and enhance service delivery, improve interdepartmental communication, and support data-informed decision-making.
2. Evaluate the feasibility and implications of adopting a Home Rule charter to improve service delivery and enable revenue generation options.
3. Implement the countywide Facilities Master Plan (FMP) to provide county facilities that improve customer service, accessibility, operational effectiveness, safety, and interdepartmental collaboration.
4. Ensure continuity of services through required departmental cross-training, succession planning, and development of written standard operating procedures (SOP).
5. Recruit and retain a high-performing workforce.
6. Conduct a thorough review of existing contracts across all departments to identify and consolidate potential duplicative services.
7. Build on the services gap analysis of county services to identify ways to better serve the needs of the county's changing population, anticipate future needs, and address identified gaps.
8. Recognize and encourage creative thinking, innovation, and calculated risk-taking.

Our Goal

Achieve operational excellence by promoting a high-performing organizational culture, embracing innovation, and proactively planning for customer needs.



Rooted in Balance

Current State

The county is currently navigating the complex challenge of balancing rapid growth with the preservation of open spaces and farmland. In recent years, the county has had notable increases in population, which have placed new demands on local infrastructure, public schools, and essential services.

As residential and commercial development accelerates, the need to protect the county's unique rural character and agricultural resources is becoming increasingly urgent. This growth has heightened concerns about the sustainability of existing resources and the ability to maintain the quality of life valued by residents and businesses alike.

Feedback from stakeholders reflects a broad consensus that a more proactive approach to county-level planning is required to address these challenges effectively. Many municipal governments within the county operate independently and often lack the resources and capacity for comprehensive, modern land use planning. While the county itself does not exercise direct control over land use decisions, it is uniquely positioned to serve as a facilitator and thought leader, bringing together local governments, community members, and other stakeholders to coordinate strategies, share best practices, and support responsible development. By leveraging its leadership role, the county can help ensure that growth is managed thoughtfully and that open spaces and farmland are preserved for future generations.



Objectives

1. Implement the county's Comprehensive Plan by providing planning leadership and assistance to the county's 33 municipalities.
2. Fund land preservation efforts that encourage the agriculture industry and provide open space for residents' physical and emotional health.
3. Safeguard water resources to help ensure long-term recreational opportunities meet resident needs and support economic development.
4. Manage solid waste disposal to preserve landfill capacity and protect the environment.
5. Leverage federal, state, and county funding to make strategic and regional multimodal transportation investments that are responsive to community needs.

Our Goal

Guide and influence responsible growth through collaborative planning efforts that preserve farmland, protect natural resources, and sustain the county's unique sense of place.



Justice for Every Voice and Safety in Every Community

Current State

The county's criminal justice system and public safety services are widely recognized for their excellence, with stakeholders across the board demonstrating a strong commitment to maintaining these high standards. The courts and public safety agencies have built a foundation of trust within the community, earning positive feedback for their consistent performance and dedication to upholding justice and safety. These strengths are underpinned by ongoing efforts to streamline case filing, adopt best practices, and enhance accessibility through targeted outreach and prevention programs.

However, the county faces significant challenges as its population grows and the demands on public safety resources intensify. The current pace of investment in tools, technologies, and human capital has not matched the county's expansion, creating pressure on existing infrastructure and personnel. Recent trends highlight the impact of expanding safety initiatives, such as the addition of school resource officers (SROs), which has contributed to an increase in reported case allegations. This, in turn, has led to a higher volume of cases requiring attention and reinforces the necessity for innovative approaches to criminal case management.

As the complexity of criminal cases grows, leveraging predictive analytics and other advanced tools will be crucial to achieving more positive outcomes for justice-involved individuals and supporting the county's mission to deliver effective, equitable, and forward-thinking public safety solutions.



Objectives

1. Modernize emergency preparedness protocols and integrate technology to improve coordination, collaboration, and sharing information among the Sheriff's Office, municipalities, neighboring counties, law enforcement agencies, and emergency services.
2. Ensure the county's sworn officers and public safety personnel are equipped with up-to-date technology and tools to effectively carry out their duties and enhance operational efficiency, situational awareness, and officer and staff safety.
3. Formalize and strengthen collaboration and communication between the Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB) and the Human Services Policy Team to facilitate more effective coordination, proactive planning, and improved outcomes.
4. Implement system-wide training for staff in intervention practices that are aligned with evidence-based approaches, ensuring consistent application across all departments within the county's criminal justice system.
5. Assess criminal justice system staffing to ensure personnel levels are sufficient for efficient operations and appropriate support.
6. Continue to evaluate and enhance security measures in county buildings, ensuring a safe environment for employees and visitors.
7. Ensure all technology systems are regularly assessed for vulnerabilities and provide ongoing education to staff about emerging security threats and best practices in data protection.

Our Goal

Serve as a trusted regional partner in public safety by providing essential services and supporting the criminal justice system in safeguarding residents and promoting community trust.



Standing Strong for Those in Need

Current State

The county's strategic priority to safeguard vulnerable populations and deliver essential human services is shaped by a range of driving forces, foremost among them persistent funding constraints. A significant factor is the \$2.6 million shortfall in state mental health funding, which has placed considerable pressure on the county's ability to maintain and expand critical services. This gap has necessitated difficult decisions regarding the allocation of resources between mandated and non-mandated services, with the county continually striving to balance statutory requirements against the broader needs of its residents. Complicating these efforts is the continued reliance on an outdated county code, which can limit flexibility in service delivery and create barriers to innovation.

In response to these fiscal challenges, county leadership and staff have expressed a growing interest in pursuing alternative funding streams. This includes leveraging grant opportunities, building stronger partnerships with federal and state agencies, and collaborating with contracted service providers to bridge the gap between available funding and desired service levels. Staff members emphasize the importance of proactive practices in identifying and securing new sources of support, which not only bolster the county's capacity to address immediate needs but also support long-term sustainability and responsiveness.

Another critical challenge is the lack of qualified service providers, which has resulted in unmet community needs. These shortages are particularly acute in behavioral health and children and youth services, where waitlists remain a persistent concern. County staff are actively exploring strategies to reduce these waitlists, including the potential hiring of a dedicated psychiatrist to expand direct service capacity. Such measures are intended to ensure timely access to care, especially for high-risk populations, and to prevent the escalation of needs that can result from delayed intervention.

To address these complex challenges, the county recognizes the necessity of enhancing collaboration and integration across departments and with external partners. Opportunities exist to streamline service models, reduce redundancy, and foster more seamless connections for residents navigating the system. Staff perspectives underscore a commitment to continuous improvement, with an emphasis on innovative solutions, cross-sector partnerships, and ongoing evaluation of service delivery models. By focusing on these priorities, the county aims to strengthen its human services infrastructure and better fulfill its mission of supporting the well-being of all residents.



Objectives

1. Expand and enhance collaboration opportunities across county human services departments, within the human services policy team and other committees, to improve service delivery and foster innovative solutions.
2. Partner with the state and federal governments as well as contracted service providers to identify and pursue diverse funding sources to bridge the gap between state allocations and the county's desired service levels.
3. Explore the implementation of an innovative program focused on testing and supporting creative ideas, particularly those that fund preventive services and can deliver long-term improvements in service delivery and community outcomes.
4. Continue proactive outreach efforts to recruit additional service providers and expand the provider pool to ensure a broader range of services and increased capacity to meet diverse community needs efficiently and effectively.
5. Explore a comprehensive county-level approach to complex county case management to streamline service delivery, reduce wait times, and provide specialized services locally.
6. Explore and implement a "No Wrong Door" approach to service delivery, ensuring that individuals and families can access a comprehensive array of services regardless of their initial point of contact.
7. Using a collaborative approach across all human services, explore mandated versus nonmandated services to focus on services that have long-term community impact across all departments.

Our Goal

Deliver responsive and accountable essential human services that safeguard vulnerable populations and collaborate with partners to connect residents to services.



Engagement Summary

The development of Cumberland County's strategic plan was marked by a highly extensive process, demonstrated by significant engagement across all levels of the organization and the community. With over 40 individual interviews conducted, 45 departments and divisions actively participating, multiple strategic planning sessions, and robust online interactions involving more than 1,500 external stakeholders, the process truly reflected a bottoms-up approach. This commitment to broad input and collaboration was not only embraced by staff and residents but also formally endorsed by the Board of Commissioners, ensuring that the resulting plan represents the collective vision and priorities of the entire county.



Individual Interviews
40+



Strategic Planning Sessions
2



Departments Engaged
45



Board of Commissioners
Workshops
3



Project Team
Meetings
22



Online interactions with
Social Pinpoint (external
stakeholders engaged)
Visitors: **1,190**
Visits: **1,512**
Contributions: **249**



Now is the time for everyone to roll up their sleeves and put the plan into motion, translating our vision into measurable results. With the strategic plan finalized, the next phase focuses on implementation. Dedicated teams and resources will be assigned to each objective to ensure actionable progress.

Crucially, the organizational budget will serve as an essential resource, directly linking financial allocations to the achievement of strategic objectives. By aligning budgetary resources with the priorities outlined in the plan, we can help ensure that each initiative receives the necessary support, whether through staffing, technology, training, or operational investments. This approach not only provides clarity on how resources are distributed but also reinforces accountability for results.

Progress will be tracked and reported on an annual basis, providing updates to all stakeholders and reinforcing our commitment to transparency. Regular reporting will highlight both successes and areas for improvement, enabling us to adjust as needed and remain responsive to community needs. Furthermore, the strategic plan will act as a guiding framework for decision making across the organization, ensuring that choices at every level are grounded in our shared vision and long-term goals.

This plan serves as a vital tool for government transparency, allowing residents and staff to see the impact and evolution of our efforts over time. By connecting resources, strategic direction, and transparent reporting, we are creating a culture of continuous improvement and shared accountability.

Acknowledgments

The successful completion of this project would not have been possible without the dedication and input of many individuals across all levels of the organization.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the frontline staff whose commitment and daily efforts provided invaluable insights into our operations.

We also wish to recognize the support and guidance of our leadership team, whose vision and strategic direction helped shape the outcomes of this initiative.

Each contribution was essential to the process, and we deeply appreciate the collective effort that made this work possible.

This project was financed in part by a grant from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, DCED.



2026-2030 STRATEGIC PLAN



COUNTY OF CUMBERLAND

Service Gap Analysis Memo

Cumberland County, PA

TO: Cumberland County Project Management Team

FROM: BerryDunn

SUBJECT: Service Gap Analysis Memo

DATE: March 3, 2026

1.0 Introduction

This section of the memo describes the background of the project, the format of the memo, the work performed in the memo's development, and the context for where the County currently is as well as projected future needs.

1.1 Project Background

Cumberland County (County) retained Berry, Dunn, McNeil & Parker, LLC (BerryDunn) to facilitate the development of a new five-year strategic plan. This plan will set the course for the future, be accessible to the community and staff, incorporate service prioritization and fiscal analysis, and account for the community's needs during a period of significant population growth. The project also includes implementation planning assistance once the strategic plan is developed and adopted.

