

'It threw us back': People living in public housing in Asheville cope in post-Helene life

October 9, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Author: Ryan Oehrli; Staff Writer | Section: News | 686 Words Page: 6A OpenURL Link

Asheville Since Helene struck, Kyesha Nelson and TJ Wilson have been making long walks across Asheville because her baby needs special milk.

To avoid the worst of Helene, they had left their home in the Fairview area to stay with Wilson's mother in Hillcrest, one of the city's public housing communities.

"I just have to get my baby somewhere I can walk around," Nelson remembered thinking. Her six-month-old, Tykwon, was born prematurely.

But Hillcrest has no power or running water, a common struggle for people in Asheville and Western North Carolina since the historic storm.

They don't have a car. Without the city's bus system running, people without transportation - including those living in low-income housing like Hillcrest - are on foot in Asheville's winding, hilly roads.

"When you have smaller children, walking is not always the best thing you can do," Nelson said. "Or the safest."

A common issue

In a Sept. 28 notice, the city said buses had been redirected to relief efforts. ART - or Asheville Rides Transit - brought 578 people to shelters, that notice said.

"The service also continues to face power outages, road conditions, and staffing shortages," it said. All services are suspended "until further notice."

The city later announced that on Monday the bus system will "begin operating a modified schedule on select routes where road conditions have improved."

In West Asheville's Pisgah View Apartments, Cicely Rogers is dealing with "more stress" without a way to get around town, she said.

She has family in the area, but not nearby. Amboy Road flooded early, making it a challenge for them to get to her, she said. And she's not even sure what the roads are like where her sister lives in Buncombe County.

Water is the chief concern for many because many in the city are without fresh water. Asheville Mayor Esther Manheimer has warned that it will take some time, at least weeks, for it to return.

Pisgah View had power Thursday, drawing in family members, said Tykerria Robinson-Williams. Her focus was stocking up as much water as she could, unsure how long necessities would be hard to come by.

She worried how far back the storm would set the people living in Pisgah View.

"We really can't afford to leave our homes behind. We weren't doing too good before, so now... it threw us back 10 more steps when we're trying to get 10 steps ahead," she said.

Friends, family and neighbors have been helping each other across the region.

"Really, I'm just counting on my friends to look out for me," said Reggie Moore, who lives in Deaverview, another public housing community that's close to Aston Park. He's worried about older people there, who can't get out.

"I think they need a bit more help than what they're getting," he said.

One such woman, who asked not to be named, said she relies on the bus system. Even if she walked downtown, she might not find an ATM with cash or a store that's stocked, she said.

'We all need to pull our part'

Buncombe County Manager Avril Pinder said the county has been working with community partners to distribute food to public housing communities.

"Community paramedics have been on the ground since this began, taking water to our housing authority areas," Pinder said.

Some residents told The Charlotte Observer about food and water being dropped off, and even a food truck cooking hot meals.

Lolita Ray also rides the bus. She's lived in Hillcrest for about five years. Without it, she's relying on her daughter for rides to and from Sam's Club, where her daughter works.

Water cases rested at a neighbor's front door Friday. Ray put them there. And she spent her morning cleaning up trash on the streets in Hillcrest. The trash irked her.

"Right now, we all need to pull our part and come together," she said.

By the afternoon, there was some new and much-needed relief at Hillcrest. The community center filled with donations, and water stacked high outside. Residents carried out diapers, snacks, water and more.

Observer staff writer Jeff A. Chamer contributed.

Ryan Oehrli: @oehrli

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JD Vance to host town hall in Greensboro, criticizing Harris on immigration and Helene

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Republican vice presidential candidate JD Vance is coming back to North Carolina this week, this time to host a town hall in Greensboro.

Doors for the town hall at the Koury Convention Center will open at 4 p.m. on Thursday, with Vance slated to speak at 6 p.m. Topics will likely include the economy, illegal immigration and Hurricane Helene.

The remnants of Hurricane Helene, which began to be felt in North Carolina on the last Thursday of September, devastated the western part of the state, bringing historic flooding, destruction and death.

The Trump campaign has heavily politicized the ongoing recovery efforts. Most recently, former President Donald Trump, during a town hall meeting in Fayetteville on Friday night, said that the federal government's response to the devastating storm had been "terrible." The news release announcing Vance's town hall said Vice President Kamala Harris "completely left North Carolinians behind in the wake of devastation post-Hurricane Helene."

The Harris campaign responded to Vance by pointing to Harris's comments about Trump being "extraordinarily irresponsible" in pushing "disinformation" about Helene relief aid.

Many on social media platforms like X have also taken to criticizing the response despite federal responders working in the area alongside their local and state counterparts. Conspiracy theories have also spread on social media.

President Joe Biden surveyed the damage in North Carolina by air on Wednesday and pledged more resources. Harris visited Charlotte on Saturday, announcing Mecklenburg County would also be eligible for federal disaster aid.

The Trump campaign's news release hones in on the fiscal impact of immigrants living in the United States without legal authorization, citing research by the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a nonprofit, anti-immigration organization.

"While Kamala Harris continues to ignore these critical issues," says the release, Trump "has a proven track record of putting North Carolinians first."

"President Trump understands the importance of lowering taxes, securing the border and stopping the unchecked flow of illegal immigration that drains resources from American citizens. President Trump has always fought for the people, and he will continue to fight to restore economic stability, security, and prosperity in North Carolina," says the release.

Vance's visit to Greensboro is his fifth trip to North Carolina since becoming Trump's running mate.

In mid-September, he held a rally in Raleigh. Before that, he was with Trump in Asheboro. He has also visited Greenville twice.

Trump, Harris and Democratic vice presidential candidate Tim Walz have also visited the battleground state often this year.

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They watched from Charlotte while Helene took Asheville shops

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Kaitlyn Burton's role as director of operations for PIE.ZZA looks different these days. Instead of managing the day-to-day operations of the pizza joint's two stores, this week she's focused on making phone calls to her employees, checking to see if they are alive.

"It's been terrifying to try and communicate with employees ...There's still some people we haven't heard from, and we're trying to communicate with them every single day," Burton told CharlotteFive on Wednesday, Oct. 2.

PIE.ZAA is a late-night pizzeria with locations in both Asheville's South Slope Brewing District and Charlotte's South End neighborhood. While Burton lives in Charlotte, she's a Henderson County native. For her, Hurricane Helene hit extremely close to home.

"Now that the rivers have gone down, we can really see what's been going on - cars flipped over, houses completely washed away. It's so surreal," she said of the storm's extensive damage.

Reaching Asheville employees has been difficult - not just for Burton, but for many Charlotte business owners with locations in Western North Carolina. With cell phone service scattered at best, communication has been a hurdle during this unprecedented time.

One employee Burton was able to reach is the Asheville store's general manager, Kayla Smith. Burton said Smith was trapped in her neighborhood with roads leading in and out blocked by fallen trees and other debris, making it nearly impossible for cars to enter or exit.

"She (Smith) was walking for three hours to be able to find any cell reception to connect with me," Burton explained.

Thankfully, a family member was able to reach Smith and get her to safety.

While Burton diligently checks on her employees' welfare, PIE.ZAA owner Tyler Kotch is using his trusty chainsaw to help clear roads.

"Tyler has been very adamant about taking his chainsaw and cutting down trees to make sure that roads are becoming accessible," Burton said. "Whether that's our employees or random people."

Kotch was also able to bring essential supplies to the Asheville store's assistant manager.

While Burton still doesn't know the full extent of the damage to PIE.ZAA's Asheville location, she says it seems that Helene left it mostly unscathed, though the store is still closed and without power or water. Other businesses, like Summit Coffee Co., which has an Asheville location just down the road, weren't as fortunate.

"We didn't have a loss of our entire business or anything like that, which we're extremely thankful for and almost feel guilty over," Burton said. "But our employees are out of work now, and without them working, they can't make money for their families."

Charlotte and Asheville: Two connected North Carolina cities

We all know and love Asheville, Charlotte's beloved neighbor to the west. While different in culture and scenery - Asheville is known for its relaxed mountain energy, while Charlotte is a metropolitan banking town - our two cities share a lot in common.

Many of our favorite Charlotte spots, like PIE.ZAA, have locations in the Asheville area. Familiar spots like Summit Coffee Co., PlantHouse, Blaze Pizza, Burial Beer Co., Hi-Wire Brewing and Botiwalla by Chai Pani have all been affected by Hurricane Helene, the catastrophic storm that has devastated Western North Carolina.

Employees and their families are displaced and business owners are facing uncharted territory - no one expected this level of devastation.

In the days following the storm, images and videos show historic levels of flooding with popular destinations like Asheville's River Arts District and Chimney Rock's Main Street completely decimated. Businesses have been literally swept away in Helene's wake. Now, much of what remains is wreckage, mud and debris.

Many Asheville businesses are focused on prioritizing employees' welfare, as well as providing support to the community and surrounding towns. Charlotte businesses have also risen to the occasion, providing much-needed supplies to Western North Carolina and beyond.

How other Western North Carolina businesses are coping after Helene

A couple miles down the road from PIE.ZAA's Asheville location is Summit Coffee Co, a Davidson-based coffee shop with locations in Charlotte and other areas across the South. Its Asheville spot was severely damaged when the French Broad River flooded the River Arts District, leaving total destruction in its path.

Summit Coffee Co. CEO Brian Helfrich said in the days leading up to the storm, he expected minor flooding - nothing that the store couldn't handle. In reality, Summit Coffee was ambushed by rushing water almost as high as the building itself.

"The first photo I received from the franchise owner was around 2 p.m., when the main wall had collapsed and water was over 10 feet high," Helfrich said. "Later that night we saw video coverage of the River Arts District with only the roof of our building visible above the floods."

