



TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND TOWN COUNCIL

FROM: JODI MILLER, INTERIM TOWN MANAGER

DATE: MAY 2, 2024

## Town Manager's Budget Message for FY 2024-2025

Mayor and members of Council, I present for your review and consideration the Recommended Budget for Fiscal Year 2024-2025 totaling \$74.5 million, which includes a 52-cent tax rate. This tax rate includes 43.5 cents to support the operating budget and 8.5 cents to support the Revenue Savings Plan, which funds the Town's capital improvement projects. The recommended budget includes an eight-and-a-half-cent tax increase from the revenue neutral rate of 43.5 cents. The FY 2024-2025 recommended budget is an ambitious and strategic budget designed to meet the Town's priorities and needs in FY 2024-2025 and to position the Town for success in the future. The FY 2024-2025 recommended budget is the blueprint for "Building for Success."

Annual budgets are a community's expression of its values, priorities, and aspirations. The FY 2024-2025 budget theme of "Building for Success" aims to support and enhance Garner's values, priorities, and aspirations. We rely on the blueprint created and supported by Town Council, Town staff and our residents to recognize and support the Town's values and priorities. Approval and implementation of this blueprint guides our talented staff in creating a strong foundation for success that directly aligns with Town Council's goals and priorities. This allows our forward-thinking Council the opportunity to invest not only in our present but in the Town's future.

The Town of Garner is a growing and thriving community. According to our Planning Department, our Town has grown 8.4% over the past year from 36,105 to 39,124. With growth comes increased property values and service delivery demands. Wake County completed its revaluation process in January 2024. Garner saw a 54% increase in assessed property values across the Town, and Wake County overall saw an increase of 51% in assessed property values. This is a direct result of the unprecedented growth the Town and County have experienced over the past several years. This level of growth has allowed the Town to continue its support of staff and high-quality services and amenities for residents. This budget provides for investment in existing and new services and initiatives that continue to make Garner a great place to be.

Town staff has been hard at work advancing projects identified for the 2021 Bond Program. Several roadway projects such as the White Oak roundabout and Main Street streetscape improvements are underway. Design work continues on a destination park at the Yeargan property in North Garner, which will host youth sports teams and tournaments, and at White Deer Park, which will see improvements including a new inclusive playground and a splashpad for kids of all ages and abilities. Staff has also been successful in securing state and federal funding earmarks of more than \$6 million to support the 2021 Bond Program and facility and equipment needs for the Public Works Department.





Garner’s business sector continues to grow and thrive as well. WakeMed’s plans for an integrated whole-person health campus in Garner’s E-District and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs medical clinic highlight the strength of the Town’s business sector and position Garner to become a health-care hub in the region. Town investment in small business support activities, the creation of a social district and traffic-calming measures in historic Downtown Garner bolster the creation of a vibrant destination in downtown. In addition, the Garner Forward Comprehensive Plan and Garner Comprehensive Pedestrian Plan—both approved in FY 2023-2024—will guide our future development decisions, policies and practices.

I am proud that the recommended budget includes several new investments that help strengthen Garner’s foundation and future. This includes a reimagining of the Town’s performance merit system for employees, which allows employees to earn up to a 4% increase annually and a market adjustment of 3% that will help Garner stay competitive in the regional employment market. The FY 2024-2025 budget also includes enhanced health insurance, dental and vision insurance benefits at no additional cost to employees. In addition, this budget recommends a pay increase for Garner’s supplemental part-time staff, who are critical in keeping our parks programs and Town-supported events available and successful.

Included in the FY 2024-2025 Recommended Budget is the addition of 15.0 FTEs: 14 FTEs to support the Town and 1.0 FTE to support the Garner Fire-Rescue Department. To continue to support our growing park system and connect to our regional greenway systems, an additional 2.0 FTEs have been included in the FY 2024-2025 budget. These positions are dedicated to executing park and greenway capital projects, leveraging financial resources and developing a long-term sustainable strategy for the Garner parks system.