1.2 Memo Format

This memo comprises the following six sections:

1. **Introduction:** This section of the memo describes the background of the project, the format of the memo, the work performed in the memo's development, and the context for where the County currently is as well as projected future needs.
2. **Service Inventory by Department:** This section of the memo will provide an overview of all services delivered by each department, including both mandated and nonmandated services.
3. **Fiscal Capacity Analysis:** This section of the memo analyzes the County's current fiscal position, identifies recent trends, and outlines general fund support for nonmandated programs.

4. **Peer Comparison:** This section of the memo provides a high-level analysis of the results from the benchmarking survey. Full results can be found on Appendix A.
5. **Innovation in Service Delivery:** This section of the memo identifies actionable strategies for Cumberland County, PA to enhance service delivery by drawing on benchmarking data from peer counties and incorporating leading practices from across the public sector.
6. **Next Steps:** This section of the memo identifies future activities in the project.

1.3 Work Performed

In August 2025, BerryDunn conducted an initial on-site meeting with members of the County Finance Department and the Controller's Office to review and understand high-level trends and issues impacting the County's fiscal position. Using that information, BerryDunn requested specific documents/data and held further sessions with County finance staff in September 2025 to understand the current state of the County budget.

BerryDunn also developed a peer benchmarking survey in collaboration with the County Project Management Team (PMT) as well as a list of peer counties and worked with the County to distribute this survey.

BerryDunn then compiled the results of the fiscal review and peer benchmarking into this memo.

Throughout the period from October 2025 to February 2026, the memo underwent a series of thorough reviews by the PMT and appropriate county stakeholders. These collaborative sessions allowed for the refinement and updating of the memo, helping to ensure its accuracy and alignment with the County's goals before finalization.

1.4 Strategic Context for the Service Gap Analysis

Overview of the County's Current State

Cumberland County stands at a pivotal moment, with its current service landscape shaped by a combination of stable fiscal stewardship and growing community needs. Over the past several years, the County has prioritized the delivery of mandated services while striving to extend support to nonmandated programs, despite fiscal limitations and competing demands. The environmental scan and draft strategic plan, both prepared in collaboration with BerryDunn, illuminate the County's strengths in maintaining a balanced operating budget, supporting core public services, and engaging with stakeholders to guide decision-making. However, these analyses also emphasize persistent and emerging service gaps, especially in areas where evolving demographics and shifting community expectations are outpacing current program offerings.

Key Drivers of Service Gaps

- **Demographic Change:** Population growth, aging residents, and increasing diversity are reshaping service demand, particularly for health and human services, and public safety. The County's population is projected to grow steadily, intensifying pressures on infrastructure, social services, and workforce capacity.

- **Economic and Labor Market Trends:** Fluctuations in local and regional economic conditions, coupled with workforce shortages in specialized fields, are influencing both the County's workforce and its ability to meet service delivery expectations. Continued investment in workforce development and retention is critical to sustaining service quality.
- **Technological Advancements:** Rapid changes in technology have created both opportunities and challenges. The need for modern digital infrastructure, cybersecurity, and data-driven decision-making is more pronounced, calling for ongoing investments in software, hardware, and staff training.
- **Regulatory and Policy Shifts:** Changes in federal and state mandates, as well as evolving standards for service delivery and reporting, require the County to remain adaptable. Proactive monitoring and compliance initiatives are required to address new requirements without detracting from locally determined priorities.
- **Financial Constraints:** The County faces significant uncertainty due to unpredictable and decreasing federal and state funding sources, which complicate long-term fiscal planning and service provision. Additionally, Cumberland County's reliance on a regressive real estate tax as its primary revenue source poses challenges, as this tax grows at a slower rate than inflation, thereby limiting the ability to keep pace with expanding service demands and rising operational costs.

Anticipated Future Needs

- **Expanded Service Demand:** Population growth and demographic changes are expected to increase demand for both mandated and nonmandated services, including behavioral health, housing, and public transportation.
- **County Workforce Development:** Addressing current and anticipated workforce challenges will require recruitment, retention, and upskilling efforts, as well as succession planning for critical positions. This can also be expanded to recruiting and expanding service providers and the County's ability to recruit and retain providers to fill necessary gaps in service.
- **Capital and Technology Investment:** Upgrading or replacing aging infrastructure, investing in cybersecurity, and implementing new service delivery models (such as evidence-based practices in public safety and the criminal justice system) will be essential.
- **Resource Stewardship:** The County must optimize existing resources, seek new funding opportunities, and pursue partnerships with other jurisdictions and private organizations to extend service reach and efficiency

Fiscal Capacity and Resource Constraints

Stable management of fiscal resources has enabled Cumberland County to meet its foundational obligations, but the fiscal context is evolving. As highlighted in the recent fiscal analysis, the County's reliance on real estate taxes and one-time intergovernmental revenues

presents both strengths and vulnerabilities. For CY 2025, 61.7% of revenue is expected from real estate taxes, while “all other revenue sources,” heavily influenced by one-time funds and carryovers, comprise 38.3%. However, projections show a 16.9% decrease in one-time intergovernmental revenues and a 4.1% overall revenue reduction through CY 2029, signaling the need for careful long-term planning. The modest (3.9%) increase in real estate tax revenue might not be sufficient to fully address the expansion of needs or to fund strategic initiatives outlined in the County’s draft strategic plan.

Alignment with Strategic Goals

The draft strategic plan, developed with broad stakeholder input, emphasizes several key priorities:

- **Stronger Together:** Lead regional collaboration by fostering strategic partnerships, driving policy innovation, and deepening public engagement to deliver responsive and effective public services.
- **Service that Sets the Standard:** Achieve operational excellence by promoting a high-performing organizational culture, embracing innovation, and proactively planning for customer needs.
- **Rooted in Balance:** Guide and influence responsible growth through collaborative planning efforts that preserve farmland, protect natural resources, and sustain the county’s unique sense of place.
- **Standing Strong with Those in Need:** Deliver responsive and accountable essential human services that safeguard vulnerable populations and collaborate with partners to connect residents to services.
- **Justice for Every Voice and Safety in Every Community:** Serve as a trusted regional partner in public safety by providing essential services and supporting the criminal justice system in safeguarding residents and promoting community trust

These priorities are essential for addressing current service gaps and preparing for future demands. The service gap analysis demonstrates that while Cumberland County effectively delivers core services, there is an increasing need for targeted investments in nonmandated programs, technology, and talent acquisition and retention support to remain aligned with strategic goals.

2.0 Service Inventory by Department

This section of the memo will provide an overview of all services delivered by each department, including both mandated and nonmandated services.

To help ensure a thorough understanding of both mandated and nonmandated services delivered by Cumberland County departments, BerryDunn facilitated interviews with each department head. These interviews were structured using a detailed interview guide, which focused on service delivery processes, departmental responsibilities, and the identification of key challenges and opportunities. The guide also prompted discussions about interdepartmental collaboration, resource allocation, and strategic priorities, providing valuable qualitative insights that informed the broader service inventory and gap analysis. The departments and divisions interviewed during this process can be found in the table below.

Table 1.1: Department/Division Name

Department/Division Name	
Adult Probation Office	Facilities Management
Administration	Finance
Aging & Community Services	Geographic Information System (GIS)
Assessment Office	Grant Administration
Bureau of Elections	Human Resources
Court Administration	Juvenile Probation Office
Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)	Library System
County Archives	Maintenance
Children & Youth Services	Mental Health/Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities
Clerk of Courts' Office	Planning
Commissioner's Office	President Judge
Communications Department	Prison
Conservation District	Prothonotary
Criminal Justice Services	Public Defender Office
Controller's Office	Public Safety
Coroner	Recorder of Deeds
Court Administration	Recycling and Waste
District Attorney's Office	Register of Wills

Department/Division Name	
Domestic Relations	Sheriff's Office
Drug and Alcohol Commission	Solicitor's Office
Emergency Services	Tax Administration
Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) Office	Treasurer's Office
Victim Witness Office	Vector Control/Weights & Measures
Veterans Affairs	

The evaluation of the County's nonmandated and mandated services was based on insights from the 2013 Early Intervention Program (EIP) and input gathered through interviews with County staff. In Pennsylvania county government, mandated services refer to those that counties are required to provide by federal or state law as well as case law developed over time in interpreting state statute. These services cover certain public safety, judicial, social service, and health functions. These mandated services are distinguished from nonmandated services, which counties may choose to offer based on local priorities, community needs, or policy decisions, but are not legally obligated to provide. Cumberland County's EIP report clarifies that while some services are regulated or influenced by state law, especially due to the Third Class County form of government, many nonmandated services, like conservation programs, or specific community outreach initiatives, are offered at the discretion of the County and may be subject to periodic review for alignment with the County's mission and fiscal capacity. Additionally, discretionary programs often provide upstream interventions that reduce the need for mandated services.

For non-discretionary services, the County faces challenging decisions about the optimal scale and distribution of those services within the constraints of its budget. There might be situations where multiple programs address similar needs, and it might be necessary to evaluate whether consolidating or discontinuing certain programs enables the County to maintain service quality and fiscal sustainability. Ultimately, these are strategic discussions that require balancing legal obligations, community impact, and available resources, and they remain open for further exploration as the County plans for the future.

Table 1.2: Departments with Nonmandated Functions

Departments with Nonmandated Functions				
Department	Nonmandated Function	Key Functions	Notes	Strategic Plan Alignment
Adult Probation and Parole	Pre-Trial Services	Pretrial Services were established in Cumberland County on May 15, 2023. Pretrial	383 defendants were ordered into Pretrial Services in 2025. A validated pretrial actuarial tool	Justice for Every Voice and Safety in Every Community:

Departments with Nonmandated Functions				
Department	Nonmandated Function	Key Functions	Notes	Strategic Plan Alignment
		Services are designed to assist the bail authority by screening defendants eligible for release consideration. Pretrial screening consists of a defendant interview, verification of interview information, criminal history investigation, and application of a validated pretrial risk assessment. The pretrial screening process provides informed, individualized, risk-based recommendations to the bail authority regarding pretrial release and supervision. Pretrial Services also have the critically important role of supervising released defendants while pending trial.	that predicts the individual risk of re-offense and non-appearance shows that 14% of the defendants entering PTS scored high risk, 39% moderate risk, and 47% low risk. People ordered into PTS are supervised based on their individual risk. 94.4% of the people ordered into PTS in 2025 remained arrest free while 93% of those ordered into the program appeared at future court appearances. These outcomes are significant because data collected from Cumberland County prior to establishing PTS shows a 67% arrest free rate and a 75% appearance rate for people awaiting trial. The use of Pretrial Services has also impacted the county jail population. A 2024 analysis of the correlation between Pretrial Services usage and jail bed usage shows that the low-risk pretrial population previously incarcerated at the	Serve as a trusted regional partner in public safety by providing essential services and supporting the criminal justice system in safeguarding residents and promoting community trust.

Departments with Nonmandated Functions				
Department	Nonmandated Function	Key Functions	Notes	Strategic Plan Alignment
			county jail were being safely supervised in the community by Pretrial Services. It's estimated that the use of PTS in Cumberland County reduced the daily bed usage at the county jail by 42 beds. This reduction in bed usage allowed the jail to use the unused beds for other local and federal jurisdictions. A cost benefit analysis estimates that Cumberland County recouped approximately \$1.2 million in revenue due to this use of the unused beds.	
Aging and Community Services	Cumberland Cares	Free in-home visitation program to support and educate parents of children (prenatal to five)		Standing Strong for Those in Need: Deliver responsive and accountable essential human services that safeguard vulnerable populations and connect residents to services.