The building's main wall is mostly gone, the roof is partially caved in and the store is waterlogged.

"I'll never forget the physical reaction," Helfrich said upon seeing the initial photos of the flooding. "It gave me chills and tears. Everything was simultaneously tense and draining from my body."

While the fate of the coffee shop is unknown, Helfrich said his priority right now is the welfare of his crew. Through Oct. 6, Summit Coffee Co. is supporting its team by giving 100 percent of proceeds from all online coffee orders to a fund for its displaced Asheville staff.

"Our short-term priorities have been to support them," Helfrich said. "This online coffee sale should at least help relieve stress for a while. We'll figure out what happens with the cafe after a few days."

In terms of the weeks ahead, Helfrich, like many others in Western North Carolina, doesn't know what the future will hold.

"We don't quite know what the future looks like, other than that we are committed to having a presence in Asheville," he said.

Hi-Wire Brewing, a brewery headquartered in Asheville with a location in Charlotte also faced devastation at its River Arts District location.

"It is heartbreaking," co-owner Bryna Frosaker told us. "There's just mud everywhere. (The flood) went probably 10 feet up the building."

Frosaker, an Asheville local, was there throughout the worst of the storm. She says she didn't realize the magnitude of the destruction until she was able to finally get cell phone reception.

"I knew what was happening in Asheville, but I didn't realize the breadth of it going on elsewhere," she said.

In order to touch base with Hi-Wire employees and check on their wellbeing, Frosaker reached out to an employee based outside of Asheville. They were able to connect to all of Hi-Wire's team members. All were safe - but not unscathed.

"We had one employee with a tree go through his daughter's bedroom," Frosaker said.

Hi-Wire's Biltmore Village location also received some damage, but Frosaker is hoping to reopen there soon.

"As soon as we have power and water - and assuming our employees can get safely to work - we can begin operations again," she said.

Like Summit Coffee, PlantHouse has multiple locations across the Carolinas, including in Asheville and Charlotte. Severe flooding overtook the plant store's Biltmore Village location.

"The water was almost all the way to the ceiling," Charlotte store manager Brittany Pineda said.

Pineda told CharlotteFive that many of the PlantHouse employees live near the damaged store in Asheville, a point of concern as the damage in the area was severe. She eventually received confirmation from the Asheville store manager that the entire PlantHouse team is safe and accounted for.

"It was pretty scary for us just trying to figure out if everyone on the team was OK and if the store was OK," she said.

While some business owners have had luck reaching employees, others are still trying. Jimmy Sierra, a franchise owner for Blaze Pizza locations in Charlotte, Gastonia and Asheville, said it's been difficult to make contact with a majority of his crew.

"So far we have been able to get in contact with about 20 percent or less of our team members," Sierra told CharlotteFive. "All are OK (so far) except one. His house suffered damage when a tree fell on top of the house - no idea the extent of the damage yet."

Sierra, a Puerto Rican native, is no stranger to hurricanes. However, that doesn't make their impact any less jarring - especially here in North Carolina.

"I never expected Asheville to go through that," he said.

Both of Blaze Pizza's Asheville locations are relatively undamaged, and its Gerber Village location has had power and water restored.

Sierra hopes to reopen as soon as possible. Not only does he want to reopen for the people of Asheville, but also for team members who rely on Blaze Pizza for income.

"Our team members have always been an important part of our success, and we want to be there for them in this time of great need," he said.

Restaurants give food and water to WNC residents after Helene

One of the biggest concerns for the people of Asheville right now is access to food and water. Botiwalla by Chai Pani, an Indian restaurant with locations in Asheville, Atlanta and Charlotte, is working hard to provide life-saving food relief with the support of World Central Kitchen, an organization that prepares food for communities impacted by natural disasters.

A spokesperson for Chai Pani Restaurant Group told CharlotteFive that all 150 team members are safe and accounted for. The restaurant group has set up an internal resource center for staff, equipped with charging stations, Wi-Fi and onsite translators for team members who don't speak English.

"It's critical they have what they need to start FEMA applications, insurance claims and relief applications with incredible organizations like Giving Kitchen and Southern Smoke Foundation. More than anything, it's become a community space for our team to be together, to hug each other," the spokesperson said.

In the days since the storm, Burial Beer Co., an Asheville-based brewery with a Plaza Midwood Charlotte location, has also been able to provide clean water, Burial beer and free burgers to Asheville locals at its South Slope Taproom.

How to help small businesses in WNC after Hurricane Helene

Here's how to help these businesses in both cities in Helene's aftermath:

PlantHouse's Bailey Ryan has set up a Go Fund Me, with all proceeds going to crew members and their families. PlantHouse Charlotte has also been serving as a donation drop-off spot. The store is accepting water, nonperishable food, hygiene products and other essentials.

At PIE.ZAA, Kotch has set up a Go Fund Me to help support the Asheville community.

Hi-Wire Brewing is collecting hurricane relief supplies at its Charlotte, Wilmington and Durham locations to be flown to Asheville and surrounding areas. You can support Hi-Wire's staff via its online relief fund.

Summit Coffee Co. is supporting its team by giving 100 percent of proceeds from all online coffee orders through Oct. 6 to a fund for its displaced Asheville staff.

Sierra has also set up a Go Fund Me for Blaze Pizza employees in Asheville, with all donations going directly to the staff to help them rebuild and recover.

Guests can add a donation directly to their check when they dine at Botiwalla by Chai Pani in Optimist Hall. All donations go towards supporting Chai Pani Restaurant Group team members who have been impacted by Hurricane Helene.

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Music stars band together for hurricane relief show at BofA Stadium

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Author: Théoden Janes; Staff Writer | Section: News | 713 Words

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Three of the biggest music stars North Carolina has ever produced - Luke Combs, Eric Church and James Taylor - will headline a special benefit show for victims of Hurricane Helene on Saturday, Oct. 26 at Bank of America Stadium in Charlotte.

"Concert for Carolina," announced Monday morning, also will feature bluegrass musician Billy Strings, a Michigan native.

In a news release, Live Nation said: "The Tar Heel State is a profoundly special place for all four artists, as it is where Combs, Church and Taylor grew up and first discovered their musical interests, and where Strings has performed many, many times over his career and holds an extra special place in his heart."

Tickets will go on sale at 10 a.m. Thursday; details are at www.concertforcarolina.com. Prices were not immediately available. Ticketmaster lists 5 p.m. as the start time for the Oct. 26 show.

The release said additional featured artists will be announced in the coming days.

Where will Concert for Carolina funds go?

All proceeds from the event will be split evenly between Combs and Church's Chief Cares Foundation, to be distributed to organizations of their choosing in support of relief efforts across "the Carolina region."

The 34-year-old Combs - born in Huntersville and raised in Asheville - announced that his dedicated charities will be Samaritan's Purse, Manna Food Bank, Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest NC, and one more organization to be revealed soon.

Church's Chief Cares will help "established charities and organizations that are well managed, organized and can expedite aid directly to the families affected by Hurricane Helene."

Of the four men atop the bill, only Combs has headlined BofA stadium before. In July 2023, he sold it out on back-to-back nights.

Church, 47, just last week released a new song, "Darkest Hour," that the Granite Falls native said was dedicated to "the unsung heroes, the people who show up when the world's falling apart." He plans to donate all of his publishing royalties for the track to hurricane relief efforts.

In a separate statement on Monday morning, Church called North Carolina "my home."

"It's in every fiber of who I am," he said. "Our family members, friends, neighbors and communities are in dire need. I'm honored to share the stage with an incredible lineup in order to help meet those needs. Through the dark, light will shine."

Taylor, a 76-year-old Rock and Roll Hall of Famer, has a long association with Chapel Hill and has written many songs influenced by his childhood experiences in North Carolina - most famously, "Carolina in My Mind."

Meanwhile, Strings is the baby of the group at 32, but has built an impressive resume over the past decade. His

album "Home" won the Grammy Award for Best Bluegrass Album in 2021. Although he's not from the area, Monday's news release stated that "Strings' life and career has been deeply impacted by the state of North Carolina both personally and professionally, as it is home to some of his most passionate and supportive fans."

How Concert for Carolina came together

"Concert for Carolina" - presented by Explore Asheville and the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority - will be hosted by ESPN's Marty Smith and Barstool Sports' Caleb Pressley.

"This concert took so much planning, work, and coordination from so many people," Combs posted on X alongside the announcement. "I'm so thankful to everyone who helped make this a possibility on such short notice."

David Tepper (owner of the Carolina Panthers, Charlotte FC and Bank of America Stadium) and his wife, Nicole Tepper, said in a statement that it was Combs who first approached them about the idea for the event, adding, "We felt compelled to open the doors of Bank of America Stadium for this special moment."

"Every day," they said, "we are more inspired by the strength and resolve of our Carolina community, and we are grateful to join Luke, Eric and our fellow Carolinians as we embark on the road to recovery together."

The David and Nicole Tepper Foundation - along with the Teppers' two local sports organizations - already have distributed \$3.85 million to provide immediate assistance to those impacted by the deadly storm that swept through the Carolinas on Sept. 26 and 27.

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Restaurant supports electrical linemen working to restore power

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A Rock Hill restaurant steps up to support linemen, providing thousands of meals to those restoring power in NC.

In the wake of Hurricane Helene's devastation across the Southeast, outages have left more than a million in the Carolinas without power. Amidst the chaos, a Rock Hill restaurant known for its significant site in civil rights history has become an advocate. Kounter has temporarily closed its doors to regular customers - to support lineman at Duke Energy as they tend to relief efforts.

Kounter's team, led by Chef Rob Masone, is currently serving between 600 and 800 meals daily at Duke Energy's training facility in Kings Mountain.

