

YOUR NEWS PALS

OCTOBER 2026

The Rant

SANFORD, NORTH CAROLINA

Monthly

Automatic License Plate Readers,
a.k.a. Flock Cameras, have made
it to Sanford, bringing the national
privacy debate to our backyard

WTF?

(Why the flocks?)

PERMIT ISSUED
FOR DATA CENTER

BIG ACADEMIC TURNAROUND
FOR LEE COUNTY SCHOOLS

MORE CANDIDATE
Q&A FOR NOVEMBER



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The Rant *Monthly*

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I thought I'd pegged you an idiot's dream. Tunnel vision from the outsider's screen.

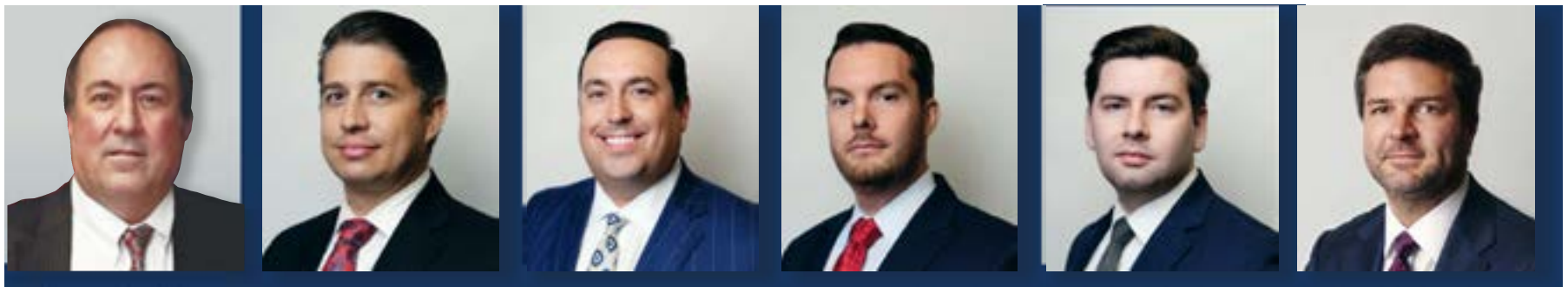


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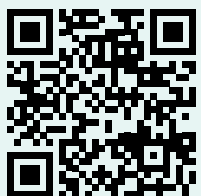
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LEE COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Parks & Recreation

OCTOBER HAPPENINGS

NEW

Check out our registration portal:
LEECOUNTYNC.GOV/MYRECPORTAL



GYMNASTICS: Register Oct. 5

Session 6: Oct. 26 - Dec. 19

- Cost varies with class length & skill
- All ages & skill levels

Gymnastics Day Camp: \$30

- October 15, 2026
- 7:30am - 5:30pm



SPECIAL EVENTS - FREE TO ATTEND

FAMILY MOVIE NIGHT; TOY STORY 5 - PG

- October 9th 5:00pm - 7:30pm
- Kiwanis Family Park



Rec & Rhythm

- New Community Event
- October 2, 2026: 5:30pm - 8:30pm
- Lee County Athletic Park
- Live Music - Dalton Davis
- Food Trucks, Artisan Vendors



Cornhole Tournament

- Benefitting Special Olympics Lee County
- October 2, 2026: 5:30pm - 8:30pm
- Lee County Athletic Park



Community Events (P&R attending)

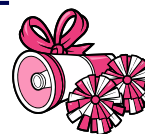
- Downtown Sanford Inc.'s StreetFest:
 - October 10: 10am - 5pm
- Sheriff's Office Trunk or Treat
 - October 30: 6:30pm - 9:00pm



PROGRAMS: Register Oct. 5

Courtside Cheerleading: \$30

- Girls ages 5-14 (6u, 8u, 11u, 14u)
- Tuesdays & Thursdays at 6pm



Parent's Night Out: \$30

- Saturday, December 12 (ages 4-12)

Ladies Night Crafting: \$25

- Friday, December 11 (ages 18+)



Cupcakes & Canvas: \$25

- Saturday, December 12 (ages 4-12)

Grinchmas Camp: \$20

- Friday, December 18 (ages 5-12)
- Bob Hales Center
- 1:00pm - 5:00pm



Grinchmas Mini: \$10

- Friday, December 18 (ages 2-5)
- Adult Participation is required
- Bob Hales Center
- 9:00am - 11:00am



ATHLETICS: Register Oct. 5

Co-ed Basketball; 6u = \$30; 8u = \$50

- Ages 4-6: Tramway Elem.
- Ages 6-8: B.T. Bullock Elem.