Departments with Nonmandated Functions				
Department	Nonmandated Function	Key Functions	Notes	Strategic Plan Alignment
Court System	Court Appointed Special Advocate Program	Administration of justice, case management, legal representation for vulnerable populations	CASA staff recruit, screen, train and supervise/support CASA volunteers (between 40-60) who advocate for children whose cases are in Dependency Court due to allegations of abuse and/or neglect. CASA volunteers assist the Court in determining the best interest of the child/sibling group to whom they are assigned. CASA volunteers give hundreds of hours of their time and often travel hundreds of miles over the course of their assignments in order to advocate for some of our community's most vulnerable children, providing an invaluable service to the Court and to our community.	Justice for Every Voice and Safety in Every Community: Serve as a trusted regional partner in public safety by providing essential services and supporting the criminal justice system in safeguarding residents and promoting community trust.
Court System	Criminal Justice Planning and Intermediate Punishment (IP) programs	Coordinates criminal justice policy, manages intermediate punishment programs, and conducts data analysis and program evaluation	Nonmandated, as a condition of external funding	Justice for Every Voice and Safety in Every Community: Implement system-wide training for staff in intervention practices that are aligned

Departments with Nonmandated Functions				
Department	Nonmandated Function	Key Functions	Notes	Strategic Plan Alignment
				with evidence-based approaches, ensuring consistent application across all departments within the County's criminal justice system.
Court System	Court Collections Unit	Collections of court-ordered costs, fines, and restitution		Justice for Every Voice and Safety in Every Community
Finance	Multiyear financial planning, benchmarking, performance measurement	Budget development and oversight, fiscal policy management, financial reporting, grants administration	Multiyear financial planning is non-mandated, however financial projections for at least 5 years is considered a GFOA (Government Finance Officers Association) best practice.	Service that Sets the Standard: Achieve operational excellence by promoting a high-performing organizational culture, embracing innovation, and proactive planning.
IMTO	GIS Services, Records Archive Facility	Information technology management, geographic information systems, records management, cybersecurity		Service that Sets the Standard: Leverage technology to improve operations and service delivery

Departments with Nonmandated Functions				
Department	Nonmandated Function	Key Functions	Notes	Strategic Plan Alignment
Mental Health	Child and Adolescent Service System Program (CASSP)	CASSP Coordinator	Preventative service	Standing Strong for Those in Need: Expand and enhance collaboration across human services to improve delivery and foster innovative solutions
Mental Health	Elementary Student Assistance Program (ESAP)	Early intervention support for at risk elementary students	Schools are required to provide these programs	Standing Strong for Those in Need: Expand and enhance collaboration across human services to improve delivery and foster innovative solutions
Mental Health	Care Options Rx LLC (Drugs)	Outpatient services	Significant cost cut impact for jail, courts, probation, D&A	Standing Strong for Those in Need: Explore preventive services and targeted investment for long-term improvements in service delivery.
Mental Health	Assertive community treatment	Mobile treatment team	Developed under a CHIPP initiative ACT is an Evidence Based Practice serving the most	Standing Strong for Those in Need: Explore preventive

Departments with Nonmandated Functions				
Department	Nonmandated Function	Key Functions	Notes	Strategic Plan Alignment
			seriously mentally ill adults who struggle with compliance to treatment. May increase cost to jail or increase system costs like psychiatric inpatient.	services and targeted investment for long-term improvements in service delivery.
Commissioners' Office	Cumberland County Housing and Redevelopment Authority	The Authority applies for HUD funding on behalf of the county; the county manages the funds	As a condition of external funding	Standing Strong for Those in Need & Stronger Together: Collaborate with partners to connect residents to services and address service gaps.
Mental Health	New Visions SLP	Staff supporting individuals with independent living		Standing Strong for Those in Need: Explore preventive services and targeted investment for long-term improvements in service delivery.
Mental Health	Stevens SLP	Staff supporting individuals with independent living		Standing Strong for Those in Need: Explore preventive services and targeted investment for long-term improvements

Departments with Nonmandated Functions				
Department	Nonmandated Function	Key Functions	Notes	Strategic Plan Alignment
				in service delivery.
Mental Health	Transitional and community integration services (Penn State Health Holy Spirit)	Forensic case management		Standing Strong for Those in Need: Explore preventive services and targeted investment for long-term improvements in service delivery.
Prison	Central Booking Facility	Inmate custody and care, intake and release operations, rehabilitation programs	There is a fee involved that takes a long time to recoup. Recouping the associated fee is a lengthy process.	No clear alignment
Public Safety	Honor Guard	Providing Honor guard services for those who have passed to honor their service to the community.		No clear alignment
Sheriff's Office	Community Services Programs	These activities include the Child ID program, DUI checkpoints and Annual Sheriff's Office Community Safety Program		Justice for Every Voice and Safety in Every Community: Strengthen public safety and community trust through outreach and prevention.
Sheriff's Office	Some law enforcement	The Sheriff assists the PA State Police and other police	Units like the K-9 or Special Response	Justice for Every Voice and Safety Community:

Departments with Nonmandated Functions				
Department	Nonmandated Function	Key Functions	Notes	Strategic Plan Alignment
	services and community services	agencies in capacities such as traffic control, crowd control, apprehension of fugitives, DUI Checkpoints, and provide security to the court.	Team are not mandatory	Serve as a trusted regional partner in public safety by providing essential services and supporting the criminal justice system in safeguarding residents and promoting community trust.
Planning	Other farmland preservations activities	Agriculture land preservation, including conservation easements.	Primary function is securing voluntary conservation easements on farm using a state designated program that is managed by the county. Each county dollar contributed to the program delivers \$1-\$2 from other non-county sources.	Rooted in Balance: Guide and influence responsible growth through collaborative planning efforts that preserve farmland, protect natural resources, and sustain the county's unique sense of place.

Table 1.3: Nonmandated Departments

Nonmandated Departments			
Department	Key Functions	Notes	Strategic Plan Alignment
Aging and Community Services	Provides support services to older adults and community members, including protective services, home-delivered meals, transportation, and social services coordination	As a condition of external funding the County accepts	Standing Strong for Those in Need: Deliver responsive and accountable essential human services that safeguard vulnerable populations.
Communication	Coordinates a comprehensive, strategic effort to inform internal and external audiences of the county's operations, goals, plans and achievements	Non-mandated, established to support transparency and public engagement efforts	Stronger Together: Engage stakeholders and partners with open communication to promote broad public participation in strategic initiatives.
Conservation District	Core activities in the 2013 County Budget: Clean Water Program, Chesapeake Bay Program, Nutrient Management Program, Watershed Program, Environmental Education, and Dirt and Gravel Program	No, except as a condition of outside funding. This is a semi-autonomous department	Rooted in Balance: Preserve farmland, protect natural resources, and sustain the County's unique sense of place.
Drug and Alcohol Services	Provides prevention, intervention, and treatment services for substance use disorders; program oversight and case management	As a condition of external funding the County accepts	Standing Strong for Those in Need
Facilities Management (maintenance)	Maintenance and up-keep of more than twenty-eight buildings and properties maintained or owned by Cumberland County; including the support of each department's maintenance, janitorial and construction needs.		Service that Sets the Standard: Implement the countywide Facilities Master Plan (FMP) to provide modern county facilities that improve customer service, accessibility, operational effectiveness, safety, and interdepartmental collaboration.
Farmland preservation	Acquires and manages agricultural conservation easements to preserve farmland and supports land preservation programs		Rooted in Balance: Fund land preservation efforts and support the agriculture industry.
Grant Administration	Supports County departments with planning grant eligible programs, submitting compelling grant		Standing Strong with Those in Need: Partner with the state and federal

Nonmandated Departments			
Department	Key Functions	Notes	Strategic Plan Alignment
	applications, and ethically administering awarded grant funds		governments as well as contracted service providers to identify and pursue diverse funding sources to bridge the gap between state allocations and the county's desired service levels.
Human Resources	Supports county operations by recruiting, developing, and retaining top talent; managing employee compensation to remain competitive and fiscally responsible; and overseeing risk management programs. HR also fosters a consistent application of county policies, resolves labor relations issues in compliance with laws and agreements, and provides workforce development opportunities for employee growth to meet the county's evolving needs.		Service that Sets the Standard: Recruit and retain a high-performing workforce.
Planning	Planning department provides the legally required County review of all subdivision and land development plans and zoning ordinance amendments. In addition, the planning department manages the 3C program.	County elected to have a Planning Commission	Rooted in Balance: Guide responsible growth through collaborative planning and technical assistance.
Recycling and Waste, Solid Waste Authority	Develops and implements the Municipal Waste Management Plan, coordinates recycling programs, conducts public education, and oversees waste reduction initiatives	Municipal Waste Management Plan is required; however, waste collection activities are not mandated	Rooted in Balance: Manage solid waste disposal and protect the environment.
Vector Control	Monitors and controls mosquito and vector-borne disease threats, conducts public education, and manages surveillance programs	As a condition of external funding Vector control fees are not only for staff but covers the entire operation	No clear alignment If the county did not provide these services, state health departments or regional public health agencies may assume oversight

Nonmandated Departments			
Department	Key Functions	Notes	Strategic Plan Alignment
Weights and Measures	Inspects and certifies accuracy of commercial weighing and measuring devices, enforces consumer protection laws		No clear alignment Weights and measures services could be managed by state regulatory agencies such as state Department of Agriculture or Consumer Protection

The following table provides an overview of the current nonmandated departments and service areas, detailing their adopted budgets for fiscal year 2025 as well as the sources of support for each department. This information highlights the allocation of federal, state, and other funding alongside general fund or county support, allowing for a clear understanding of resource distribution among nonmandated services.

Table 1.4: Current Nonmandated Departments and/or Service Areas²

Department/Fund/Service Area	CY 2025 Adopted Budget	Federal/State/Other Support*	General Fund/County Support*
Aging	\$5,058,114	\$4,720,011	\$338,114
Agriculture Extension ³	\$440,000	\$-	\$440,000
Community Services	\$1,200,310	\$1,200,310	\$0
Criminal Justice Planning and Intermediate Punishment (IP) Programs	\$1,455,037	\$270,000	\$1,185,037
Drug and Alcohol Services	\$4,936,525	\$4,646,302	\$290,223
Farmland Preservation	\$887,000	\$137,000	\$750,000

¹ This is now a line item in the planning budget as it is no longer a county department, but a contracted agency.

² This exercise was not a formal expenditure and financial analysis but rather an analytical examination based on known budget data, observations, and discussions with County staff. Nonetheless, the brief overview above can provide valuable insight and might help County leadership make informed decisions regarding increased revenue generation needed to administer and manage select County service delivery.

³ This is now a line item in the planning budget, as it is no longer a county department, but a contracted agency.