"We got a phone call and prayed about it, and it just felt like we needed to put our talents to use," Masone told CharlotteFive. "We're going to go do some of the things that we do well for some of the folks that are dealing with a lot of things that none of us want to imagine dealing with on a daily basis right now, but I couldn't do this without my entire team. This is a lot. It's a big ask."

US Foods covers some costs in Helene relief effort

With support from US Foods, which is covering refrigeration costs and helping with the logistics of food supply, the partnership between Kounter and Duke Energy has become an essential part of the disaster relief efforts. Masone expressed his appreciation for US foods' role, noting, "We have a good relationship with US Foods here in Rock Hill US Foods reached out and said, 'How can we help out? How can we get involved?'"

The meals being prepared include pork, chicken and beef dishes. Each morning, the linemen receive hot breakfasts and cold lunches packed for them to take with them into the field. And after a long day's work, they are served dinner before heading to their hotels or cots.

Kounter is trying to 'create a little sense of normalcy'

"We're trying to create a little sense of normalcy for them when they get back up. You know, I can't speak for all the great things and the hard things that they're doing out there, But I mean, it's got to be, it's not just physically taxing for them. I mean, they're just working hard. They're finding a lot of things out there that none of us want to think about," Masone said.

This effort required all hands on deck from the Kounter staff for the 24-hour operation. "We're producing all day, all night. We're shipping, moving things back and forth from Rock Hill, South Carolina, to Kings Mountain every few hours," Masone said. "My team has showed up, and we're working on very little sleep. We got a lot less sleep in our future, and we're rocking and rolling."

Masone remains focused on one primary goal: "My job is to make sure these guys get fed, and they have a good meal"

For the time being, Kounter's doors will remain closed to regular diners, but the restaurant's heart is firmly rooted in serving the community.

If you're interested in volunteering with Kounter, email hello@kre8events.com for more information.

Kounter

Location: 135 E Main Street, Suite 101, Rock Hill, SC 29730

Menu

Cuisine: American

Instagram: @kounterdining

Mari Pressley: Maripressley_ Copyright (c) 2024 The Charlotte Observer

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Western NC Latino community forms makeshift delivery service after Helene

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EMMA At El Porvenir Cultural Center, volunteers who live nearby used walkie-talkies as cars came and went on volunteer missions to quickly deliver supplies to flood victims.

Usually, El Porvenir is a community center for Buncombe County's Emma, a largely Hispanic area. The center is home to quinceañeras and weddings. But since Sept. 30, it's been a lot of things.

The back - where people dropped off donations - had become a sort of volunteer-run, free Amazon-esque warehouse. Crews delivered those donations to neighbors. Others cut down trees and repaired homes. There was a daycare, too.

They have been going through Emma, but also to communities like Swannanoa and Fletcher, said Andrea Golden, the director and founder of the community group Poder Emma.

Her group and several others made up La Milpa, an existing coalition of community groups now helping guide the operation out of El Porvenir.

'Love shining through'

Carol Alcantar made one of the day's first deliveries. She lives in East Asheville, and wanted to help Emma in particular because of her Mexican heritage.

The trip was quick and light, only a five-minute drive to drop off some meat, tortillas and produce to a woman who lives near El Porvenir.

It proved fruitful in more ways than one. The woman who got the food explained that someone in Biltmore Village - about 15 minutes from Emma - had two trailers of supplies available for distribution.

Alcantar spoke with her in Spanish, thanked her for the information and relayed the message to others working at the distribution center.

"I think the love is shining through for the community more than anything," Alcantar said.

'We're all neighbors'

"Comida? Agua?" Diego Romero asked later in the day as he went door to door on Deaverview Road.

He and the other volunteers who filled several trucks had much more than food and water, though. There was toilet paper, Dayquil, soap, shampoo, nonpotable water to fill buckets and bathe with, diapers and toys for kids.

Power, cell service and food have been returning to the area. Water is the biggest concern. Asheville Mayor Esther Manheimer has said it will take a while for the city's water system to work again.

"And I'm not talking about days," the mayor told the Asheville Citizen Times. "We want them to plan for longer than that."

Families stepped outside their homes on Saturday to grab what they needed as the volunteer convoys arrived, and thank their neighbors.

Soon, the convoy would go to a new neighborhood near Johnston Elementary School, and then others until truck beds ran out of water.

In an interview as he rode from house to house, Romero explained that he hasn't heard much about a government response in Emma. But people are looking out for each other.

"We're all neighbors, just looking out for people, you know?" he said.

And if he needed help, he knew they'd be there for him.

Ryan Oehrli: @oehrli

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Paul V. Fitch

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Paul V. Fitch II

January 31, 1947 - October 2, 2024

Charlotte, North Carolina - Paul V. Fitch II, beloved father, brother, and grandfather, passed away peacefully at his home in Charlotte, NC, on Wednesday, October 2, 2024, at the age of 77. Born in Paintsville, KY, on January 31, 1947, Paul lived a full and accomplished life, filled with love for his family, a passion for business, and an unforgettable sense of humor.

Paul attended the University of Kentucky before completing his education at Marshall University in Huntington, WV, where he earned a degree in accounting and became a Certified Public Accountant (CPA). He began his career with Arthur Andersen, where he worked in the late 1970s and early 1980s, before transitioning into real estate development in the early 1980s. In 2002, Paul founded Fitch Development Group Inc., specializing in affordable housing. He took pride in working closely with his son, Hollis, to build communities throughout the southeastern United States.

Over the course of his career, Paul also dabbled in several ventures, including thoroughbred horse racing, farming, commercial nurseries, and commercial construction. His diverse entrepreneurial pursuits showcased his boundless energy and creativity in business.

Paul was known for his love of storytelling, frequently retelling stories with slight variations and an amusing habit of forgetting key character names, often creating new ones instead. Through his playful nature Paul built friendships and created joyful memories with all those he knew. He was such a special person and cherished presence among family and friends.

When his children were growing up, Paul was an active volunteer, participating in Indian Guides, Scouts, and coaching the church league basketball team for St. Thaddeus in Aiken, SC. Paul spent his last decade in Hendersonville, NC where he enjoyed hosting barbeques and planning trips with his neighbors. Paul always looked forward to organizing an annual golf outing with his friends from Williamson High School. He found joy in traveling the world, watching college football and basketball, and pampering his loyal dog, Winston. Paul took the time each year to recount that year's adventures in a Christmas letter that had loyal readers from all seasons of Paul's life.

Paul leaves behind a legacy through his three children, Brannon E. Fitch and his wife, Charissa Thornton Fitch, Hollis M. Fitch and his wife, Abby Milner Fitch, and Margaret Kendall Fitch Bailey and her husband, Jonathan Bailey; his grandchildren who affectionally called him "Papaw", Harper E. Fitch, Collier W. Fitch, Henry Fitch, Eleanor Fitch, John "Jack" Fitch, Margot Bailey, and William Bailey to whom he was a devoted grandfather. Also surviving are his brother, Troy Scott Fitch; his sister, Charlotte Fitch and the mother of his children, Dr. Margaret Fitch of Aiken, SC, who was married to Paul for 25 years, and they remained connected through their shared love for their family. He was preceded in death by his parents, Paul V. Fitch, Sr. and Ernestine Webb Fitch.

Paul's life will be celebrated by his family and friends at a gathering from 4:00-7:00 PM on Friday, November 8, 2024, at the Myers Park Country Club, 2415 Roswell Ave, Charlotte, NC. Per his wishes, all his remaining good bottles of wine will be consumed.

In lieu of flowers, the family kindly requests donations be made in Paul's name to the Community Foundation of Henderson County, 401 N Main St. Ste 300, Hendersonville, NC 28792 or via https://www.cfhcforever.org/for-

donors/helene-relief to aid in relief efforts.

Arrangements are in the care of Kenneth W. Poe Funeral & Cremation Service, 1321 Berkeley Ave., Charlotte, NC 28204; (704) 641-7606. Online condolences may be shared at www.kennethpoeservices.com.

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Salty Goat Grill a beacon of hope amid crisis

October 9, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The (NC) Author: Sara Murphy; Staff Writer | Section: Features | 747 Words Page: 1C OpenURL Link

At the Salty Goat Grill in Leicester on Wednesday morning, few things were as in demand as a steaming hot cup of coffee.

"I hadn't had coffee in five days, so I was having a caffeine fix," said Diane Smith, a 76-year-old lifelong resident of the township. Only a few hash browns were left on her otherwise empty plate - a warm meal that was a far cry from the tomato sandwiches and bananas she's been eating at home, which is still without power.

Leicester, an unincorporated community of over 21,000 people according to the 2020 Census, is located approximately 15 miles northwest of Asheville. Compared to much of Western North Carolina, the semi-rural area escaped the worst of the flooding from Hurricane Helene.

Still, power, water and internet are patchy.

No one interviewed for this story had all three, with the exception of the Salty Goat Grill itself. Located in the heart of the township's main street, New Leicester Highway, the Grill only lost power for two days, co-owner Erin Vazquez told CharlotteFive. And even then, the generators kept the fridges running.

Vazquez and her husband, Rick, who worked at the grill under the previous owners, have owned the former Smokey Mountain Diner for the last two years. Normally, the menu is quintessential diner-style, offering everything from biscuits and gravy in the morning to steak for dinner.

But nothing is normal now. Though operating on a limited menu, the Grill is busier than usual, with people coming from devastated places like Swannanoa and Black Mountain just to get a hot meal and a dose of normalcy.