As a direct result of continued growth and development demands, 6.0 FTEs have been added to support Development Services. The Inspections Department performed 43,000 inspections, a 20% increase, and issued 2,575 permits, a 10% increase, in FY24. Due to the increased workload, 4.0 FTEs for Inspections, 1.0 FTE for Planning and 1.0 FTE for Engineering have been included in the recommended budget. These positions will assist in streamlining service delivery and organizational functions to better respond to the needs of Development Services customers.

Garner continues to support and invest in the safety of our residents and community.. This budget includes the addition of 4.0 Police corporals and 1.0 FTE for the Garner Fire-Rescue Department. The additional Police corporals will allow greater span of control for patrol services needed for a growing community and the safety of its residents. The additional FTE for Garner Fire-Rescue will support training efforts required to provide exceptional fire and first-responder services across the Town.

Finally, the budget includes 1.0 FTE for Communications and 1.0 FTE for Public Works. These positions support ongoing functions that interact with residents. A right-of-way specialist in Public Works will allow the department to meet the growing demand of maintaining aesthetics and improving sightlines in many of the public right-of-way sections of the Town. A communications specialist will assist with connecting with the public in many of the common media platforms, providing greater community outreach and engagement with our residents.



# FY2025 Budget Message



As a result of the increase in assessed valuation, the funding to support the Penny for Parks Program implemented in FY 2023-2024, has increased from \$573,094 to \$914,826. This increase will greatly assist the Town in making updates and improvements to our park facilities, which are great assets to our Town. Updates and improvements include playground equipment replacement, wayfinding and signage replacement and improvements, as well as repaving of trails across the park facilities.

In addition to increased funding for Penny for Parks, this budget includes investments in public art and housing rehabilitation partnerships. The FY 2024-2025 budget includes seed funding for the Town to support public art initiatives and continued funding to support keeping residents in their homes. The Town has had success in leveraging state and federal funding to improve its recreational amenities, the Garner Senior Center and infrastructure investments in Downtown Garner. These investments and new projects provide additional opportunities to leverage funding while engaging with community partners to create an inviting and thriving community.

Along with supporting the Town's parks, this budget continues to support maintenance, repair and replacement of the Town's infrastructure, facilities and vehicles. The Public Facility Repair and Maintenance (PFRM) program supports the maintenance of Town facilities and assets, while the Vehicle and Equipment Repair Program (VERT) supports a strong fleet for those requiring Town vehicles as part of their work.

Funding to evaluate the Town's growing space needs, including Town Hall expansion and future office space, has been included as part of the PFRM budget in FY 2024-2025. These are critical elements that are the foundation to continue to provide high-quality services to the community.

Our blueprint also includes a multi-year strategy that addresses opportunities and challenges associated with the Town's unprecedented growth. The tax rate includes 8.5 cents dedicated to the Revenue Savings Plan, a new strategy that allows for greater planning, transparency and management of capital funds. Through this approach, Garner continues to maintain well-managed fiscal policies and practices that have resulted in continued outstanding credit ratings of AAA by Standard & Poor's and Aa1 by Moody's Investors Services. We intend to maintain this fiscal strength in upcoming years despite our growing financial needs.

The investments included in the FY 2024-2025 Recommended Budget are building blocks for our future that create a solid foundation and support for the preparation of future funding strategies. Each one is a critical element in the success of a strategic, forward-thinking community that is a great place to be.

Presenting the recommended budget to the Mayor and Council starts the process for Council's discussion and deliberations of the FY 2024-2025 budget. The Council is scheduled to have a budget work session on Thursday, May 23, and a second public hearing is scheduled for Tuesday, May 21. In addition, a budget comment portal is available on the Town's website for resident feedback and ideas.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this ambitious and strategic recommended budget. I appreciate the diligence of our dedicated department heads and staff in contributing to a balanced budget while addressing service demands. I would like to acknowledge and thank the Budget Team—which includes Sara Warren, Ian Johnson, David Beck and John Hodges—for all their efforts and dedication to develop this



# FY2025 Budget Message



recommended budget. I look forward to our continued discussions on the budget as we all work to support the Town's mission of fiscal responsibility, efficient and timely service delivery, orderly growth and great quality of life.

Respectfully submitted,

**Jodi M. Miller**

Interim Town Manager