Department/Fund/Service Area	CY 2025 Adopted Budget	Federal/State/Other Support*	General Fund/County Support*
Human Service Development Fund	\$225,952	\$225,952	\$0
Planning – Commission	\$1,590,557	\$50,000	\$1,540,557
Planning – Grants (251710)	\$2,642,345	\$2,694,845	\$-
Planning – Grants (251711)	\$226,340	\$40,340	\$186,000
Planning – Grants (252010)	\$76,310	\$200,000	\$-
Planning – Grants (253010)	\$52,800	\$-	\$52,800
Recycling and Waste	\$663,640	\$567,065	\$96,575
Vector Control	\$146,564	\$108,000	\$38,564
Weights and Measures	\$233,839	\$301,000	\$-
Total	\$19,835,333	\$15,160,825	\$4,917,870
*estimated, support (revenue) budgets may exceed adopted expenditure budgets			

Source: Cumberland County Department of Finance

As noted in the table above, almost 30% of budgeted expenditures for nonmandated services is supported by County sources.

Should core revenue generation remain stagnant or decline, the County might need to conduct a line-item review of the nonmandated service budgets listed above. Furthermore, efforts to prioritize programs based on community impact, usage data, and equity considerations should also be included when assessing potential reductions and/or cuts, as should input from departments, stakeholders, and the public to help ensure fairness and minimize disruption, wherever possible.

It might not be practical to reduce and/or cut any of the functions or services listed above. In the interest of reviewing and considering all nonmandated services and functions, the departments providing the services above are not legally required to do so, and these areas could present opportunities for further expenditure reviews as necessary.

Although overall budget baselines continued to be balanced, and resource levels might seem sufficient, they are not indicative of guaranteed financial health indefinitely. To that end, several factors should be considered when assessing future resource levels and estimated future expenditure targets. The County has experienced increased expenditures for some departments' service areas related to both personnel and non-personnel segments over the past few CYs—a trend likely to continue. Revenue growth across all core service segments has not kept pace with expenditure increases, with revenue in some core service categories declining year-over-year.

As costs for goods, equipment, and labor have continued to rise, the County has been increasingly challenged to continue providing services at current levels and, in some cases,

increasing service levels without burdening taxpayers. The County also relies on a significant amount of non-tax revenue annually. Currently, there is uncertainty surrounding state and federal funding, which could impact the County's fiscal environment in future CYs and should also be considered when planning for the future.

3.0 Fiscal Capacity Analysis

This section of the memo analyzes the County's current fiscal position, identifies recent trends, and outlines general fund support for nonmandated programs.

3.1 Fiscal Capacity and Capital Investment in the Strategic Planning Context

Fiscal Capacity

The County's annual budget serves as the principal financial planning and control tool. The County uses its annual operating and capital budget development process as the primary strategic tool that helps guide the County to realize all elements associated with mandated service delivery, nonmandated service delivery, and countywide strategic goals and objectives. For the County to realize and implement the core components outlined in the strategic plan, it will need to lay out a fiscally responsible road map into the future. To that end, County finance staff currently develop and annually share a five-year financial forecast regarding the County's general fund and applicable special fund operations to help guide leadership and provide revenue/expense projections and estimates to assist with decision-making and planning for the future. The forecast generally includes key assumptions and trends related to revenues and expenditures over the next five calendar years (CYs) that are specific to the County environment as well as applicable macroeconomic trends and impacts.

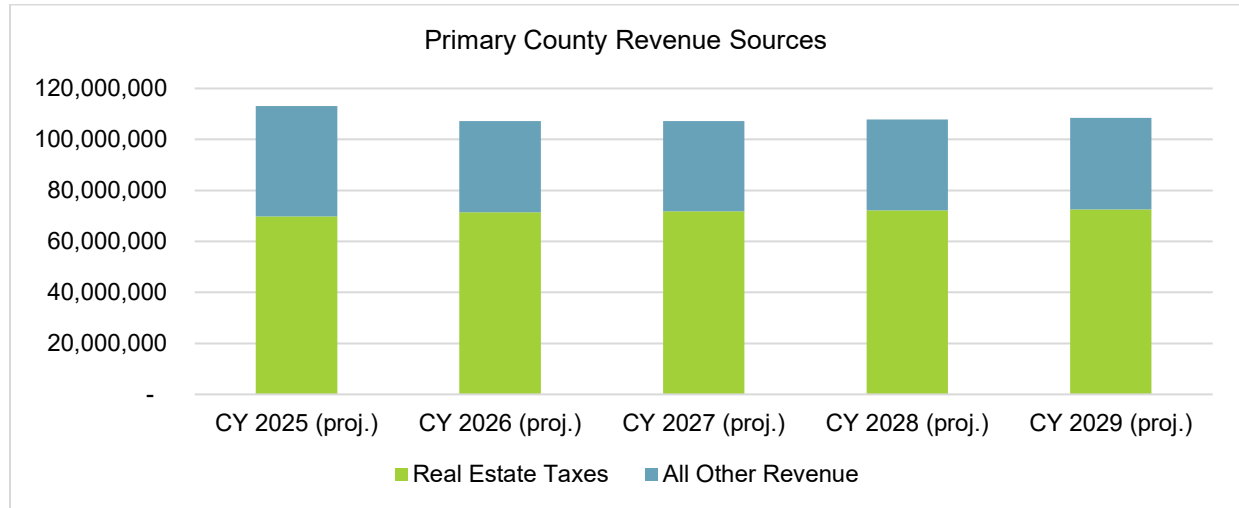
Therefore, in conjunction with helping ensure operational and service continuity, consideration for future strategic needs and resource planning related to strategic plan priorities should also inform the five-year financial forecast. Other budgetary assumptions that would address financial needs and priorities related to day-to-day service delivery and other countywide initiatives, including capital investment needs, would be examined. The forecast should attempt to balance priorities with issues of affordability and reality. The financial forecast model should provide a thorough analysis of existing funding practices, sources, and levels for day-to-day service delivery, capital investments, and comprehensive and strategic plan priority investments; this model should also identify barriers to long-term funding needs in certain scenarios related to millage rates (real estate taxes).

Revenue and Expense

To establish a baseline for assessing fiscal capacity and future growth needs, it is necessary to understand the County's core revenue generating capacity. For CY 2025, an estimated 61.7% of revenue will come from real estate taxes, a slight increase from CY 2024 levels. CY 2025 is also projected to see an increase in intergovernmental revenues (one-time revenues), pushing the "all other revenue" sources category to 38.3% of total annual revenue; however, the majority of one-time revenue support is a carryforward of unspent funds from the previous CY, not necessarily additional revenue available. One-time intergovernmental revenues are projected to decline 16.9% through the close of CY 2029, with real estate tax revenue projected to increase

a modest 3.9% over the next five CYs. Despite a strong revenue generation projection for CY 2025—due in large part to one-time intergovernmental revenues (and carry forwards)—total revenue generation is projected to decline 4.1% through CY 2029, as one-time and intergovernmental revenue support is expected to diminish.

Figure 2.1: Primary County Revenue Sources



Source: Cumberland County Department of Finance

Operational expenses have increased in recent years, with most indicators pointing to a continuation of this trend. Some of these cost increases cannot be avoided, as they are beyond the control of the County and are influenced by macroeconomic shifts in the economy and public sector labor market. Personnel-related costs (salaries and benefits) have increased in recent years and are expected to increase 13.6% over CY 2025 levels by the close of CY 2029.

Table 2.1: County Primary Expense Categories

	CY 2025 (Proj.)	CY 2026 (Proj.)	CY 2027 (Proj.)	CY 2028 (Proj.)	CY 2029 (Proj.)
Salaries	\$40,651,637	\$42,215,678	\$43,824,819	\$45,091,782	\$46,400,607
Benefits	\$15,517,871	\$16,463,734	\$16,802,599	\$17,053,860	\$17,397,972
Operating	\$34,080,397	\$31,929,397	\$32,529,500	\$33,164,041	\$33,806,138
Subsidy	\$13,438,243	\$16,131,111	\$16,845,195	\$17,233,013	\$17,642,341
Capital	\$7,246,434	\$4,376,079	\$6,251,509	\$5,354,737	\$3,934,489
Transfers/ Debt	\$6,533,691	\$5,697,653	\$4,391,990	\$5,913,711	\$3,155,533

Source: Cumberland County Department of Finance

Contingency Budgeting

The County uses contingency budgeting as a financial strategy to help mitigate revenue shortfalls, expenditure overages, or other financial emergencies encountered in any given fiscal year. Through this approach, the Finance Department withholds a portion of the adopted budget allocation, reserving funds that are not assigned to specific departments or projects upfront. Instead, these funds are held in reserve to respond to unforeseen events, including unexpected costs, declines in revenue, or urgent funding needs for critical capital projects and departmental priorities. The contingency amount is determined based on analysis of historical spending patterns, revenue volatility, and ongoing discussions with departments about anticipated needs and priorities over a one- to three-year period. This practice acts as a financial buffer, enabling the County to maintain essential operations and advance priority initiatives without resorting to cutting programs or delaying services. However, it is important to note that contingency budgeting may unintentionally create the perception of cost savings or sufficient cash flow, when in fact these reserves are designated for risk mitigation and strategic needs, rather than discretionary spending.

Valuation and Millage Rate

In Pennsylvania, each county is responsible for valuing parcels uniformly county-wide which is called a reassessment. The assessed values are used to determine what each property owner will pay in county taxes by multiplying the assessed value with the county-assigned millage rate. The millage rate is used to calculate property taxes based on the property's assessed value. The rate is the tax payable per \$1,000 of assessed value.

To this end, a chief assessor is appointed by the Board of Commissioners to monitor assessed values, valuation uniformity, and other factors to recommend when a reassessment is necessary. As improvements are made to parcels or properties, county employed licensed assessors, who work under the direction of the chief assessor, determine the assessed value through a standard calculation process. The standard calculation process is based on the values in the last reassessment. Like many other counties in the state, Cumberland County has experienced an increase in total valuation over the past decade. Although market values have increased, properties, including new builds, continue to be assessed upon 100 percent of 2010 values – the last time a reassessment was completed in Cumberland County.

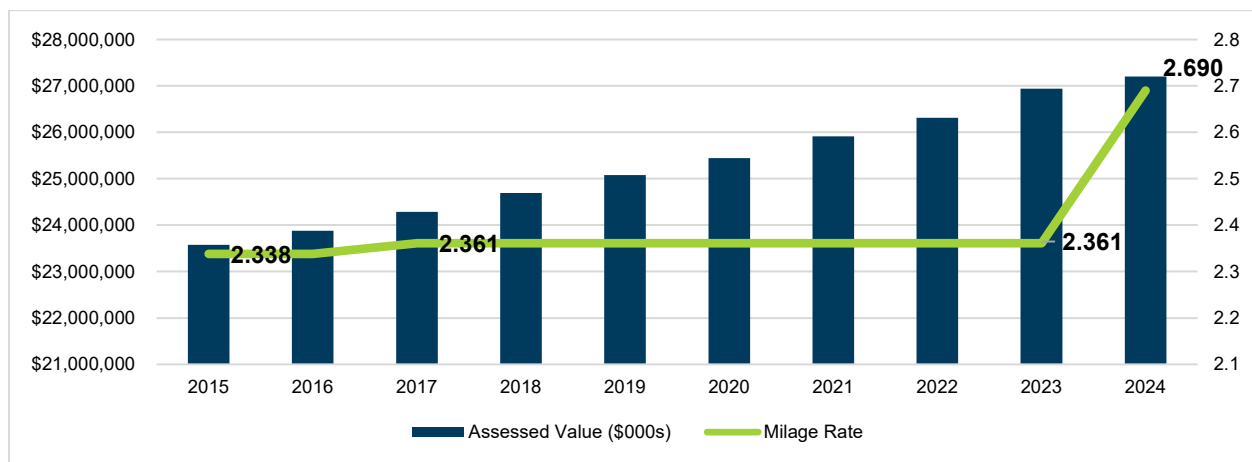
The decision to complete a reassessment is based on property valuation indicators. These indicators compare the market value to assessed value and sale prices of properties by parcel type to determine the relevance of assessed values and the uniformity of assessments county-wide. These indicators point to a growing divide between market and assessed values. The growing volume of assessment appeals has led to a shift in uniformity indicators for some parcel types. Depending on the complexity of the parcel type and whether any of the reassessment work is completed by County personnel, a reassessment costs between \$70 and \$100 per parcel. With over 100,000 parcels in the county, a reassessment is a costly undertaking. Cumberland County should aggressively analyze these numbers, prepare a cost benefit analysis, and begin planning for a reassessment.