Other options in the area, which unlike Asheville is not chock full of restaurants on every corner, include Shorties BBQ, serving food for free or donations and Grateful Roots Market & Deli. The latter store usually serves Amish meats and cheeses from Ohio but have exhausted their inventory. (On its Facebook page, Grateful Roots said that the restaurant plans to help residents in Marshall, a hard-hit town approximately 12 miles north of the deli.)

Food supply challenges in Western North Carolina

The biggest issue for the Salty Goat has been food, but Vazquez said they have been lucky. Rick Vazquez drove to Johnson City, Tennessee to purchase as many groceries as he could fit in his van, and a customer named Calvin drove north to Tennessee to bring them supplies. Their usual food procurer, Mike Doyle, not only helped them with supplies but also volunteered in the kitchen and washed dishes.

"We have three items in the morning and three items at lunch, and then we're trying to do a little bit of dinner for the locals. And then we just do it till we run out,"Vazquez said. That morning, the menu offered biscuits and gravy, pancakes with eggs and bacon, and an egg and cheese biscuit with sausage or bacon.

Despite its relative good fortune, Leicester is not back to normal.

Smith finally managed to get gas after three days of trying, waking up before 6 a.m. to get in line. Diners came in hoping to charge phones on the diner's few available outlets. And while Keith Curry, who retired here with his wife from upstate New York eight years ago, has power and water, he doesn't have internet - and doesn't expect to have

it for at least a week.

Curry is a regular at the Salty Goat, coming in at least twice a week. He lives in the same community as Dani Walker, one of the waitresses. As he finished his coffee, wearing a dark blue cap with the words "Life Is Good" printed on it, he had a to-go bag with a biscuit for his wife, who was at home with a knee injury.

"We love this area. Love the community," he said. "This is a godsend right here, this little restaurant."

For Vazquez, though, it's the first responders who are the real heroes, including her brother who is a firefighter. "They're putting their lives at risk for so many people," she said.

Even though the diners are emotional after days without power, water and ways to connect with loved ones, their thoughts are with those who have lost so much more. Including the couple that owned the Salty Goat previously, who went on to open a restaurant in Hot Springs.

Vazquez has heard no news of them yet, though she assumes that their new restaurant, at the very least, is gone.

Anything else people should know? "That we're open," Walker said, coffee pot in hand, searching for an empty mug.

Sara Murphy: @saramurphyphd

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When Helene crippled NC's small mountain communities, lifelines lived next door

October 9, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Video (NC)

Section: News 9 Words

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More big names and a livestream set for 'Concert for Carolina' Helene relief show

October 9, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Chyna Blackmon, The Charlotte Observer | Section: c5_things_to_do | 609 Words OpenURL Link

As recovery efforts continue after Hurricane Helene, more award-winning stars will be hitting the stage for the "Concert for Carolina" benefit show to support storm victims across the region — and a livestream option has been added due to overwhelming demand for tickets to the sold-out show.

The concert at Bank of America Stadium on Saturday, Oct. 26 will feature North Carolina natives Luke Combs, Eric Church and James Taylor. The latest additions, announced Tuesday, Oct. 15, are more acts with North Carolina ties: Concord-based The Avett Brothers, "American Idol" winner Scotty McCreery from Garner, country singer Chase Rice, a former UNC football player, and Parmalee, which got its start in Parmele, North Carolina.

Seth & Scott Avett. .jpgThe Avett Brothers are joining the Concert for Carolina in Charlotte Oct. 26. The sold-out show will now be livestreamed too. Seen here, Seth Avett, left, and his brother Scott Avett, in New York City in front of the marquee for their shipwreck musical "Swept Away," which starts performances in late October.

Sheryl Crow, Keith Urban and Bailey Zimmerman will also be performing.

All proceeds from the event, including sponsorships, will be split between Combs' and Church's Chief Cares Foundation to administer to different organizations' relief efforts in the Carolinas, including Samaritan's Purse, Manna Food Bank, Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest NC and Eblen Charities.

4bc66c9a-c566-422b-ae8d-54d43478576fSheryl Crow will play at "Concert for Carolina", a benefit concert for Hurricane Helene victims in Charlotte, NC.

"I'm glad we can help, but ... I wish we were never here," Church, who also released a song dedicated to "the unsung heroes" with all publishing royalties to be donated to hurricane relief efforts, previously told The Charlotte Observer.

"So now it's a matter of trying to figure out the best way that we can rebuild where we're both from ... the place that made us who we are as artists."

There are two options for the livestream, organizers say.

- « If you live in an affected area: The livestream will offer free access to those who live in an area affected by Hurricane Helene. For this option, click "Watch live" at ConcertforCarolina.com, then "Claim free ticket" to register. "Concert for Carolina" and Veeps use geotargeting to ensure you won't be charged.
- « If you live outside an affected area: The livestream will be available worldwide and will cost \$24.99.

CharlotteFive inline link embed: Combs Church benefit concert interview

For those looking to support in other ways, a release from LiveNation says donations can also be given to The North Carolina Community Foundation Disaster Relief Fund or to various organizations listed online at concertforcarolina.com.

6e1a3d60-c83e-410a-825e-3cb6072f468aKeith Urban will play at "Concert for Carolina", a benefit concert for

Hurricane Helene victims in Charlotte, NC.

CharlotteFive inline link embed: How to help WNC restaurants, businesses

Other Helene relief efforts

"Concert for Carolina" isn't the only relief show being held for storm victims across the southeast. Winston-Salem native Ben Folds is also putting together a benefit concert alongside other North Carolina artists in Wilmington on Oct. 29 at Greenfield Lake Amphitheater.

"I'm honored to share the stage and stand in unity with other North Carolina music artists to help those whose lives and livelihoods have been tragically lost or forever altered by the horrific events triggered by Hurricane Helene," Folds said in a statement. "Our goal with this benefit concert is to raise awareness and funds to support the massive rebuilding efforts now underway, and that will be ongoing for months and years to come."

The concert will feature artists from Western North Carolina, including Jim Lauderdale, Moonshine State, Caleb Caudle & The Sweet Critters and Josh Goforth.

Tickets for the "From Wilmington With Love" show at Greenfield Lake Amphitheater are on sale at concerts.livenation.com starting at \$40.

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Thousands in Western NC still without water after Helene. When will service be restored?

October 9, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Mary Ramsey, The Charlotte Observer | Section: north_carolina | 726 Words OpenURL Link

Extensive work remains to restore clean water access for North Carolina communities hit hard by Helene two weeks ago.

Repairs are underway across Western North Carolina, including the main city of Asheville's facilities, which serve more than 156,000 people in Buncombe and Henderson counties, according to the system's 2023 water quality report. Crews are trying to finish work that would normally take months or years on a much shorter timeline, Asheville Assistant City Manager Ben Woody said Wednesday.

At other public water systems throughout Western North Carolina, a variety of issues are stopping water restoration, according to state officials.

Even people with private wells need to take precautions to avoid health risks after Helene's flooding, officials say.

How many people in Western NC are without water?

helene_tuesday_08.JPGVolunteers fill containers of water for the community at a water distribution site at Pack Square in Asheville, N.C. on Tuesday, October 1, 2024.

About 3.7% of the region's public water systems, serving 24,330 people, were closed and not producing water as of Wednesday morning, according to the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality's tracker. An additional seven systems serving 238,967 people, including the City of Asheville's system, were down or limited due to water pressure problems.

Another eight systems had no power, and 48 systems serving tens of thousands were either running on back-up power or operated on stored water only.

Hundreds of thousands are under boil water advisories.

When will water be restored in Asheville, Western North Carolina?

Asheville's Mills River Water Plant is "fully operational," the city said Monday. That plant serves about 20% of the city's water system, according to the Asheville Citizen-Times.

But the North Fork Reservoir and its plant, which serves the other 80%, need more extensive and time-consuming repairs. City officials did not give an updated timeline Wednesday on when water would be restored but said previously it could be weeks.

Woody on Wednesday said crews are laying a new bypass line connecting North Fork's treatment plant to the water distribution system and hope to finish that by Friday. Boulders clogging pipes slowed down that project, he added.

"That's just the contingencies we have to be prepared for," he said.

Asheville also is working to repair distribution lines throughout the city, Woody said. The city is partnering with the Environmental Protection Agency and engineers to purify the water in the reservoir, which was contaminated by

sediment during the flooding from Helene.

"When the storm came, it essentially flipped the reservoir," he said. "... All this sediment, pieces of clay particles, are now suspended in the water column."

Workers need to get much of the sediment out of the water before it goes through the treatment plant, Woody said. Not doing so could cause more damage that could take months to fix.

The city will also have to repressurize its system, which will likely lead to the discovery of more damage, Woody said.

"Even when the water is able to leave the North Fork treatment plant, the process of refilling thousands of miles of pipe is going to take time," he said.

Asheville's water system also serves parts of Black Mountain, Hendersonville, Woodfin and Weaverville.

Issues in other water systems include a lack of consistent power, storm debris that needs clearing and damaged distribution infrastructure such as pipes and pumps, said Josh Kastrinsky, spokesman for the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality.

"The spectrum of needed improvements is broad," he said.

What about well water?

Officials are also urging caution for those in Western North Carolina using well water after Helene.

Floodwater can contaminate wells with livestock waste, sewage, chemicals and other contaminants that can lead to illness, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services advises.

Dug wells, bored wells and wells less than 50 feet deep are especially vulnerable to contamination, according to NCDHHS.

Property owners should reach out to their local health department, the NC State Laboratory of Public Health or their local county extension about getting their well water tested after flooding, the agency says. Additional testing may be needed if the well is near animal feeding operations, fields that use pesticides or industrial chemical factories.

Test kits will also be available for pick-up starting Thursday at 30 Valley St. in Asheville, county officials said at their Wednesday briefing.

