

251 buildings with major damage in Burke

County launches damage website

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In Burke County, 251 buildings had major damage after Hurricane Helene hit the area as a tropical storm on Sept. 27.

Another 34 buildings were destroyed, according to a new Burke County damage assessment dashboard. One hundred and fifty-three homes had minor damage and 31 were mildly affected.

The majority of damaged buildings were in Morganton. Eight buildings were destroyed in town. Near Glen Alpine, a row of 10 homes was destroyed along Powerhouse Road, according to the dashboard.

The data was collected by 10 teams throughout the county, according to the county.

Burke County announced the damage dashboard and a Hurricane Helene informational page at a press conference on Wednesday. The page, www.burkenc.org/26000/Hurricane-Helene, has information about private wells and FEMA help.

During the press conference, Burke County, Morganton, Drexel and Valdese officials updated residents about the impact of Hurricane Helene damage and thanked people who worked to get the area back to a semblance of normal.

"I'm incredibly proud of our team and how they responded

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To make a donation or learn more, visit www.cfburkecounty.org/grants.html.

from the time the board of commissioners issued an emergency declaration up until now," said Scott Mulwee, vice chairman of the Burke County Board of Commissioners. "They all worked tirelessly, selflessly and with an abundance of courage and compassion throughout this event. We owe them a tremendous debt of gratitude.

"I also want to commend our community for its resilience throughout this event, and for the generosity of individuals, civic and faith organizations and our local business community. It's been amazing."

County Manager Brian Epley said there is still only one confirmed death caused by the storm, which involved a vehicle accident with a downed tree where there was heavy damage.

Epley said during the storm the county 911 center was inundated with 4,300 calls and at one point, the 911 system went down but the backup system worked as designed. About 300 calls during that time were rerouted to Catawba County's 911 system, he said.

From 48 to 72 hours after the storm, 75 swift-water calls were made to homes and bridges. Ep-



SHARON MCBRAYNER, THE NEWS HERALD

Burke County Manager Brian Epley speaks during a press conference Wednesday to update residents about damage and recovery from Hurricane Helene that ravaged western North Carolina.

ley said there were 330 wellness checks conducted, administering and deploying supplies like oxygen to high-risk citizens, insulin and a variety of other medications.

Epley said FEMA is in Burke County handling two functions of the agency. One is for individual assistance for homeowners and the other is for assistance for local governments.

Epley said agents called disaster survival associates will go door to door to those who have suffered damages due to the storm.

"So if you are on this map (of damaged homes), or you've met

someone who's indicated you have damage, these folks will come to you and start that process of the application to see how they can help," Epley said.

He said the agency is evaluating Burke County for a regional FEMA Disaster Recovery Center, where FEMA associates would set up a shop to help people in person.

Epley said the county is also working with FEMA on debris removal, reminding folks to put their debris on the curb and sort it.

In a move toward a more long-term strategy, the county has identified the nonprofit Community Foundation of Burke County

to accept monetary donations from those who still want to donate. Epley said the initial donation was more than \$100,000. Epley said all money donated to that fund stays in Burke County for disaster relief efforts.

The Community Foundation will make grants to nonprofits to help support housing, food and economic insecurities of residents due to the storm, Epley said.

Debris, scams in storm wake

Burke County Emergency Management Director Mike Willis asked residents to be patient with debris removal because it will take time. He said that long-term recovery from the storm will take years.

Willis said the storm will change emergency management in the state and its response to future events.

Burke County Sheriff Banks Hinceman warned about scams during this time. He said if someone shows up at a property offering to do work, residents can call the sheriff's department for a deputy to verify whether the person or group is legitimate.

"Don't trust people that just show up at your house," Hinceman said.

Hinceman said his department has had more calls from people suffering from mental health issues. He requested that people reach out to health professionals for help with mental health issues.

Long View teams up with Burke church to aid hurricane victims

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Hurricane Helene has given Christians a chance "to be the hands and feet of Jesus," a Burke County youth pastor said on Tuesday.

Amherst Baptist Church Youth Pastor Braxton Ervin was speaking about continuing efforts to help western North Carolina. He said the heavily impacted communities will need help for months.

"Missions is not only across seas," Ervin said. "It's right here at home, as well."

The Long View Police Department took a utility trailer full of canned foods, toiletries and clothes to Burke County to help victims of Hurricane Helene.

The Long View donations were taken to Amherst Baptist Church in Morganton on Tuesday. Amherst has been distributing hot meals in Morganton and taking donations to western North Carolina. The church is located at 1024 Amherst Road in Morganton.

The donations are going to Columbus, a town in Polk County, Ervin said. Columbus is roughly 30 minutes south of Lake Lure. Amherst Baptist Church is partnering with a church in Columbus which has a pastor who is originally from Burke County, Ervin added.

Long View Public Information Officer Heather Minor said 13% of the town of Long View is in Burke County. She said most of the donations have come from citizens and businesses in Long View, along with some donations from Granite Falls.

"Through all of this I have felt really blessed and lucky," Minor said. "And then there's a sense of guilt with it, too, because we did come out so unscathed and 30-45 minutes up the road, it's just like total devastation."

Two churches in Long View donated a total of \$1,460, which was used to buy supplies. The Word of Life Church donated \$960, Minor said. Another church gave \$500 on Monday, Long View Town Manager James Cozart said.

"What we are understanding is the need is changing to stuff to keep warm like blankets, gloves, hats," Cozart said. "We took that (\$500), and our deputy finance director went shopping with it. She just piled her cart full of throws, blankets, all that stuff. She got to the register at Walmart in Hickory. The cashier was checking her out and she said 'Now, when I get to \$500 or close to \$500 stop.' Everything in that buggy went through except for one little throw. She hit the total button. It was exactly 500 bucks."



XAVIER MARTIN PHOTOS

Long View Finance Director Melissa Lalonde, left, and Public Information Officer Heather Minor, right, seal a box of donated supplies on Monday.

Minor said the town of Long View will continue to accept donations at their town hall. Ervin said Amherst Baptist Church will continue accepting donations, too. Donations can be taken to Amherst Baptist Church at 1024 Amherst Road in Morganton from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. each day, Ervin said.

"(The donations) are very much appreciated," Long View Mayor Marla Thompson said. "We're hoping that they get to the people that need them. If anybody wants to donate, please feel free to drop off at any time."

Long View plans to bring another load of donations later in the week. Minor said a local manufacturing company is donating a 53-foot trailer filled with supplies.

"(A man) just called us and said, 'I live in Burke County. I work in Conover and my company wants to help,'" Minor said. "We were like, 'Yes, send it.'"

Minor said it has been incredible seeing her small town pouring out support for their neighbors. She said Long View has a significantly smaller tax base than Hickory. Long View had an estimated population of 5,207 in 2023 and Hickory had an estimated population of 44,415 people, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

"We had a mom, and her sev-



From left: Long View Public Information Officer Heather Minor, Finance Director Melissa Lalonde, Town Manager James Cozart and Police Sgt. Dylan Smith pack boxes of donations inside of Long View Town Hall on Oct. 7, 2024.

eral young children come by, and each child got to donate an item," Minor said. "And then our town manager got the opportunity to explain to them why they were needing to donate these items. It was incredible to see them come together."

Long View Town Hall is located at 2404 First Ave. SW in Hickory.

Sarah Johnson is the courts and breaking news reporter for the Hickory Daily Record.



Long View Deputy Finance Director Denise Collins packs a container of coffee into a box of supplies on Oct. 7.