Boys or Girls Basketball; \$50

- 10u (9-10) Boys: Bob Hales Center
- 12u (11-12) Boys: Bob Hales Center
- 14u (13-14) Boys: W.B. Wicker Elem.
- 11u (9-11) Girls: W.B. Wicker Elem.
- 14u (12-14) Girls: W.B. Wicker Elem.

Fees shown are for Lee County Residents. A non-Lee County Resident Fee of +\$15 may apply.

2303 Tramway Rd Sanford, NC | 919-775-2107 | Monday - Friday | 8 am - 5pm   @LCGParksnRec



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"I'm running to be a commissioner who listens, speaks plainly, and puts Lee County families first by growing responsibly, investing in our schools, supporting our first responders, and spending wisely so our kids can build their futures right here at home.

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OPINION

EDITORIAL

Important mid-term vote right around the corner

The 2026 election is here. The votes won't be counted until Nov. 3, but early voting begins in Lee County on Oct. 15. Months into one of the more consequential years in recent local political history, you can go and make your voice heard.

When it comes to county government, particularly the Board of Commissioners, most of Lee County has clear choices. The only uncontested race on the ballot is for the board's District 3 seat, currently occupied by Republican Andre Knecht. Districts 1, 2 and 4 all feature two candidates from which to choose.

On the school board, you can choose up to three candidates. And while there's only one Democrat in the race against three Republicans — meaning partisan control of the board can't shift as a result of this election — voters still face an important choice in whether that body will continue to lack any alternative view on most major issues.

Over the last two months, we've asked questions of the candidates who will appear on Lee County ballots (specifically, those running for the board of county commissioners, the school board, and the state legislature) about their platforms, and published the answers in this paper. These local candidates don't generate a lot of coverage from bigger outlets, and beyond the letters beside their names, many people don't know much about who they are or what their priorities will be if they win office. We hope you'll take a few minutes to read their words about how they hope to approach the issues that impact your life if they win, and cast your vote accordingly.

And the earlier you make your choice and cast your vote, the less you'll have to think about it. The bigger campaigns look at voter data every day, will know you've been to the polls, and remove you from their contact lists. You might not be able to stop the TV commercials, but the mailers, the text messages, the knocks on your doors should dry up. Election Day is Nov. 3, but you can responsibly put it out of your mind almost three weeks before that.

Early voting is available from 8 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. on weekdays between Oct. 15 and Oct. 30 at the Hales Center (147 McIver St.) and the McSwain Center (2420 Tramway Road). The same two locations will also be open from 1 to 4 p.m. on Sunday, Oct. 18 and from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 31.

COLUMN

AI slop and digital sameness

By Billy Liggett

Artificial intelligence is front and center in the global news cycle, mostly because of expert predictions that it will kill us all (or at least try) in the next five years or so.

I'll welcome our impending doom, if only because I will never again have to lay eyes on another AI slop poster or flyer.

You know what I speak of. My mere mention of it likely has you envisioning the bold, slightly tilted brush fonts accompanying glossy AI-generated images and way too much going on in terms of colors, words and information.

Our schools are using them, our local governments are using them, and our local businesses (even some of our advertisers) are using them. All have traded in their brand awareness and individuality for a little bit of time saved to design something and do it right.

“Your AI flyer makes it look like you're running some sort of scam.”

— @twisteddoodles —

As a graphic designer myself (*The Rant doesn't just fall from a tree*), this pains me. AI slop posters are to advertising and social media as those jingle-laden pharmaceutical commercials are to television. At some point, they all blend together, and the consumer has no idea what they're looking at.