NCDHHS also recommends property owners reach out to their local health department or a licensed well driller to "shock chlorinate" their well — a process that disinfects wells using liquid bleach or chlorine — after flooding. Copyright (c) 2024 The Charlotte Observer

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As Western North Carolina digs out of Helene's mud, residents worry, agencies urge caution

October 9, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Catherine Muccigrosso, The Charlotte Observer | Section: north_carolina | 709 Words OpenURL Link

As historic floodwaters recede in western North Carolina, the destruction left behind from former Hurricane Helene also involves dealing with massive amounts of mud that some residents and business owners fear is toxic.

Helene leveled the Biltmore Village where Origami Ink has been "completely destroyed," the gift shop said on its Facebook page last week. The flood waters reached the second floor, "literally smashing everything to bits and leaving everything coated in toxic mud," Origami Ink said.

Origamilnk

But as of Wednesday, federal and state officials would not confirm that the mud from Helene is toxic.

RAL_100124-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-28.JPGWestern North Carolina residents are dealing with massive amounts of mud in Hurricane Helen's aftermath. Shown, residents and volunteers on Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024 after the French Broad River flooded downtown Marshall.

As part of the state and federal storm response, North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality and other state agencies are working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to identify and address potential contamination in the affected region, the agencies said in a joint statement to The Charlotte Observer.

"Given the widespread impacts of the storm and flooding, generally speaking, the public is advised to treat areas that have flooded and any substances of unknown origin with caution," the agencies said.

Western North Carolina residents are urged to use caution during cleanup, especially if there is a noticeable chemical odor or spilled container of a hazardous material and to ask the local health department or fire department for help.

More guidance is available online at deq.nc.gov and the NCDHHS websites.

Federal and state agencies did not make an official available for interview.

RAL_100224-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-26.JPGOrigami Ink gift shop in Biltmore Village was "completely destroyed," by flooding from Hurricane Helene. Shown, inches of mud cover Biltmore Village in Asheville on Wednesday October 2, 2204.

Testing for potential contamination

DEQ has received reports of concerns about potentially toxic mud downstream in Madison County near Marshall from damaged IPEX's Silver-Line Plastics plant in Asheville. Marshall, with less than 800 residents, is on the French Broad River about 20 miles north of Asheville.

In response, inspectors have visited the site and found no injuries were confirmed related to potential exposure in this area, according to the federal and state agencies.

RAL 092822-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-10 (2).JPGNorth Carolina residents like Tomas Quiroz, shown Sept. 28, 2024,

shoveling mud from his porch steps in Clyde, are urged by federal and state environmental agencies to wear PPE during cleanup.

Silver-Line is not listed as a hazardous waste generator in DEQ permitting records.

"They have an air permit with the local air program in Buncombe County and did not have significant quantities of hazardous chemicals," DEQ and EPA said.

RHL kimball asheville 10424J.JPGA pickup truck is encased in mud Thursday, Oct. 3, 2024 near downtown Asheville.

How to handle cleaning up the mud?

Flood water can bring microorganisms from sewage and other sources inside buildings, according to the EPA. During flood cleanup, exposure to microorganisms can cause allergic or irritant effects, or in some cases even infectious diseases.

The EPA urged residents are urged to wear an N-95 respirator, sealed goggles, gloves, pants, long-sleeved shirt, and boots or work boots.

NC DHHS also advises residents to clean their hands with soap and water before preparing food or eating after contact with flood waters.

"Never assume that a water-damaged house is safe," NC Department of Health and Human Services said in a statement to the Observer on Tuesday.

RAL_100124-HURRICANE-HELENE-TEL-29.JPGResidents and volunteers clean up on Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2024 after the French Broad River flooded downtown Marshall. The remnants of Hurricane Helene caused widespread flooding, downed trees, and power outages in western North Carolina.

"Going into a building that has been flooded, even after the water is gone, can present a wide variety of hazards that can cause injury, illness or even death," the agency said.

Origami Ink Shop owners Cathie and Jonathan Robbins have been digging through the mud daily looking for anything salvageable. "Cathie and I have been doing most of it ourselves since we could not risk the health of any of our customers who have offered to pitch in," Origami Ink said Saturday on Facebook.

The store, which sells stationery, fountain pens and gifts, set up a Go Fund Me page Saturday to help rebuild. Origami Ink officials did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

RHL_kimball_asheville_10424G.JPGA damaged building in Biltmore Village near downtown Asheville is surrounded by mud Thursday, Oct. 3, 2024

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He jumped into a river to survive Helene. Sheltering near Charlotte, he looks forward.

October 9, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Gavin Off, The Charlotte Observer | Section: north_carolina | 810 Words OpenURL Link

Danny Mancini knew it was time to take his chances in the river when Helene's floodwaters started shaking his home early Saturday.

Between midnight and 8 a.m., the Broad River flooded Mancini's Subaru WRX to the roof. Then it climbed 18 feet up a slope to the modular home Mancini built in Black Mountain two years ago.

For a few minutes after Mancini woke up, the 41-year-old south Florida transplant thought he could stay in the house.

Then water slowly seeped in and his home began loosening from its concrete foundation.

"That's when I panicked," said Mancini, an owner of four Buncombe County smoke shops.

RAL_HELENE-NE-100624-RTW_17.JPGHelene's floodwaters ripped apart Danny Mancini's home along the banks of the Broad River in rural Buncombe County. He jumped into the water prior to the home sliding off a hill.

Some days since have been a blur, Mancini said. After he escaped his home, he hiked down a mountain, hitchhiked to Asheville, slept and ate little but eventually made his way to Matthews, where he's been living in a hotel.

Like many Western North Carolina people whose homes were harmed by Helene, he's temporarily without an address, living with little more than the clothes he escaped in and the help of family and friends.

"It hasn't been easy," Mancini said, of the start of his quest to try to put his Black Mountain life back together. "I'm just grateful to be alive."

A leap into the river

When Mancini's one-story home began to move under his water-soaked shoes the morning of Sept. 28, he grabbed his phone and gold necklace and hurried out his front door onto a wooden porch left wobbly by rushing water.

RAL_HELENE-NE-100624-RTW_11.JPGDaniel Mancini shows photos of the flooding from Hurricane Helene that destroyed his home along the banks of the Broad River on Sunday, October 6, 2024 in rural Buncombe County, near Black Mountain, N.C.

He left the door open so Layla, his corgi, could escape too.

Not far downstream, he saw the top of a then-flooded tree poking out of the swollen river. So he jumped in. Just as Mancini hoped, the water rushed him directly to its branches.

From there, he could hold on, stretch his leg toward the slope and make a push for drier land.

Mancini's home, with all of his possessions, was teetering on the hill.

RAL HELENE-NE-100624-RTW 18.JPGThe rushing Broad River rose some 18 feet to Danny Mancini's modular home,

collapsing it and sweeping it off the hill Sept. 28.

One of his cars, with his wallet, was submerged and the other had disappeared to who knows where.

"If I had to guess, Lake Lure," he said during a recent interview. "A 20-minute drive."

Now what?, he asked himself.

Alone, Mancini walked in the rain, through mud, around fallen trees and over landslide debris, he said.

Five hours later, around 1 p.m. Saturday, a rescue crew found Mancini on North Carolina Highway 9 and took him to a firehouse in Fairview.

But he didn't stay long. He wanted to get off the mountain before nightfall to reach a place where there would be electricity and roads leading to family members, he said.

So Mancini walked 10 miles to U.S. 74. There, he hitchhiked to Asheville arriving around 7 p.m., and fell asleep inside one of the smoke shops that he owns.

Challenged but grateful and optimistic

At some point — Mancini doesn't know when — the Broad River took his home.

He's seen it since, ripped open and laying on top of the Subaru and halfway down the hill it once sat on. His vegetable greenhouse is gone. Same with his camper and a metal outbuilding that was his office.

Despite losing almost everything, Mancini said he can't help but to feel lucky.

None of his four Plug Smoke Shops, which he opened in the past two years, were damaged. Layla somehow made it safe to a neighbor.

His 4-year-old daughter, who was supposed to spend the night of the flood with Mancini and had never missed a scheduled night with him, was safe at her mother's house when Helene hit.

And FEMA inspectors have already visited what's left of his home. They've deposited some \$54,000 into his account — certainly not enough to replace everything he lost but more than he ever expected, Mancini said.

RAL_HELENE-NE-100624-RTW_14.JPGFEMA employee Jirau Alvaro talks with Danny Mancini Sunday at Mancini's Buncombe County home. Less than a week after the flood, the federal government awarded Mancini \$54,000 for his losses.

Mancini said he'll likely stay at a hotel in Matthews a few more days. Then he'll go to his girlfriend's in Flat Rock, a town with power, water and internet.

After that, Mancini is not sure. But he doesn't assume the worst.

"This is going to be good for me somehow," Mancini predicted.

What will he do with his property after he removes the tattered remains of his home?

He might turn it into a campground to pay the mortgage. But he won't live there.

"I'm pretty traumatized by that river and that property," he said.

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Is House Speaker Johnson playing politics with Helene aid? Please don't. - Opinion

October 9, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Issac Bailey, The Charlotte Observer | Section: opinion | 678 Words OpenURL Link

Speaker of the U.S. House Mike Johnson's time would be better spent reconvening Congress to consider more disaster aid than surveying Hurricane Helene damage in western North Carolina this week. The speaker should not wait until after the election, as he reportedly plans to do.

That's a mistake. A huge mistake.

MYB IssacBailey headshots-3Issac Bailey

Americans suffering from billions of dollars in damage don't need another politician smiling in their faces. This is not a slight against politicians who show up in the aftermath of natural disasters. Such visits can be reassuring and put a spotlight on vulnerable areas that need the attention. Democrats President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, Republican former President Donald Trump, and a bevy of other officials have made such trips the past two weeks.