The millage rate is re-established when a reassessment is done to ensure tax revenue is net zero minus natural growth from the previous year. This means the millage rate is set to ensure no additional monies are collected due to the reassessment. Once established Counties have

the option to increase this amount by up to ten percent after the new millage rate has been established. Each year the County is responsible for analyzing revenue and expenses and determining whether a change in the millage rate is required. One factor that must be considered is the percentage of natural growth that is projected in the current and subsequent years. When natural growth trends are high, additional tax revenue created due to this growth might cover expenditure increases. It might require adopting millage rate changes more frequently to keep pace with expenditure increases and to maintain County buying power. The County should consider small incremental changes rather than large increases.

As property valuation has increased, the millage rate has not followed accordingly. As illustrated in Figure 2.2 below, only recently has the millage rate been increased.

Figure 2.2: County Assessed Value and Millage Rates 2015 – 2024



Source: Cumberland County Department of Finance, Annual Reports of the Cumberland County Controller, and County Board of Assessors

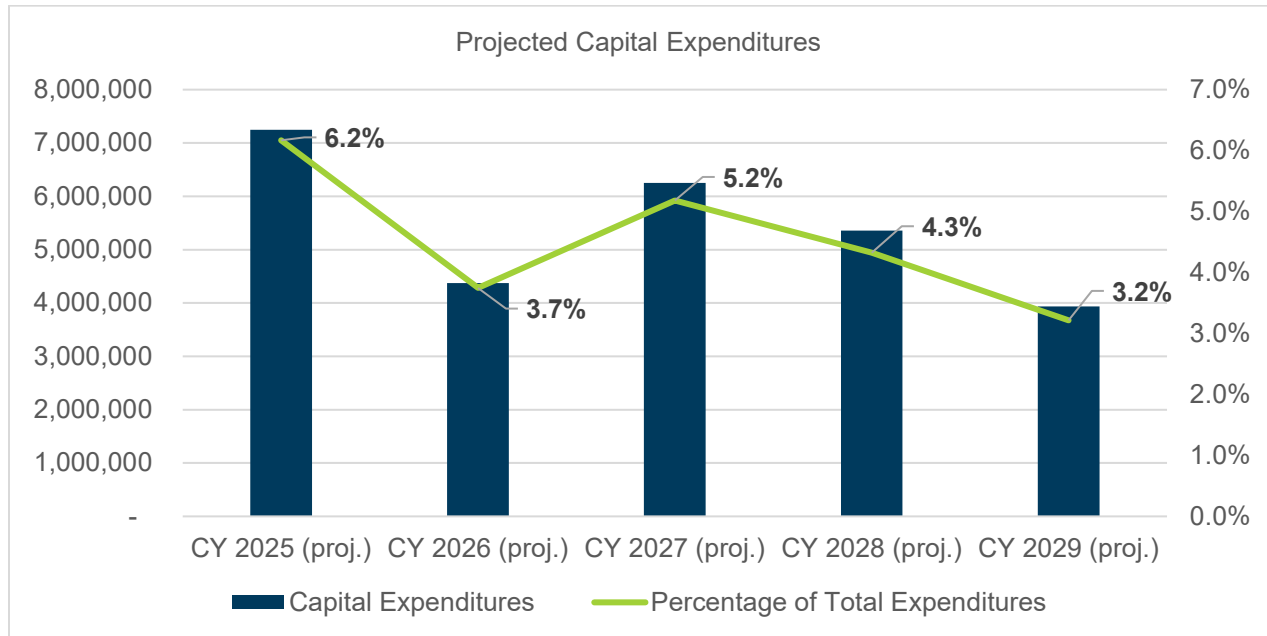
Capital Planning and Debt Capacity

The County has an annual Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) that is reviewed and approved along with the annual budget. In addition, rising operational costs and projected rising costs for larger capital expenses (design, construction, inspection, debt service, etc.) require long-term planning to help ensure the County has adequate facilities, equipment, and supplies to continue effectively providing services to residents and commercial partners.

BerryDunn reviewed planned capital investments and requested capital related to County departments' service delivery needs and County facilities. The County's continued commitment to community-centric investments that are balanced with current capital plan requests—such as addressing aging infrastructure and promoting strategic facility development—is evident. However, capital spend is projected to decrease by almost 50% through CY 2029 when compared to projected CY 2025 levels. Therefore, additional efforts should include determining projected capital expenditure needs associated with strategic plan initiatives and assisting the County with prioritizing and sequencing capital investments/service enhancement initiatives. Overall, percentages of projected capital investment over the next five CYs should be linked to a

strategic plan priority and/or a facility need. Figure 2.3 highlights the percentage of projected capital investments and/or requests over the next five CYs.

Figure 2.3: Projected Capital Expenditures: CY 2025 – CY 2029



Source: Cumberland County Department of Finance

Debt issuance should be considered, discussed, and integrated into a multiyear CIP to help ensure transparency, prioritization, and alignment with community and strategic goals. For example, the financial model and subsequent five-year financial forecast (developed annually) should include existing debt as well as proposed new debt inputs related to capital investments and facility needs. Proposed new debt should generally reflect projects and/or purchases that support priority and facility needs.

Challenges

The reported inconsistency and unpredictability of state and federal funding streams—compounded by the current budget impasse at the state level—adds to the challenges of meeting current budgetary needs and planning for the future. Over the past several budget cycles, the County has reportedly encountered a trend that funding commitments from state and federal sources are becoming less predictable. Federal and state programs that once provided consistent, reliable support are now reportedly subject to delays, reductions, or abrupt policy shifts. These continued challenges not only affect current CY resource availability but also undermine confidence in future revenue and expense projections. It requires the County to take a reactive posture rather than allowing staff and leadership the ability to proactively and strategically plan based on guaranteed, consistent revenue streams and cash flows. The following are reported examples of commonplace challenges encountered in the current environment and their impacts:

- **Delayed/Suspended State and Federal Payments:** Federal and/or state payments to the County are being delayed or suspended, including reimbursements and shared revenue distributions.
- **Deferred Matching Funds for Programs:** Matching funds for programs are having to be put on hold, jeopardizing the ability to leverage state and federal dollars.
- **Inconsistent Cash Flows:** Cash flow becomes inconsistent, forcing the County to make difficult decisions about which payment obligations to prioritize, especially in the third and fourth quarters of the CY.
- **Operational Strain:** Departments are continuously being asked to do more with less or to identify cuts, creating tension/exhaustion and removing the focus from day-to-day service delivery.

The challenges above present a substantial risk for all County services, but especially to nonmandated services. While all County services provide value to residents and County partners, nonmandated services are generally defined as those that the County is not legally obligated to provide. These services most often enrich the community, but they might need to be scaled back or temporarily suspended if financial conditions worsen. Absent additional revenue generating capacity by way of real estate taxes, or continued delay and/or uncertainty related to federal and state funding support, the following departments/service areas might be substantially impacted (Table 2.2):

Opportunities

Implement More Frequent/Consistent Millage Rate Increases

To maintain consistent revenue and preserve the County's purchasing power over time, millage rates must be adjusted periodically, especially in the face of inflation or stagnant property values.

Taking an approach to more frequent, incremental increases allows the County to adapt to economic changes more fluidly without waiting for a crisis to act. Small, regular adjustments enable better budget planning and transparency. Large jumps in the millage rate(s) can appear reactionary or politically motivated rather than fiscally responsible.

Strategic Prioritization of Services

Provide budget and forecasting scenarios demonstrating the impact of maintaining all services versus making strategic reductions. Evaluate which services align most closely with the County's core mission and statutory obligations through a thoughtful review of nonmandated services to assess cost, impact, and alignment with current community needs, helping to demonstrate the long-term implications of current spending patterns.

Adjust Fees

Currently, some county fees are outdated. Regularly reviewing and updating fees for services can provide a meaningful way to increase revenue without disproportionately burdening property owners. For example, the County could evaluate whether fees for permits, facility rentals, or specialized programs are keeping pace with the actual cost of service delivery and

market rates. Implementing a schedule for fee adjustments ensures transparency and predictability, making it easier for residents and businesses to plan. Additionally, benchmarking these fees against peer counties can reveal opportunities for adjustment and help maintain competitiveness while ensuring fiscal sustainability.

Prioritize Cost Management

Explore ways to reduce non-personnel expenditures or make more efficient use of resources to help prevent overreliance on millage rate increases, fee increases, or external funding sources.

Monitor Revenue Streams

Staff and leadership should also carefully monitor state and federal indicators related to legislative and policy changes/trends to assess the reliability and volatility of revenue and funding sources. These efforts could help ensure services continue at current levels and that increased service levels can be achieved to accommodate increased customer demand and the County's growth trajectory.

4.0 Peer Comparison

This section of the memo provides a high-level analysis of the results from the benchmarking survey. Full results can be found on Appendix A.

Peer Counties

A survey was distributed to each community with questions related to current fiscal environment, millage adjustments, nonmandated programs, staffing increases or decreases, and cost-saving initiatives. Chester, Dauphin, and Franklin counties responded fully to the questionnaire, Berks County provided partial responses, and Westmoreland and York counties did not respond. A summary of the results is provided in the tables below.

The benchmarking survey of the aforementioned counties offers a view of fiscal practices, staffing trends, discretionary program management, and cost-saving initiatives across counties like Cumberland.

Key Benchmark Findings

- **Fiscal Environment:** All peer counties have modified millage rates over the last decade, reflecting ongoing responses to operational needs, rising personnel costs, and capital investments. Peer counties have also balanced revenue generation through fee increases and grant exploration.
- **Strategic Planning:** Chester and Dauphin have formal strategic plans, while Berks uses a five-year budget forecast and goal setting; Franklin lacks a formal plan.
- **Discretionary Programs:** Chester stands out with 51 nonmandated programs and substantial investment (\$74.9 million), including initiatives in mental health, DEI, and sustainability. Dauphin and Franklin focus on grant-funded and targeted social services, while Cumberland's discretionary portfolio is more modest.
- **Staffing Trends:** All counties have added and eliminated positions, responding to both mandatory and discretionary needs. Cumberland's ratio of mandatory to discretionary hires is higher, demonstrating a focus on core functions.
- **Revenue Generation and Cost Savings:** Peer counties actively pursue grants and new revenue streams. Berks' "budget diet" is a department-led approach to targeted spending reductions, while Franklin has benefited from operational outsourcing and asset sales. Chester and Dauphin have implemented energy efficiency and modernization efforts.