Don't get me wrong, I get why people use it. For all of my skepticism toward artificial intelligence, I'm not immune to its convenience. While it will be a cold day in hell before I use it to write a story, I have leaned on our robot overlords for other areas of my life — AI walked me through some recent health issues (chronic back pain) and gave me some great advice on how to approach things with my doctor. AI helps me keep stats on the soccer team I coach and even suggests things I could do differently based on those stats (did I follow its advice ... I will

never tell). And AI isn't bad when it comes to settling debates with someone in real time — its answers are more thorough than a simple Google search. You just have to trust that the information is correct.

But the AI slop flyers, they will be the true downfall of human existence. We're already getting dumber as a society (math scores have fallen for students who have relied on AI), and now we're getting far less creative.

And that's what truly gets to me. The first time I saw an AI-created advertisement with that brush font and glossy feel, I thought to myself, “This [school/business/organization] finally hired a designer,” because what did I know? Seeing the same flyer for the 3,000th time in the last year, I now think, “This [school/business/organization] needs a designer.” It baffles me that organizations are still leaning on this and not realizing that this “look” only tells consumers that they took the path of least resistance.

There's a better-than-zero chance that some or many of you reading this have created these flyers, and there's a better-than-zero chance I've offended some of you by calling you lazy and void of individuality. I accept that. This is a hill I'll die on.

A big part of me thinks that one day we as humans will look back on this very strange period of time and feel “ick” toward AI-generated content (along with the MAGA movement, holding our phones up at concerts and sporting events instead of just watching them, broccoli haircuts and vaping.)

Until then, help me buck the trend. Hire a designer ... or at least tell ChatGPT to try something new.



The future of Central Carolina is a responsibility we share

By Brian Davis, Faye Cress, Xavier Ellis,
Kyle Shipp, Barber Holmes, Steve Wicker,
Joe Wolf and Kirk Bradley

Guest Column

Every strong community is built on shared investment. We invest in businesses because they create opportunity. We support schools because they prepare the next generation. We strengthen churches and faith communities because they nurture hope and compassion. We volunteer through civic organizations because we believe we are stronger together.

And we invest in children because they are our future.

For 30 years, Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Carolina has helped shape that future by providing young people across Lee, Chatham and Harnett counties with safe places to learn, caring mentors, academic support, healthy meals and opportunities to build confidence and character. The impact reaches beyond the walls of the Clubhouses.

Parents can work knowing their children are safe after school. Students gain the skills and encouragement they need to succeed. Young people develop into future employees, business owners, educators, first responders, military members and community leaders.

That is why supporting organizations like Boys & Girls Clubs is more than an act of generosity — it is an investment in the long-term strength of Central Carolina.

Like many nonprofit organizations, BGCCC is navigating today's challenging funding environment while continuing to serve children every day. Summer is the most expensive operational period for the organization and unfortunately also the time of year that they receive the fewest donations. They need our help to bridge the gap. This moment is not simply about one organization. It is about the kind of community we choose to be.

Throughout our history, when our neighbors have needed help, businesses

have stepped forward. Churches have opened their doors. Civic clubs have organized volunteers. Foundations have invested generously. Families have supported one another. That spirit of partnership has always been one of Central Carolina's greatest strengths.

Today, we have another opportunity to demonstrate that same commitment.

Whether you own a business, lead a congregation, belong to a civic organization, volunteer in your neighborhood, or simply care about local children, there is a role you can play. You can make a contribution. You can sponsor a program or event. You can introduce BGCCC to a new business, foundation, or community partner. You can volunteer your time or talents.

Or you can simply share the story of why investing in children matters. Every act of generosity helps strengthen the future of our communities.

As Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Carolina celebrates its 30th anniversary

this year, we honor the thousands of young people, families, volunteers, donors and community partners who have made this mission possible. Together, we've spent three decades building great futures for local children. Now, we have the opportunity — and the responsibility — to help build *Great Futures for the Next 30 Years*.