Johnson's trip would be in line with those, which serve the dual purpose of politicking and serving constituents in need. That's not the problem. The problem is unnecessarily waiting to recall the nation's leaders to begin legislation that will fund the next stages of recovery. The urgency has increased as yet another historically-strong storm lurks in the Gulf of Mexico and is forecast to hit Florida — a state also reeling from Helene — sometime this week. Hurricane Milton, which has become one of the strongest hurricanes ever, had scarily-fast 160 miles per hour sustained winds at the time of this writing.

The damage from Helene and Milton will be several billion dollars. Johnson reportedly said Congress can wait until after the election because we don't yet know the price tag. But we don't have to know a precise number to understand the need. Every day of delay could lead to more hardship.

The Biden-Harris administration has warned Johnson the Small Business Administration's disaster relief program may run out of money before Congress returns from recess, which could mean forgoing "longer-term recovery activities in favor of meeting urgent needs."

House Republicans turned down requests from the administration for disaster relief funding after the Maui fires, the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore and tornadoes that hit multiple states. I don't know why. I'll assume Johnson and other Republicans had good reason to deny that funding. I don't want to believe they would play partisan politics with such important decisions.

I'm going to assume Sen. Thom Tillis didn't attack Harris on X, formerly Twitter, just to get in a political jab instead of remaining focused on what's best for Tar Heels who remain in harm's way. I'll assume Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has decided not to return Harris's phone calls for reasons that aren't political. I'm going to believe it has nothing to do with what happened to Gov. Chris Christie in 2012 when he warmly greeted President person
value="APIN:2148844264">Barack Obama after Superstorm Sandy hit New Jersey a week before the 2012 election. His once-promising career as a Republican was effectively ended because of an imaginary "hug" with a Democrat.

In a moment like this, I'm trying to refuse to think the worst of people, including everyday Americans who have spread so much misinformation that it has affected relief efforts, and elected officials who have short- and long-term incentives to politicize a natural disaster that has killed more than 230 people and left an unknown amount of

damage in its wake, which could worsen in coming days if Hurricane Milton makes landfall.

I have to refuse to think of the worst of people. To believe otherwise is to think a nation that holds itself as great is so broken, its social fabric so tattered and strained at the seams, it may never be able to repair itself.

We can't be so far gone that though we are staring in the face death and destruction on a Biblical scale we remain locked in partisan corners even as our brothers and sisters suffer and need our help.

That's why I won't assume Johnson is refusing to reconvene Congress early because he doesn't want to give the Biden-Harris administration a political "win" before the election.

That simply can't be. It must not be.

Issac Bailey is a McClatchy Opinion writer in North and South Carolina.

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Issac Bailey, The Charlotte Observer, 'Is House Speaker Johnson playing politics with Helene aid? Please don't. Opinion', *Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles* (online), 9 Oct 2024 https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view? p=AMNEWS&docref=news/19C19AC85BC9D888>



'Helping the helpers.' How Charlotte laundry service aids Duke Energy crews after Helene

October 9, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Chase Jordan, The Charlotte Observer | Section: north_carolina | 695 Words OpenURL Link

In the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, workers from Collins Cleaners are driving a lot of miles around Charlotte picking up dirty laundry from Duke Energy crews who are working to restore power in Western North Carolina.

For owner Patrick Collins, it's not enough to just clean the clothes for the stressed-out workers. Employees are sending the laundry bags back with snacks, water, notes of encouragement and waterproof bags.

"You don't know if they're sleeping in tents for a couple of days, or whether they're going to be in a hotel or sleeping in the back of their trucks," Collins said. "This is just just a nice way to tell them how much we appreciate them for what they do."

Close to 14 drivers are picking up laundry early in the morning at hotels across Charlotte for Duke workers.

The laundry is returned later in the evening after it's cleaned through multiple wash and rinse cycles. Duke Energy workers are also dropping off clothes with trailers full of clothes to Collins Cleaners locations across Charlotte.

It's an honor, said driver Drew Nathan.

"I'm honestly feeling the urge to go up there and help and do something," Nathan said. "I know that it's probably a nuisance for me to be in the way for people actually like bringing stuff in, people that are supposed to be there."

But like many other people miles away from the devastation, Nathan is glad to be doing his part.

"I'm from North Carolina and it's a weird sense of 'helping the helpers,' " he said. "And I think that's what I felt from it."

Collins Cleaners operates from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m. with two shifts of workers. As of Tuesday, they have cleaned 13,807 pieces of clothing since the storm for 466 people from Duke Energy and other organizations.

"We've tried to put that word out because the name of the game really is to get them their clothes as best and as fast as we can," Collins said.

Drivers are also planning trips farther west to cities like Hickory, which is closer to the devastation. Collins expects the work to continue through October based on information he received about hotel bookings.

"A lot of those guys are, you know, they're traveling, and they just kind of get beat up while they're on the road," Collins said. "It can be really disheartening."

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About Collins Cleaners

Collins started the business in 1992 with his wife Shelby, who serves as vice president. The valet cleaning services provides pick up and delivery services for customers, including law enforcement agencies and other organizations.

Collins Cleaners connection with Charlotte-based Duke Energy began in December 1998 after an ice storm froze much of the city Charlotte. The relationship started through the Sports Page restaurant, which shared an attached building with the cleaning business at the time. Sports Page provided catering for Duke workers during disaster events, according to Collins.

And it's also important for Duke crews to leave with good thoughts about Charlotte, Collins added.

"For us, it's really more about just trying to give back to these guys," he said. "And also, my wife and I are from here, so we kind of consider Charlotte our town. We want people to leave here with the best impression of Charlotte they could possibly get."

Since Helene first struck Duke Energy's service territory in North Carolina, the company has continued to work with local, state and federal agencies, and numerous private businesses, to support team members in some of the hardest-hit areas of the state, according to Duke Energy spokesman Jeff Brooks.

Van full of bagsCollins Cleaners picks up laundry for Duke Energy workers after Hurricane Helene.

"We greatly appreciate the support of and collaboration with these organizations and businesses as our team continue to work to rebuild the grid and restore power," Brooks said.

The faith-based business also has a relationship with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association for services. Collins has presented the idea of having mobile laundry facilities for workers in disaster areas.

But reaching people may become a challenge if destroyed roads are closed.

"There are still some things to work out," he said. "But I think that's just a little bit of the vision into the future of where things like this are going."

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Free meals for Helene survivors have been a lifeline — but not everyone can eat them

October 9, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Sara Murphy, The Charlotte Observer | Section: charlottefive | 963 Words OpenURL Link

When Patricia Sprinkle and her family lost power in the Buncombe County neighborhood of Enka-Candler due to Hurricane Helene, she faced an extra challenge when it came to getting food.

As someone with celiac disease, an autoimmune disorder in which eating gluten damages the lining of the small intestine, Sprinkle's diet centers on meats, fruits and gluten-free products. (She's not a fan of vegetables.) But all of the meat and gluten-free goods were gone from her local store's shelves.

"We finally found some bacon at the farmers market. So I've kind of been living off of bacon," she said. And even though her power returned a few days later, there's still no water, making cooking and baking a challenge.

"I honestly feel like I've lost about 10 pounds in the last 10 days," Sprinkle said. A friend in Virginia also just sent her two boxes of gluten-free food from Wegmans. But she is still on the lookout for a nice hot meal that she can trust won't make her sick.

According to the latest Duke Energy outage map on Tuesday, Oct. 8, over 100,000 people still lack power in the Carolinas following Hurricane Helene. As of last Thursday, 136,000 people in the Southeast didn't have access to clean water, with 1.8 million under a boil advisory.

As a result, many people are still relying primarily on nonperishable items and donated meals. And for people like Sprinkle with dietary restrictions like celiac disease or diabetes, or even people who are vegan or keto for health or ethical reasons, many of those items are off limits.

For instance, a member of the Asheville Foodies Facebook group posted asking where a friend could find vegan and gluten-free options so that she could focus on helping with recovery efforts.

Commenters quickly suggested vegan and vegetarian restaurant Rosetta's Kitchen in downtown Asheville, currently serving free meals from 12-4 p.m. daily. The Ayurvedic Institute and Plant have also teamed up to provide vegan meals this week, alternating sites.

In times like these, bakers like Hendersonville's Diana Casteel, owner of Pies by Di who specializes in gluten free goods, are a lifeline. Casteel has severe celiac disease, her husband is diabetic and her daughter does not eat dairy. So she understands the importance of having food that doesn't make you sick.

Cinnamon Roll Cheesecake.jpgPies by Di owner Diana Casteel made a six-inch gluten-free cinnamon roll cheesecake for a customer amid the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. "I don't know what kind of magic love you put into that cake that you gave me, but that was the best thing I've ever had in my entire life," the customer said in a message to Casteel.

Since the storm, a number of Casteel's customers have reached out for assistance. One woman wanted gluten-free goods for her daughter, a police officer.

"Her daughter's been having headaches and, you know, stomach upset, and she just can't really focus on the job," Casteel said. "Everybody's offering food, but when you have celiac disease, that's a tough one."

Casteel provided bread, as well as cornbread French toast and some apple cider donuts.

Other customers are in need of pantry staples like gluten-free pasta and soups, which Casteel has in stock because she buys in bulk. Getting supplies like almond, sunflower seed and chickpea flour is not a problem, she said, though she had to meet her assistant, who lives in Georgia, in Greenville to pick them up.

She also helped out India Aroma Bistro in Hendersonville, whose lunch buffet is primarily gluten free. After donating meals in the first week of the disaster, they have reopened for customers at new lower prices with free meals for first responders and people without power. But they had no to-go containers, so Casteel bought some for them from a restaurant depot in Charlotte.