Noteworthy Approaches Among Peer Counties

- **Chester County:** Exceptional commitment to discretionary programming with a large portfolio and investment. Notable additions include a Human Relations Commission, DEI initiatives, a mental health crisis response system, and sustainability roles. Chester’s approach demonstrates the value of balancing fiscal discipline with community-oriented innovation.
- **Berks County:** The “budget diet” model emphasizes department-driven reductions, empowering leaders to make targeted cuts aligned with operational priorities. Their delayed hiring process, which reviews vacancies for potential elimination, has yielded significant savings.
- **Dauphin and Franklin Counties:** Focus on grant-funded programs, energy efficiency, and modernization. Franklin’s outsourcing of services and sale of its nursing home streamlined operations and reduced costs.

Similarities and Differences with Cumberland County

- **Similarities:** Cumberland shares the peer counties’ mix of mandated and discretionary programs, millage adjustments, and staffing management. Like peers, Cumberland pursues grants and fee adjustments to support fiscal sustainability.
- **Differences:** Cumberland’s portfolio of discretionary programs is less robust than Chester’s, and its cost-saving initiatives are less varied compared to Berks and Franklin. The county’s hiring and elimination of positions show a stronger emphasis on mandatory roles, while peers experiment with more aggressive discretionary cuts and program innovation.

Additional details of the benchmarking survey findings can be found in Appendix A.

5.0 Innovation in Service Delivery

This section of the memo identifies actionable strategies for Cumberland County to enhance service delivery by drawing on benchmarking data from peer counties and incorporating leading practices from across the public sector.

Cumberland County is committed to advancing service excellence by learning from its peers and adopting industry-leading innovations. In an evolving public sector landscape, leveraging best practices from other counties and integrating forward-thinking strategies is essential to meet the diverse needs of residents efficiently and sustainably. The following section highlights actionable approaches, drawn from benchmarking data and successful models across the nation that can drive meaningful improvements in service delivery, cost management, and community well-being.

Each strategic recommendation below is linked not only to the County's stated priorities in the strategic plan document, but also to direct examples from peer city and county governments that have implemented these initiatives.

5.1 Mecklenburg County Choice Matrix Budgeting

Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, has developed a nationally recognized approach to budget transparency and strategic resource allocation. A key feature of their process is the clear categorization of county services into mandated, partially mandated, and discretionary (or "choice") services, as detailed in their FY2026 Adopted Budget. This framework, known as the "Choice Matrix," provides a powerful tool for elected officials, staff, and the public to understand the county's legal obligations versus areas of local discretion. Cumberland County can draw valuable lessons from this approach to enhance its own budget deliberations, improve transparency, and align spending with community priorities.

Figure 3.0: Choice Matrix

	No Funding Choice	Funding Choice
No Program Choice	No Choices (Program or Funding) FY2026 Adopted \$429,997,051	No Program Choice Funding Choice FY2026 Adopted \$1,368,825,012
Program Choice	Program Choice No Funding Choice FY2026 Adopted \$158,479,671	Program Choice Funding Choice FY2026 Adopted \$585,017,908

How Mecklenburg County Structures Budget Conversations

1. Clear Categorization of Services

Mecklenburg County presents a detailed breakdown of revenues and expenditures, followed by a “Choice Matrix” that classifies every county-funded service into one of four categories:

- **No Choices (Red):** Services that are legally required and must be funded at a specific level (e.g., debt service, state-mandated social services).
- **No Program Choice/Funding Choice (Blue):** Services that are required by law, but the county has some flexibility in funding levels (e.g., certain health and human services).
- **Program Choice/No Funding Choice (Purple):** Services that are not required, but once the county chooses to offer them, there are restrictions on how funds can be used (e.g., grant-funded programs).
- **Program and Funding Choice (Green):** Fully discretionary services where the county has complete control over both the existence of the program and the level of funding (e.g., many parks and recreation programs, certain community grants).

This matrix is supported by detailed tables showing the cost, funding source, and staffing for each service, allowing for a transparent and data-driven discussion about trade-offs.

2. Integrating the Matrix into the Budget Process

The Choice Matrix is not just a reporting tool, it is embedded in Mecklenburg’s annual budget cycle. The Board of County Commissioners uses the matrix to:

Prioritize funding for mandated services first, ensuring legal compliance and fiscal responsibility.

- Identify areas where reductions or expansions are possible, focusing debate on discretionary services.
- Communicate clearly with the public about why some services cannot be cut and where local priorities can shape spending.

3. Linking to Strategic Priorities

Mecklenburg County aligns its discretionary spending with Board-adopted strategic priorities, such as education, economic development, and health equity. The matrix helps ensure that new investments or reductions are made with an understanding of both legal requirements and community goals.

Recommendations for Cumberland County

Adopt a Service Categorization Framework

Cumberland County should develop its own version of the Choice Matrix, categorizing all county services as mandated, partially mandated, or discretionary. This will:

- Clarify which services are required by state or federal law and which are subject to local control.

- Provide a common language for budget discussions among commissioners, staff, and the public.
- Help manage expectations during times of fiscal constraint or when new funding opportunities arise.

Use the Matrix to Guide Budget Deliberations

- **Start with Mandates:** Ensure all mandated services are fully funded before considering discretionary expansions.
- **Focus on Discretion:** Use the matrix to identify areas where the Board has true flexibility, and direct public engagement and debate toward these services.
- **Scenario Planning:** In times of revenue shortfall, use the matrix to model the impact of cuts on discretionary versus mandated services.

Enhance Transparency and Public Engagement

- Publish the matrix and supporting data in the annual budget book and online.
- Use the matrix in public hearings and community meetings to explain budget constraints and opportunities.
- Invite feedback on discretionary services to ensure spending aligns with resident priorities.

Link to Strategic Planning

- Align discretionary spending with the county's strategic plan and Board priorities.
- Use the matrix to track how investments in discretionary areas advance long-term goals.

5.2 Proactive Community Engagement and Transparency

Cumberland County currently faces significant challenges in community engagement. According to the stakeholder engagement findings, many residents are not well informed about county services or the avenues available for meaningful participation. This knowledge gap limits the County's ability to foster inclusive dialogue, gather input on critical decisions, and build trust between local government and the public. As a result, there is a pressing need for strategies that increase awareness and empower residents to take an active role in shaping county priorities.

To address current gaps in community awareness, participation, and trust, Cumberland County could consider implementing a coordinated, resident-centered communication and engagement strategy designed to expand access to information, foster two-way dialogue, and empower residents to meaningfully shape County priorities. Best practices demonstrate that sustained, inclusive engagement improves service delivery, strengthens public trust, and leads to better decision-making outcomes

1. Establish a Centralized and Accessible Communication Framework

The County could adopt a multi-channel communication framework that consolidates information about services, public meetings, and engagement opportunities into easily accessible platforms. Research shows that residents are more likely to participate when government communication is clear, consistent, and delivered through multiple channels tailored to community preferences.

Peer Example:

- **Camden County, NJ** implemented a unified digital engagement system that allows residents to submit concerns, track responses, and receive updates across departments. This approach reduced confusion about where to engage and improved responsiveness while increasing trust in county government.

Application for Cumberland County:

- Launch a single “Community Engagement” webpage or portal that aggregates meetings, surveys, volunteer opportunities, and service information.
- Ensure content is mobile-friendly and written in plain language to increase usability.

2. Expand Two-Way and Digital Engagement Opportunities

Residents increasingly expect interactive and flexible engagement options. The County should supplement traditional meetings with digital tools such as Social Pinpoint, Go Vocal that allow residents to provide feedback on their own schedules while preserving in-person options for those with limited digital access.

Peer Example:

- **City of Allen, TX** used an online engagement platform during its comprehensive planning process and significantly increased participation from residents who had never attended public meetings before. One of their initial challenges to overcome included outdated engagement models that were resource intensive and lacked the depth of insight needed to support high stakes planning decisions. The city deployed a hybrid public engagement model that included the use of the Go Vocal platform to capture input and engage stakeholders who traditionally did not engage in government while continuing to host traditional public meetings to expand its reach.

Application for Cumberland County:

- Introduce online surveys, virtual town halls, and participatory feedback tools for policy initiatives and budget priorities.
- Utilize community events and public meetings to engage residents directly in their own neighborhoods and familiar settings.
- Publicly share “what we heard” summaries that demonstrate how resident input influenced decisions, reinforcing accountability.

3. Build Internal Capacity and Measure Engagement Outcomes

Sustainable engagement requires staff capacity, clear roles, and measurable outcomes. Counties that invest in communication training and evaluation are better equipped to maintain consistent resident engagement over time.

Peer Example:

Jurisdictions following ICMA's community engagement framework use standardized evaluation criteria to assess participation levels, demographic reach, and resident satisfaction, allowing continuous improvement.

Application for Cumberland County:

- Consider implementing biannual community surveys. These surveys would not only provide valuable insights into resident priorities but also enable the county to capture meaningful metrics that track progress over time. Regularly collecting and analyzing this data will inform decision-making and help demonstrate accountability to the community.
- Train staff across departments in public communication and engagement best practices
- Track participation metrics and resident feedback to refine outreach strategies annually

5.3 Fiscal Resilience and Resource Optimization

Centralized Grant Management

Cumberland County's progress toward a more centralized approach to grant administration reflects a clear and strategic commitment to improving funding competitiveness, compliance, and operational efficiency. The County's Grants Administration Department already plays a vital coordinating role, supporting departments with prospect research, application development, and post-award management. These efforts have strengthened the County's ability to secure and steward external resources responsibly. Yet, as peer counties continue innovating in grant governance, technology, and community engagement, Cumberland County stands well-positioned to build on its momentum and adopt additional forward-thinking practices.

Across the country, counties have discovered that deepening centralization not only reduces inefficiencies and compliance risk but also creates strategic advantages. Miami-Dade County, for example, operates a highly developed Grants Coordination Division within its Office of Management & Budget. This office annually secures federal grants to advance a wide variety of county needs, such as HIV/AIDS services and drug and crime prevention and intervention. The office also provides countywide grant alerts, administers structured competitive processes, delivers training, and maintains a robust set of tools and resources that thousands of internal and external users rely on each year. Their model demonstrates how a centralized "one-stop shop" can significantly elevate staff readiness and accelerate high-quality applications.

Cumberland County can continue strengthening its own centralized approach by integrating several innovations already being used by its peers. One opportunity involves investing more deeply in a unified grants management platform mirroring Prince George's County's PGC GMS system, which streamlines application workflows, performance tracking, document retention, and internal approvals. Such a system would improve transparency across the County, reduce

administrative burden on departments, and provide leadership with real-time visibility into grant activity and outcomes.

As the County seeks to increase collaboration across departments, it could also benefit from adopting an enterprise-level governance structure modeled by creating a cross-departmental grants steering group, for example, to allow the County to coordinate high-impact applications, reduce duplicative pursuits, and better align funding opportunities with county strategic plans. This structure could further support consistent implementation of federal Uniform Guidance, strengthen audit readiness, and help ensure that indirect cost strategies and monitoring frameworks improve over time.