Strong communities are never built by one organization alone. They are built when businesses, schools, faith communities, civic organizations, nonprofits, and individual citizens work together with a shared purpose.

That has been the story of Central Carolina for generations. Let's make sure it continues for generations to come. Because when we invest in children, we invest in stronger families, stronger communities, and a stronger future for us all.

□

To learn more, get involved, or make an investment in the future of our children, visit www.centralcarolinabgc.org.



OCT 15 - NOV 1

COVER STORY

FLOCK THIS WAY

SANFORD POLICE HAVE INSTALLED AUTOMATIC LICENSE PLATE READERS (FLOCK CAMERAS) THROUGHOUT THE CITY, BRINGING THE NATIONAL PRIVACY DEBATE TO OUR LOCAL ROADS

BY GORDON ANDERSON

Wherever you go, there you are. And if you've been driving around on a public roadway in much of America in recent years, it's become more and more likely you've passed by a camera reading your license plate information and potentially sending it to a law enforcement database. Across the U.S., "automatic license plate readers" (ALPRs) have become increasingly common in the past decade — cameras that are capable of not just photographing vehicles moving along roadways, but also of recording their license plates and making that information accessible to law enforcement.

The cameras don't just photograph vehicles police are looking for. ALPR cameras capture license plates of any passing vehicles and transmit the information electronically.

One particular company, Flock Safety, has become a major player in ALPRs — so much so that "Flock cameras" has become almost synonymous with the technology (that's not quite the case, as there are several other companies with similar technology, including Vigilant Solutions, PlateSmart, Genetec, and more). Founded in 2017, Flock now has a nationwide footprint which includes at least 100,000 cameras used by thousands of law enforcement agencies, as well as businesses and private communities.

Sanford is one of those communities.



While advocates say Flock Safety cameras useful for a variety of law enforcement purposes, critics have raised concerns about the routine collection of location information from people suspected of no crime, how widely that information can be shared, and the potential for abuse by individual officers. *Photo: WikiCommons*

The Sanford Police Department entered into a \$53,900 agreement for Flock license plate reader hardware and software in 2025, according to documents obtained by The Rant through a public records request. An invoice provided by the city identifies six standard Falcon readers and two Falcon Flex units purchased as part of the first year of a two-year agreement.

Where those cameras are located, however, the city won't say.

The Rant requested the locations of Sanford's fixed ALPR cameras, along with installation dates and records related to their deployment. The city ultimately confirmed the Sanford Police Department maintains a deployment plan, but declined to provide it or information showing camera locations, citing a provision of North Carolina public records law exempting certain security information from disclosure.

FLOCK CAMERAS IN SANFORD

Deflocktheusa.com shows 12 locations in Lee County with ALPR cameras.

- ❑ U.S. 1 at the Lee/Moore county line. This camera is logged as a Flock Safety camera, facing northeast, and was reported to the website in February 2026.
- ❑ Two cameras on U.S. 1 just north of Hawkins Avenue, near Pfizer's facility. These cameras are logged as Flock Safety cameras standing on either side of the highway. One faces south and one faces north. They were reported to the website in June 2026.
- ❑ U.S. 1 and Colon Road. This camera is logged as a Flock Safety camera. The website doesn't indicate when the camera was reported or which direction it faces.
- ❑ U.S. 1 between Wicker Street and the Carbondon Road overpass. This camera is logged as an unknown brand, pole mounted, and facing south. It was reported to the website in July 2026.
- ❑ Tramway Road just east of the intersection with St. Andrews Church Road. This camera faces south

and is logged as a Flock Safety camera. It was reported to the website in March 2026.

- ❑ Two cameras are listed on North Horner Boulevard just southeast of the intersection with U.S. 1, one on each side of the road. They're logged as Flock Safety cameras. The one next to the southbound lane was reported in June 2026, but no longer appears to be standing. The one next to the northbound lane of traffic is pole mounted, faces west, and was reported to the site in August 2026.
- ❑ Two cameras are listed as operated by Lowe's Home Improvement and placed at each of the entrances to the store's parking lot on South Horner Boulevard. They're logged as Flock Safety cameras and were reported to the site in February and April 2026.
- ❑ Two other Flock Safety cameras are logged in the same immediate area, one just southeast of the Horner Boulevard entrance to Lowe's which faces west (reported May 2026) and one near the intersection of Horner Boulevard and Seawell Street facing east (reported June 2026).