Casteel's next step is to search for a new kitchen, since the one she was using in Hendersonville has minor damage and no power.

Casteel needs a pristine kitchen to prevent cross-contamination, because people like her with severe celiac disease will react to even the smallest amount of grains and wheat. "You can't just vacuum out the flour from the air," she said. She has a potential lead in Bryson City, a kitchen that has not been in use for a while.

As for Sprinkle, she plans to take it day by day. She's grateful for the Western North Carolina Farmers Market. "They've got everything down there," she said.

In the meantime, her focus is on helping a family member who lost everything find housing, clothing and — yes — food. Food has such power. A hot meal made with love can nourish both our physical and emotional needs, while a dingy cup of broth or sad, saggy Jell-O can sink our spirits.

Earlier this week, another Asheville Foodie member posted asking where they could find a good burger and support a small business. People chimed in with recommendations, from Blue Sky Cafe in Fletcher, Waynesville's Church Street Depot and Main Street Grill in Weaverville.

In normal times, satisfying such a simple craving isn't so hard. But for people like Sprinkle and Casteel with dietary needs, the search for nourishing and safe comfort food can be far more challenging.

Especially as in the case of Casteel's neighbor, when your birthday falls on the day a hurricane arrives. When Casteel heard about it, she knew she had to help. So she plugged her toaster oven in the generator and baked a birthday cake: three layers — two chocolate, one vanilla — with chocolate ganache. The neighbor was over the moon.

Toaster Oven Birthday Cake.jpgA three-layer cake baked in Pies by Di owner Diana Casteel's toaster oven for her neighbor's birthday, which fell on the day Hurricane Helene hit.

"Just to be able to have some bit of normalcy, you know, with everything going on, is a big thing," Casteel said.

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Helene presents leaders with an important choice on western NC schools - Opinion

October 9, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Bryan Proffitt, The Charlotte Observer | Section: opinion | 638 Words OpenURL Link

As the tragedy facing Western North Carolina continues to unfold, our state faces a critical choice about its future. As public school educators, we know that challenging life events like divorce or the loss of a loved one can stunt a student's learning, growth and happiness. Young people living in the wake of Hurricane Helene's havoc will face immeasurable stress, as will the public school staff who love and serve them. In the coming months, our state's elected leaders have the ability to relieve a great deal of that stress.

For years, members of the North Carolina Association of Educators have advocated for resources to remediate crumbling infrastructure in our schools across the state. From sweaty trailers, freezing classrooms, and libraries with mold, we have asked for those resources because our students deserve better. Our public schools are the centers of our communities.

Beyond the bonds we build at Friday night games and Saturday performances, our public schools serve as sites of refuge when things go wrong. Throughout our mountain region, we have seen neighbors gathering at public schools for showers, water and cell service. Educators have called through class rosters, offering support and love to students and their families. Public schools in counties around the state have already started to welcome displaced families into their communities. Schools keep more of us connected on a regular basis than any other institution in our community. A storm won't change that.

This storm will, however, create a moment of choice for our elected leaders. We can keep neglecting our constitutionally-guaranteed public schools, or we can prioritize safe and stable public schools as we rebuild for the future.

We can start by protecting our public school employees. They need their pay, leave and benefits until it is safe to go back to work. They should be able to focus on rebuilding and supporting their families through this trauma, not stress over finances.

School districts should have what they need too. As we did during COVID, we can keep funding schools as their student populations fluctuate. Thousands of students will be displaced, and some will bounce from county to county as their families seek stability. Public schools, as the most stable institutions in our communities, need resources for the long haul. They need to be ready to welcome our kids home.

We also need the resources to help them thrive. Too many students and staff have been dealing with substandard schools. To serve as stable centers of our communities, we need modern, safe and sturdy schools that can withstand the kinds of disasters that Eastern North Carolina families have been accustomed to. Rebuilding schools with updated infrastructure, in and out of the current disaster area, keeps our kids and communities safer and invests in the future of our state. Legislative action can also provide free student meals.

Before Helene, the General Assembly was considering giving away more than \$400 million of public tax dollars this year, and more than \$4 billion over the decade, to private school vouchers. Those vouchers cannot be the priority right now. Instead, let's allocate those same resources to relief, rebuilding and resourcing safe and stable public schools as the center of Western North Carolina communities.

Every day, our students and staff accomplish incredible things in public schools across the state. In the coming months, many public school communities will accomplish more than they ever imagined. Not only will they serve

every student, regardless of background, ability, or income, public schools will also keep our communities safe, our families fed, and all of our lives a little more stable. Our kids deserve a strong and resilient state—let's rebuild Western North Carolina with a recognition that our public schools are at the heart of what makes that possible.

Bryan Proffitt is a high school history teacher in Durham and the North Carolina Association of Educators vice president.

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NCHSAA extends football season after Hurricane Helene

October 9, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Langston Wertz Jr., The Charlotte Observer | Section: high_school | 508 Words OpenURL Link

The N.C. high school football season will extend a week after Hurricane Helene caused severe damages to many schools in the western part of the state.

The N.C. High School Athletic Association announced the change Wednesday, which was approved by its board of directors. The playoffs will begin on Nov. 15 and end with state championships on Dec. 20-21.

Originally, the playoffs were set to start on Nov. 8 and conclude on Dec. 13-14.

In addition, the NCHSAA board approved pushing most playoffs for fall sports back and approved one additional contest for all sports with a season limit. But that additional game — which could be added to avoid an open week at the end of the regular-season — must be approved by the NCHSAA.

That additional game cannot exceed daily or weekly game limit rules. It must also exceed the season limit for both participating schools. Lastly, that additional game cannot be entered into MaxPreps and will not count towards postseason qualifying.

The NCHSAA also said that, effective immediately, a minimum of 72 hours must occur between football games, a move that could allow schools to make up some missed contests.

"Changes to the fall calendar are difficult as well as complex but necessary," said NCHSAA President Dr. Stephen Gainey and NCHSAA Commissioner Que Tucker in a joint statement. "Keeping our student-athletes safe as we try to minimize risk of injury was central to any decisions made. We commend the work of the NCHSAA staff in its research, the Board of Directors in making time to consider these changes and the willingness of our host partners to accommodate any changes and make their venues available."

Other changes announced:

- « The reporting deadline for boys' soccer was pushed back a week to 11:59 p.m. on Nov. 6. The first round will be Nov. 7, followed by rounds on Nov. 9, Nov. 12, Nov. 14 and Nov. 16. The regionals will now be played Nov. 19 with state finals on Nov. 22-23.
- « For girls' golf, the minimum number of 9-hole scores require to qualify for regionals was revised from five to three.
- « The girls' tennis regionals reporting deadline was extended to 11:59 p.m. on Oct. 14. Originally, that deadline was 3 p.m. Regional play is scheduled for Oct. 18-19. State finals are scheduled for Oct. 25-26.
- « The dual team tennis reporting deadline was moved from Oct. 10 to Oct. 17. The first round will begin Oct. 18 with state finals now on Nov. 9.
- « The volleyball reporting deadline was moved back to 11:59 p.m. on Oct. 19, instead of Oct. 16. The first round will now begin Oct. 22, instead of the original Oct. 19 date.

The remaining rounds will play on a more condensed schedule: Oct. 24, second round; Oct. 26, third round; Oct. 29,

fourth round; Oct. 31, regional round.

The state finals will be held Nov. 2 as originally scheduled.

« Cross-country reporting deadline for regional qualifying was moved back to 11:59 p.m. on Oct. 22. It was originally scheduled for Oct. 19. The regionals will be held Oct. 26 with state finals Nov. 2.

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What people in Western North Carolina had to say as supplies arrived by helicopter

October 9, 2024 | Charlotte Observer, The: Web Edition Articles (NC) Author: Jeff A. Chamer, The Charlotte Observer | Section: north_carolina | 1081 Words OpenURL Link

Thursday, Oct. 3, was the first time Loretta Zahn, 60, was able to speak with her husband since the storm knocked out cell phone service and electricity in Mitchell County. It was difficult, she said.

She and her neighbors watched as helicopters landed near their homes in the Poplar area to deliver food, water and a temporary satellite that would give the couple the connection they needed to confirm they were each safe.

Like many other areas in Western North Carolina, Poplar is depending on these airdrops from the National Guard, or Amazon in the case of the satellite, as many roads were destroyed by Hurricane Helene and have cut them off.

Zahn stayed in Spruce Pine for several days after the storm hit because the roads weren't clear.

"It was treacherous," she said. "It was like a war zone."

The Charlotte Observer spoke with people in two communities hit by Helene's flooding while traveling with the National Guard as soldiers delivered supplies, flying from Salisbury.

LIONEL_RICHIE_05.JPGLoretta Zahn of Poplar, N.C., and Jett Murphy, left, were among members of the community waiting for Bravo Company 1-171 to deliver bottled water and ready to eat meals in Western North Carolina on Thursday, Oct. 3, 2024. Zahn and her community are suffering the effects of damage from Hurricane Helene.

Clearing the roads has "all been done by the locals right here," said Jody Murphy, 52, who watched the helicopters arrive with his son Jett, 24, and Zahn. People used their machinery, he said.

Murphy said his home wasn't destroyed but his property was.

On the day of the storm, it took three hours for his other son to get home, Murphy said.

"I had to go out and help him home," he said. "Every way we went was washed out, but we finally got him home safe. And then the eye of the storm come over less than an hour later."

He said he was thankful for the National Guard bringing supplies, but felt frustrated by the response, or lack thereof, by the state and his county officials.