BerryDunn recommends the County continue expanding its centralized grant administration efforts to not simply an endorsement of internal efficiency, but also prepare the County's readiness to acquire complex, large-scale funding. As federal and state grant landscapes become more competitive and accountability requirements more demanding, counties with integrated systems, consistent standards, and strong cross-departmental collaboration are often best positioned for success. Cumberland County has already built a strong foundation; the next phase involves deepening coordination, adopting proven tools and governance models, and strengthening communication and capacity-building across the enterprise. By continuing on this path, and by drawing on tested innovations from peer counties, Cumberland County can further enhance its fiscal resilience, expand its ability to pursue transformative projects, and deliver even greater impact for the residents it serves.

Explore Home Rule Charter Adoption to Expand Revenue-Generating Authority and Modernize County Governance

In addition to strengthening centralized grant administration and resource optimization, Cumberland County should proactively evaluate the adoption of a Home Rule charter as a strategic initiative to enhance fiscal resilience and operational flexibility. A Home Rule charter would enable the County to move beyond the limitations imposed by state general law, granting greater local control over revenue generation, service delivery, and regulatory frameworks. This increased autonomy would empower the County to independently adjust millage rates, introduce innovative funding mechanisms, and modernize outdated policies to better respond to evolving demographic and service demands.

To ensure a successful transition, the County should undertake a comprehensive review of the legal, financial, and administrative implications associated with Home Rule. This process would include engaging a broad spectrum of stakeholders, residents, businesses, elected officials, and community organizations in structured dialogue and public forums. Additionally, the County should commission robust impact analyses to assess the potential benefits and risks, including the need for new governance structures and compliance protocols. By aligning this exploration with Cumberland County's strategic goals and commitment to equity, the County can position itself to secure sustainable revenue streams, enhance service excellence, and maintain responsiveness to community priorities well into the future.

Conduct a Comprehensive Review of Potentially Duplicative Services and Strengthen Cross-Departmental Collaboration

To further enhance fiscal resilience and operational efficiency, it is recommended that Cumberland County undertake a systematic review of county services to identify potential areas of duplication, with a particular emphasis on high-impact domains such as human services and the criminal justice system. This review should include both internal assessments and benchmarking against peer counties that have successfully streamlined service delivery through consolidation or enhanced collaboration.

The County should consider engaging the Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB) and the Human Services Policy Team with mapping current workflows, identifying overlapping responsibilities, and evaluating the feasibility of shared services or integrated processes. By fostering collaboration, especially between departments such as human services, law enforcement, and the courts, the County can uncover opportunities for cost savings, reduce administrative overhead, and improve service quality.

Findings from this review should inform the development of targeted action plans, including pilot projects or phased implementations, to eliminate redundancies and leverage collective expertise. Regular reporting to County leadership and stakeholders on progress and outcomes will also help ensure transparency and continuous improvement. Through this proactive approach, Cumberland County can maximize resource utilization, strengthen program effectiveness, and deliver greater value to its residents.

5.4 Equity and Access in Service Delivery

As Cumberland County experiences significant demographic shifts, staff have reported challenges in effectively communicating with residents who have limited English proficiency (LEP) or come from diverse cultural backgrounds. Reviewing the policies and practices of peer organizations such as Multnomah County, OR and the City of Portland, OR provides valuable insights into how local governments can proactively address these challenges and foster equitable access to services.

Cumberland County's current strategic landscape underscores a clear mandate for enhancing equity, access, and innovation in service delivery. The strategic plan, informed by an environmental scan and robust stakeholder engagement, identified increasing gaps in service utilization among culturally and linguistically diverse communities. These challenges not only impede equitable access but also impact on the broader workforce participation, public health outcomes, and community engagement.

Addressing these barriers is explicitly prioritized in the County's guiding principle of equity, and objectives related to modernizing the County's operations. The strategic plan calls for innovative, sustainable approaches that leverage partnerships, and technology to expand access and equity in service delivery.

To address these priorities, Cumberland County can draw from successful models in other jurisdictions, adapting proven approaches to meet local needs and help ensure inclusive service delivery. Multnomah County, OR's Language, Communication and Cultural Access Policy establish expansive standards for providing culturally appropriate and effective services to people with LEP and people with disabilities. The policy is rooted in federal, state, and local

legal requirements including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act. Key elements include:

- **Four-Factor Analysis:** Departments assess the number and proportion of LEP individuals served, frequency of contact, nature and importance of services, and available resources to determine reasonable steps for language access.
- **Vital Documents:** Identification and translation of essential materials (e.g., emergency alerts, consent forms, notices of rights) into the languages of commonly encountered groups.
- **Effective Communication:** Provision of auxiliary aids and services for individuals with disabilities, ensuring participation in programs and services.
- **Cultural and Linguistic Competency:** Staff training on culturally and linguistically appropriate service delivery, supported by ongoing data collection and community profiling.
- **Community Partnerships:** Collaboration with community-based organizations to design and implement language access and effective communication plans.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Regular departmental assessments, client satisfaction surveys, and updates to demographic data to evaluate and enhance service delivery.

Similarly, the City of Portland OR's Language Access Policy institutionalizes language equity across all city bureaus, guided by national standards and best practices. The policy mandates:

- **Meaningful Access:** All city programs, services, activities, and communications must be accessible to LEP individuals, with proactive and responsive language services provided at no cost.
- **Centralized Support:** The Office of Equity and Human Rights lead the citywide Language Access Program, offering technical assistance, staff training, and standardized procedures.
- **Tracking and Accountability:** Bureaus must track every instance of language access provision, both public-initiated and city-initiated, to assess compliance, budget needs, and service effectiveness.
- **Language Pay Differential:** Multilingual employees who pass proficiency testing receive additional compensation, recognizing the value of language skills in serving the public and supporting workplace equity.
- **Professional Standards:** Use of professional interpreters and translators is required for interactions with safety, health, legal, or financial implications, while bilingual staff may serve as a "language link" for routine communications.
- **Community Engagement:** The policy emphasizes culturally and linguistically specific engagement, using strength-based language and recognizing the spectrum of language proficiency within the community.

Recommendations for Cumberland County

Drawing on these peer models, Cumberland County can adopt several best practices to address its own communication challenges:

1. **Develop a Countywide Language Access Policy:** Establish clear standards and procedures for providing language services, grounded in federal and state civil rights obligations. Ensure all departments are responsible for implementation and compliance.
2. **Conduct a Four-Factor Analysis:** Regularly assess the demographics of the service population to identify commonly encountered language groups and prioritize translation and interpretation resources accordingly.
3. **Translate Vital Documents:** Identify essential materials and ensure they are available in the languages most commonly spoken by residents with LEP. This includes emergency communications, consent forms, and notices of rights and benefits.
4. **Invest in Staff Training:** Provide ongoing education for staff on cultural and linguistic competency, effective communication strategies, and the use of language service providers.
5. **Implement a Language Pay Differential:** Recognize and compensate multilingual staff who serve as a bridge to the community, following a formal proficiency testing process. This not only improves service delivery but also supports recruitment and retention of diverse talent.
6. **Track and Evaluate Language Access Efforts:** Establish systems to monitor the provision of language services, collect data on usage and costs, and use this information for budgeting, planning, and continuous improvement.
7. **Engage Community Partners:** Collaborate with local organizations to design and implement language access plans, ensuring that services are culturally appropriate and responsive to community needs.
8. **Ensure Accessibility for People with Disabilities:** Provide auxiliary aids and services, accessible signage, and web content to ensure effective communication for all residents.

By adopting these practices, Cumberland County can better serve its increasingly diverse population, reduce disparities in access to services, and foster meaningful public engagement. These steps will help staff overcome communication barriers, comply with legal requirements, and advance the County's commitment to equity.

5.5 Emergency Preparedness and Community Resilience

Cumberland County has made notable progress in emergency preparedness through interagency coordination and routine drills; however, the existing system relies on disparate reporting tools and manual updates, which can hinder timely information sharing. These factors underscore the urgency of adopting advanced technological solutions to support emergency operations and strategic planning.

In addition to the challenges posed by external coordination, Cumberland County also faces difficulties with internal emergency management. Currently, there is no comprehensive, well-

documented emergency management plan, which can lead to confusion and inefficiency during emergency events, as evidenced during the county's most recent winter storm. To address this gap, the County should prioritize the development of a clear, centralized emergency management plan that outlines roles, responsibilities, and protocols for all departments. Regular training and simulation exercises, combined with ongoing review and updates to the plan, will help ensure staff are prepared to respond effectively and consistently to emergencies.

As Cumberland County continues to refine its strategic planning efforts, it is important to recognize the strengths already demonstrated by the department of public safety, including their ongoing commitment to community protection and interagency collaboration. Building on these existing capabilities, there remains an opportunity to further enhance emergency management by strengthening coordination across departments, improving communication with the public and stakeholders, and integrating data from multiple agencies and sources. These advancements can elevate situational awareness, streamline decision-making, and improve overall readiness, key priorities identified in the County's strategic plan.

Hennepin County, Minnesota, operates one of the largest consolidated Emergency Communications Facilities (ECF) in the Upper Midwest. This center manages more than 600,000 annual emergency and non-emergency calls and provides dispatch services for over 50 law-enforcement agencies, fire departments, and EMS providers across the region. The ECF houses a unified radio system that allows direct communication between multiple police departments, enabling seamless coordination during emergencies such as active shooter events, natural disasters, mass-casualty incidents, or high-risk tactical operations. The Sheriff's Office also trains local, state, and federal officers, facilitating consistent protocols and shared readiness expectations across jurisdictions. This consolidated model illustrates how counties can achieve high-functioning, multi-agency coordination that enhances situational awareness and accelerates incident response.

Hennepin County's broader emergency management framework further strengthens this collaborative infrastructure. Its Emergency Management division partners actively with law enforcement, first responders, public health agencies, and local jurisdictions to monitor threats ranging from severe weather to terrorism. The county also maintains a multi-jurisdictional hazard mitigation plan developed collaboratively with partner agencies, underscoring a comprehensive and unified approach to planning, mitigation, and risk reduction. This interdepartmental coordination supports unified response protocols and ensures that law enforcement is fully integrated into emergency planning and preparedness cycles.

In addition to inter-agency dispatch consolidation, some jurisdictions are adopting community-oriented technological tools that enhance emergency preparedness and law-enforcement collaboration. For example, through the Connect Hennepin County initiative, residents and businesses can register or voluntarily integrate their security cameras into a countywide network. This gives investigators rapid access to relevant video evidence during emergencies or criminal incidents, enabling faster situational assessment and more effective deployment of police resources. Programs like this demonstrate how counties can modernize preparedness by merging community-based technology with law-enforcement operations, strengthening both proactive prevention and rapid response.

The County should assess current technology infrastructure, identify gaps in data integration, and prioritize features that address its most pressing risks. Collaboration with state and federal agencies can open opportunities for grant funding, while partnerships with local universities or technology providers might offer expertise and support. Ensuring data security and accessibility for all users, including the public, emergency personnel, and elected officials, is essential for building trust and maximizing utility.