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Sanford’s adoption of ALPR technology comes during a time of increasing scrutiny over its use across the country. While advocates say they’re useful for a variety of law enforcement purposes — finding missing persons, recovering stolen vehicles and developing leads in criminal investigations — critics have raised concerns about the routine collection of location information from people suspected of no crime, how widely that information can be shared, and the potential for abuse by individual officers.

ALPR cameras capture license plates of any passing vehicles and transmit the information electronically.

The plate information can then be automatically compared with law enforcement databases and “hot lists,” and then potentially alert officers when a vehicle of interest passes a camera (those lists can include vehicles associated with warrants, stolen vehicles or tags, missing persons, domestic violence protective orders, sex

“Flock cameras are as if there are hundreds of officers standing on every street corner in America watching our every move. This is Big Brother in America.”

— Sanford attorney Chas Post —

offenders, gang activity or suspected terrorism, supervised prisoner releases and Amber Alerts or missing children, and when the system identifies a possible match, it can send an alert to officers).

Previously collected information can also be searched later as part of future investigations.

Raleigh, for example, says Flock helped its police department recover 154 stolen vehicles, clear 244 criminal cases and locate seven missing people between January 2025 and July 15 of this year.

But the concerns from detractors have

intensified following reports of law enforcement officers using ALPR databases for personal purposes, including to track romantic partners and acquaintances. A Washington Post investigation found dozens of cases in which officers allegedly misused ALPR systems, including 46 involving Flock; many involved officers searching for spouses, girlfriends, former partners or other women. The scrutiny has crossed traditional political lines, with civil liberties groups as well as Republican members of Congress calling for new restrictions on the technology. Some law enforcement agencies have sus-

pending or ended their use of Flock amid privacy concerns and public opposition. Flock itself has responded by announcing additional safeguards governing searches and data retention.

Sanford-based defense attorney Chas Post called the use of ALPR technology “a perpetual violation of citizens’ constitutional rights against unwarranted searches.”

“The Supreme Court has previously ruled that people cannot be GPS tracked without a warrant. This goes even further in that these cameras use technology to record the type of vehicle,” he said. “The argument that a law enforcement officer could see the same thing as a Flock camera and therefore Flock cameras are not an issue isn’t genuine, because Flock cameras are as if there are hundreds of officers standing on every street corner in America watching our every move. This is Big Brother in America.”



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The Sanford Police Department didn't respond to multiple requests for an interview about the department's use of Flock technology, and Sanford Mayor Rebecca Wyhof Salmon declined comment on this story. But *The Rant's* public records request did produce the department's policy on the use of ALPR cameras, which took effect June 26.

The policy describes the technology as an investigative tool rather than a traffic enforcement system and establishes rules governing when officers can act on information generated by the cameras – for example, an alert alone may not be used by Sanford officers as “reasonable suspicion” or “probable cause” for a stop, enforcement actions can't be based solely on an ALPR alert, and ALPR data is not to be used for traffic enforcement.

Additionally, the policy states that all data is encrypted while in the camera, in transit, and in the cloud. Searches of

the system are logged by date, time, user, and purpose of the query. In order for information gleaned from the system to be preserved for more than 90 days, investigators are required to obtain a preservation request or a search warrant. Officers are required to undergo “policy and system overview training” before they're allowed to access the system.

It's unclear exactly when SPD began using ALPR technology. The department's policy governing their use is dated June 26, 2026.

Sanford PD's cameras don't retain information indefinitely. Under the department's policy, Flock stores ALPR data for 30 days before purging it. During that period, officers can search historical data as part of an investigation into any type of crime, although the policy requires an officer conducting a search to enter a corresponding case number, and the searches are subject to audit.