LIONEL_RICHIE_12.JPGPoplar, N.C., resident Jody Murphy waited at the drop point for supplies from the crew of Bravo Company 1-171 on Thursday, October 3, 2024. The company flew bottled water and ready to eat meals to the community on a Chinook helicopter. The town in Western North Carolina is suffering the effects of Hurricane Helene.

When National Guardsmen or other disaster response teams land in towns, they make lists of supplies the town needs.

Murphy and Zahn said they hoped the National Guard would bring heaters to keep them warm as temperatures begin to drop, as well as generators and a way to cook food.

"We need diesel fuel for our workers. Our guys are using their own equipment," Murphy said. "We need regular fuel for generators."

They've been told it would take about eight months before things were back to "normal," but they didn't seem confident about that outlook.

'God is good, mountain people are strong'

Earlier on Thursday, residents in Buladean, another small community in Mitchell County, watched as the National Guard landed on a baseball field to deliver food and water.

LIONEL_RICHIE_08.JPGCitizens of the Buladean, N.C., community stand near the landing zone for a Chinook helicopter flown by Bravo Company 1-171 on Thursday, Oct. 3, 2024. The company delivered bottled water and ready to eat meals to the community in Western North Carolina suffering the effects of Hurricane Helene.

Ray Honeycutt, 70, said the days since the storm had been tough, but watching the helicopters land and take off with his 3-year-old grandson Mason brought excitement.

He said his home was undamaged by the storm and he didn't lose any loved ones.

The lifelong Buladean resident said the experience brought him back to his childhood.

"I was raised up without any water in the house," he said. "I didn't have no inside plumbing or nothing."

David Caughroun, 76, who has lived in the area most of his life, watched the helicopter land. He, like many others, began volunteering to clean the area as soon as the storm passed.

Caughroun said he didn't know many of the people volunteering alongside him but still felt close with them.

"It's been rough, but could have been a lot worse," said Caughroun, whose home was undamaged and loved ones were safe. "God took care of us."

LIONEL_RICHIE_13.JPGJeffrey Schweitzer stands near the landing point for the Chinook helicopter piloted by Bravo Company 1-171 in Poplar, N.C., on Thursday, Oct. 3, 2024. Schweitzer is employed by Amazon and is a global lead with the company's disaster response operations. Bravo Company 1-171 flew pallets of bottled water and ready to eat meals to the community in Western North Carolina that is suffering the effects of Hurricane Helene.

One man bagged debris kicked up by the helicopter's propellers. He said local people are using chainsaws to cut fallen trees and clear roads.

Like Poplar, people in Buladean requested specific items: baby formula, insulin, and chainsaws.

The time it will take for the area to recover seems unclear, residents said. They've heard one to three months.

But Becky Garland and Kathy Jenkins, friends who were helping clean up the debris in Buladean, said they're confident their community will pull through.

Garland's homes and loved ones were not harmed by the storm. Jenkins' home and loved ones were safe, but the storm destroyed her son's home, she said.

Despite that, they both remain optimistic.

"God is good, mountain people are strong," Garland said. "We need help, but we'll be all right."

national guard 003.JPEGThe North Carolina National Guard begin to load commodities for transport to Western North Carolina on Thursday morning, October 3, 2024, in Salisbury, N.C.

LIONEL_RICHIE_17.JPGBravo Company 1-171 crew member Ryan Venden watches for other air traffic as the team flies a mission to Western North Carolina to deliver bottled water and ready to eat meals on Thursday, Oct. 3, 2024.

national guard 002.JPEGThe North Carolina National Guard begin to load commodities for transport to Western North Carolina on Thursday morning, Oct. 3, 2024 in Salisbury, N.C.

national guard 001.JPEGThe North Carolina National Guard begin to load commodities for transport to Western North Carolina on Thursday morning, Oct. 3, 2024 in Salisbury, N.C.

IMG_1149.jpegPilot Carson Smith leads a briefing for members of his team prior to leaving for Western North Carolina on Thursday, October 3, 2024. The team was delivering supplies.

LIONEL_RICHIE_14.JPGFlood damage can be seen from the Chinook helicopter flown by Bravo Company 1-171 to Western North Carolina on Thursday, Oct. 3, 2024. The company flew pallets of bottled water and ready to eat meals to the Buladean and Poplar areas, which are suffering the effects of Hurricane Helene.

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Durham City Council approves Duke's rezoning proposal for land near Central Campus

October 9, 2024 | Chronicle, The (Duke University) (Durham, NC) Author: Aseel Ibrahim | Section: News | 1041 Words OpenURL Link

Durham City Council approved Duke's rezoning application for 10 parcels near Central Campus in a 5-2 vote at its Monday meeting.

Duke first filed a Zoning Map Change application for the 10 parcels in April, though the University withdrew its application for three of the parcels in June amid community pushback. Duke previously presented the current rezoning proposal at an Aug. 19 city council meeting, and its consideration was continued to Monday's meeting.

Also on Monday, the council acknowledged the devastation experienced across parts of western North Carolina due to Hurricane Helene and shared local efforts to aid in the region's recovery.

Duke's rezoning proposal

Adem Gusa, director of planning and design at Duke, and Neil Ghosh, a land use and zoning attorney representing Duke, presented the University's Central Campus rezoning plan to the council, which is aimed at rezoning 10 parcels of Duke-owned land to the "University College" designation to better allow for campus-wide planning initiatives.

"The primary benefit of the UC is that it allows for planning and zoning elements such as stormwater, parking, sidewalks [and] tree coverage to be considered holistically at the campus scale, rather than on each individual building site," Gusa said.

The 10 parcels are contiguous to University-owned land that is already zoned UC or UC(D) — "University and College with a Development Plan."

"This is really like an infill strategy to allow [for] better planning," Gusa said.

The University submitted its 2024 Illustrative Master Plan to the council, which does not include development plans for the 10 parcels or the larger area "commonly known as Central Campus." Gusa noted that the University would expect a "significant public engagement process ... if and when the time comes for the future development of Central Campus."

"We look forward to reframing our relationship with the City of Durham moving forward in the spirit of transparency and collaboration," he said.

During the public comment period, Durham resident Mimi Kessler proposed turning the parcels on Erwin Road into housing for the workforce, which she defined as those who work hourly in Duke and Durham.

Ghosh responded that UC zoning rules do not allow for "general housing" to be built, only residential housing for students and staff.

"I think that Duke is probably very interested in the [Unified Development Ordinance] rewrite ... to provide residential housing," he said. "I think they recognize — like probably many of you — that there are a lot of people that work at Duke who live in Durham, and they can't actually provide housing for those folks."

The motion was passed 5-2 in favor of approving the rezoning application, with Councilmembers Nate Baker and Chelsea Cook voting against it.

Hurricane Helene aid

Council members acknowledged the ongoing recovery efforts across western North Carolina in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene and emphasized the role of local policy in promoting environmental security.

"My heart is really breaking for these communities. The loss of life, the loss of housing, the loss of economic security, the loss of potential many rights, voting rights being one of those, tenant security and housing and labor rights — all of these things potentially lost or made harder for folks in the western part of our state in surrounding areas," Cook said.

Cook noted that while most policies to combat climate change are enacted at the federal level, local officials have "a lot of control over mitigation of the impacts of these storms." She called on Durham to "think about development smarter" when making policies surrounding land use, pointing to recent decisions that have allowed for "mass clear-cutting of forests and the leveling and destruction of natural land."

Mayor Leonardo Williams, Mayor Pro Tempore Mark-Anthony Middleton and Councilmembers Javiera Caballero, DeDreana Freeman, Carl Rist and Baker all echoed Cook's message and the need to support western North Carolina.

"Let us continue to pray, and after we say amen when we pray, let us continue to send supplies and money and resources," Middleton said. "It's going to be a long, long time before we get back to a semblance of normalcy."

Deputy City Manager Bo Ferguson broke down the contributions that the City of Durham has made to the relief effort thus far, which have included a 7-person water management crew sent to the affected area with city equipment to assist with waterline repairs and easement clearing and several Durham Fire Department teams sent to aid in search and rescue operations. He also pointed to a volunteer supply drive organized by the Durham Police Department.

In other business

The council approved four zoning and annexation requests: a temporary construction easement at River Forest Park, annexation of the Yates Road right of way, annexation of Bristlewood right of way, annexation of Parmer Edge and a zoning map change of Sunrock Camden.

All items passed unanimously, except for the annexation of Parmer Edge, which passed 5-2, with Councilmembers Baker and Dedreana Freemen voting no.

The council made a number of ceremonial proclamations, including for Minority Enterprise Development (MED) Week, Digital Inclusion Week, National Customer Service Week and Durham Housing Authority Day, which recognizes the 75th anniversary of the incorporation of the Durham Housing Authority on Oct. 8.

Cook, Middleton and Williams all acknowledged the one-year mark of the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attacks on southern Israel and condemned the ongoing violence of the Israel-Hamas war.

Rist spoke in memory of Joel Fleishman, founding director of Duke's Sanford School of Public Policy and namesake of the Fleishman House, who recently died at age 90.

"Joel Fleishman was a visionary leader and an incomparable force of nature ... who had probably as much influence arguably on the growth of Duke University as anyone in the last 50 years," Rist said. "... May his memory be a blessing."

Cook acknowledged the start of early voting next week and encouraged Durham residents to vote early.

"We have seen some drastic changes in terms of how the ballots are prepared, in terms of ID requirements [and] in terms of voters being purged from the rolls," she said. "If you vote early, that is your opportunity to address issues. This is the safest time to vote."

Williams also	recognized a	a Duke sophomore	who was	recently	hired a	s a co	mmunica	tions inte	ern in	the ma	ayor's
office.											

Aseel Ibrahim | Associate News Editor

Aseel Ibrahim is a Trinity sophomore and an associate news editor for the news department.

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