5.6 Talent Retention

Recruitment in Cumberland County currently faces considerable challenges due to competition with state government agencies and private sector salaries. The County struggles to attract and retain talent, as state positions often offer more comprehensive benefits packages, while private companies typically provide higher salaries and greater flexibility. These factors contribute to ongoing vacancies and increased turnover, which in turn affect the County's ability to maintain service levels and advance strategic initiatives.

Stakeholders interviewed expressed that another challenge that the County faces is succession planning. Ensuring that key roles and institutional knowledge are maintained during staff transitions requires proactive strategies and dedicated resources. Addressing this issue is critical for sustaining service quality and organizational stability as experienced employees retire or move on.

Montgomery County, Maryland, enhanced its commitment to workforce development through the launch of MCGLeads Online, a digital platform dedicated to continuous learning and leadership growth. MCGLeads Online offers a comprehensive suite of interactive courses, virtual workshops, and leadership modules, accessible to all county employees, focusing on technical upskilling, management skills, and professional advancement. Since its implementation, the platform has reported a notable increase in internal mobility, with more county employees advancing into leadership roles and participating in cross-departmental mentorship programs. The digital nature of MCGLeads Online has also enabled Montgomery County to reduce external recruitment costs by expanding internal talent pipelines.

MCGLeads Online is funded through a blend of county budget allocations, state workforce development grants, and strategic partnerships with local universities and professional organizations. This funding model supports ongoing curriculum updates, platform maintenance, and the inclusion of external thought leaders for special training sessions. By integrating professional development into daily operations and leveraging digital infrastructure, Montgomery County ensures sustained investment in talent while maintaining fiscal responsibility and service excellence.

In addition to external recruitment efforts, Cumberland County has already taken an important step toward strengthening its internal talent pipeline through the establishment of its Leadership Academy. The program is designed to develop leadership competencies among County employees, increase understanding of county operations, and prepare participants for expanded responsibilities and future leadership roles. By focusing on professional growth from within, the Leadership Academy supports succession planning efforts and helps preserve institutional knowledge during periods of transition. This internal development approach aligns with best

practices in public-sector workforce management, which emphasize investing in existing employees as a strategy for improving retention and long-term organizational stability.

Currently overseen by Human Resources, the program's effectiveness is measured using several key performance indicators: participation numbers, enrollment trends, completion rates, attrition figures, mentorship involvement, and departmental representation.

Building on this foundation, there are opportunities to further enhance the Leadership Academy's impact by expanding its scope and accessibility. For example, the County could introduce a more structured learning pathway that includes tiered programming for emerging leaders, mid-level supervisors, and senior managers. Peer jurisdictions such as Montgomery County, Maryland, have demonstrated that digital learning platforms and modular content allow employees to engage in professional development continuously, rather than during a single program cycle. Incorporating virtual courses, on-demand leadership modules, or short skill-based workshops into the Leadership Academy would increase participation, accommodate varying schedules, and reinforce learning beyond cohort-based sessions.

Finally, similar to Montgomery County's funding model, Cumberland County may benefit from exploring external partnerships and diversified funding sources to sustain and expand the Leadership Academy. Collaborations with local colleges, universities, or professional associations could support curriculum development, guest instruction, and certification opportunities, while state workforce grants could offset costs related to technology or instructional design. By enhancing the Leadership Academy through digital integration, stronger succession alignment, and strategic partnerships, Cumberland County can reinforce its commitment to employee development as a core component of its recruitment, retention, and long-term workforce sustainability strategy.

6.0 Next Steps

This section of the memo identifies future activities in the project.

The information presented in this memo incorporates the fiscal capacity analysis and comparative data from peer Pennsylvania counties, providing a foundation for developing strategic priorities, goals, and objectives as part of the Cumberland County Strategic Plan.

Table 4.0 below presents and summarizes upcoming project deliverables and next steps.

Table 4.0: Next Steps in the Project

Deliverables	Status and Timing
D4. Service Gap Analysis Memo	March 6, 2026
D6. Final Cumberland County Strategic Plan	April 30, 2026
D7. Implementation Plan and Companion Report	April 30, 2026

Appendix A – Benchmarking Results

A survey was distributed to each community with questions related to current fiscal environment, millage adjustments, nonmandated programs, staffing increases or decreases, and cost-saving initiatives. Chester, Dauphin, and Franklin counties responded fully to the questionnaire, Berks County provided partial responses, and Westmoreland and York counties did not respond. A summary of the results is provided in the tables below.

Strategic Plan Status

Table 3.2: Strategic Plan Status

County	Does the County Have a Strategic Plan?
Berks	No, but uses a five-year budget forecast and goal setting process
Chester	Yes
Dauphin	Yes, by specific areas but not countywide
Franklin	No

Discretionary or Nonmandated Programs

Chester, Dauphin and Franklin County reported non-mandated services as part of their respective service delivery models.

Chester County

Chester County reported 51 distinct nonmandated programs with a total budget amount of \$74.9 million.

Dauphin County

- Prevention programming through Social Services for Children and Youth. This includes community-based prevention services for juvenile justice-involved youth.
- Opioid Remediation Grant.
- Various peer support and social programs.
- Human Services Housing Support Specialists.
- Human Services Quality Assurance Specialists and Descriptive Statisticians.
- Grant Writers in Human Services and the District Attorney's Office.

Franklin County

- *U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Grants:* Provides 30 single-person housing units in Franklin County with approximately \$250,000 per year, including a 25% general fund match.
- *Reentry Coalition:* Supported with minimal funding.

- *Grants Management and Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB)*: A two-person department dedicated to these areas—crucial for attracting and maintaining grant-funded programs.
- *Communications Coordinator*: Handles public relations (PR) for the commissioners' office, with personnel costs for these three positions totaling \$230,000 in 2025.
- *Operations Within Certain Elected Officials' Offices*: Nonmandated statutorily but determined required by the elected official.

Changes in Millage Rate Over the Last Decade

Berks, Chester, Dauphin, and Franklin counties have all adjusted their millage rate over the last several budget cycles. The summary chart below shows changes over the past decade for each of the counties except Franklin, which has not increased its operating levy but did increase its debt millage in 2019 to fund capital improvements at court facilities.

County	Year	Total Millage	Change from Prior Year	Rational if Provided
Berks	2024	8.345	-	
Berks	2025	9.013	+.668	Increase personnel costs, slower tax base growth, new debt service, increases in contracted services
Chester	2016	4.163	-	
Chester	2017	4.369	+.206	
Chester	2020	4.369	-	
Chester	2021	4.551	+.182	
Dauphin	2024	6.876	-	
Dauphin	2025	8.376	+1.5	

Discretionary Programs Eliminated

Table 3.4: Discretionary Programs Eliminated

County	Have You Eliminated Discretionary Programs in the Past Three Years?	If So, Which Programs?
Berks	No response	

County	Have You Eliminated Discretionary Programs in the Past Three Years?	If So, Which Programs?
Chester	No	
Dauphin	Yes	ERAP
Franklin	Yes	The county ended a reentry housing initiative after the grant period closed due to lack of progress in meeting outcomes successfully.

Discretionary Programs Added

Table 3.5: Discretionary Program Added

County	Have You Added Discretionary Programs in the Past Three Years?	If So, Which Programs?
Berks	Yes	Youth Shelter; Juvenile Detention Center is in the planning stages for 2027.
Chester	Yes	Human Relations Commission (minimal cost); Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) (minimal cost); Mental Health Crisis Response system (\$10.4 million over several years, initially funded with American Rescue Plan Act [ARPA] funds); Sustainability Coordinator (\$121,566)
Dauphin	Yes	ERAP Whole Home Repairs Program
Franklin	No	

Positions Added in Past Three FYs

Table 3.6: FTEs Added

County	Total FTEs	FTE Added	Mandatory or Discretionary
Berks	2,138.0	130.5 FTEs	44.5 Mandatory, 86 Discretionary
Chester	2614.8	79 FTEs, 10 Part-Time Interns	No response
Dauphin	-	46 FTEs	No response
Franklin	-	26.5 FTEs	No response
Cumberland County	1068.0	75 FTEs	61 Mandatory, 14 Discretionary

Positions Eliminated in Past Three FYs

Table 3.7: FTEs Eliminated

County	Total FTEs	FTEs	Mandatory or Discretionary
Berks	2,138.0	209 FTEs	53 Mandatory, 156 Discretionary
Chester	2614.8	Many positions were eliminated that were vacant for more than one year, and some positions were reclassified or updated to attract qualified candidates and remain competitive with the marketplace.	No response
Dauphin	-	41 FTEs	No response
Franklin	-	25 FTEs	No response
Cumberland County	1068.0	26 FTEs	16 Mandatory, 10 Discretionary

New Revenues in the Past Three FYs

Table 3.8: New Revenues

County	Revenue
Berks	The county has successfully accessed funding for several capital purchases through the Local Share Account (LSA) and LS4 grant programs, which favorably impacted the facilities and parks departments.

County	Revenue
Chester	Rental income from the Chester County Conventions and Visitor's Bureau using the historic courthouse. Departmental fee increases, such as parks pavilion fees.
Dauphin	Various grants from the state and federal government are routinely explored based on need and requirements.
Franklin	The county applies for approximately \$700,000 in competitive grants each year. In addition, the sheriff recently increased his fees, resulting in an additional \$50,000 in revenue.

What Cost-Savings Initiatives Has Your County Undertaken in the Past Three FYs?

Berks County

Following tax increases in two consecutive years, Berks County conducted its “budget diet” in August 2025. Department heads, elected officials, and the courts were asked to reduce 3% of their discretionary spending for the remaining five months of the year, as well as reduce 5% of their discretionary budget request for 2026. Rather than administration making across-the-board cuts to budgets, leadership challenged department heads (who best know their operations) to make targeted cuts that would not compromise their department’s fundamental role or mission. All areas of county government participated and returned reductions. For 2025, about \$550,000 in reductions were recommended; for 2026, the reductions came in at roughly \$1.4 million. The net result was a reduction slightly in excess of \$1.9 million.

In addition, a delayed hiring process was initiated. Departments have been told all vacancies for which replacements are requested will be held in abeyance for a period of three months. At the end of the period, the vacancy review committee will ask department heads if positions could be held vacant for an additional period of three months. If so, the requests would be reviewed at the six-month mark and either targeted for elimination or, if a strong business case could be made, approved for hiring. If the position is held and eliminated, there is a full headcount reduction. If the position is filled at the end of the six-month hold, the county will have deferred the expense of the position, resulting in net savings of 50%.

Chester County

Southeastern Energy Partnership

- Replacing lights with LED.
- Electric vehicles (EVs) and EV chargers. The County is slowly converting as many vehicles as possible to EVs.
- DCIS (Information Technology): Pursuing fiber channel switch replacement.

Dauphin County

Dauphin County reports various energy savings projects, modernization of systems, and controlling various costs by bringing jobs and projects in-house.

Franklin County

Franklin County is operating six new buildings that are more energy efficient than the buildings vacated to move into them. Unfortunately, energy costs increased during the same time period. While it was more than three years ago, the county also outsourced MH/IDD/EI case management as well as transportation, which equated to a savings of \$300,000 per year total (2015 dollars). Around that time, the county also sold its nursing home. Since then, the county has made a concerted effort to collaborate with community stakeholders to contract for personnel and to implement initiatives.