Fall Into Something New

As the season begins to change and the leaves begin to turn, it's a great time to think about new ways to help your business grow. By becoming a Sanford Area Growth Alliance Investor, you set your business up for success in the months and years ahead.



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Routine maintenance today can help prevent costly repairs tomorrow.

And despite the city’s refusal to disclose the location of its eight cameras, the public has done some work of its own on documenting them. *Deflocktheusa.com* is a free website which lists more than 143,000 ALPR camera locations across the United States. It shows at least 12 ALPR cameras in Lee County, although at least one camera on the site no longer appears to be present.

There’s another wrinkle, though. Not all of those are Sanford’s, and not all cameras in use across the country are operated by law enforcement agencies. At least two of the cameras are listed on the site as being operated by Lowe’s Home Improvement, one of many companies known to use the technology. Additionally, homeowners associations have been known to use ALPR cameras, although *The Rant* is unaware of any in Lee County that do so. The Lee County Sheriff’s Office does not operate any ALPR cameras.

“There are no federal policies to punish or even track when one of the 140,000 law enforcement officers across the country with access to license plate tracking data misuses that information.”

— Raphael Warnock, U.S. Senator —

That being said, Sanford police do have access to even some cameras they doesn’t operate. The department’s policy states that Sanford police have access through Flock to ALPR cameras and security cameras “owned and maintained by private entities.” That potentially expands the pool of cameras available to investigators beyond the eight units purchased by the city. The records provided to *The Rant* don’t indicate how many privately owned cameras Sanford police can access, which private entities operate them or how frequently officers use them.

What also isn’t clear from the records provided by the city is how extensively Sanford police actually use that access, or how much the department uses its ALPR system at all.

The records describe in considerable detail what the technology is capable of doing and what officers are permitted to do with it, but provide almost no information about how it’s actually been used in Sanford. They don’t show how many license plates the city’s cameras have photographed, how frequently the cameras generate alerts, how often officers search historical data, or how many investiga-

tions have used information obtained through the systems.

And they don’t show whether the Sanford Police Department’s cameras have produced results like those Raleigh attributes to its own Flock system: arrests, the recovery of stolen vehicles or the location of missing people.

The extent of Sanford’s connections to the larger Flock network is also unclear. The records don’t establish how many officers have access to the system, which other law enforcement agencies can search information collected by Sanford’s cameras or precisely which of the network-sharing capabilities described in Flock’s contractual materials Sanford has enabled.

A search of Sanford City Council minutes from 2025 to the present day includes no references to Flock or other ALPR cameras. But SPD’s use of Flock cameras didn’t require a vote by the Sanford City Council. North Carolina law



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allows state and local law enforcement agencies to operate ALPR systems, subject to restrictions on how they're used.

Among other requirements, agencies using ALPR technology must adopt a written policy governing the system before it becomes operational. That policy — as Sanford's does — is required to address issues including data retention, sharing information with other law enforcement agencies, officer training, supervisory oversight, internal security, auditing and access to ALPR systems operated by other entities. State law also limits information collected by the systems to law enforcement purposes and prohibits use of the system for traffic enforcement.

In the Sanford Police Department's case, Assistant Chief Vinnie Frazer signed an order form constituting an agreement between SPD and Flock on Sept. 24, 2025.

So while the records provided to *The Rant* by the Sanford Police Department establish what the city got for its \$53,900, what the technology can do, and the rules its officers have to follow, what they don't show is how the system has operated in practice: How extensively it's used, what results it has produced or how broadly the information it collects is shared.

Those are questions *The Rant* hoped to ask the Sanford Police Department. But multiple requests for an interview weren't answered.

What we do know is this: Sanford has eight cameras that collect license plate information from vehicles traveling in the area, and Sanford police can search that information for up to a month after it's collected. How often they access that information, what they find when they do, and the role those searches have played in local investigations remain unknown.



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CATERPILLAR SAYS IT WILL INVEST \$1 BILLION TOWARD EXPANSION

Caterpillar announced on Sept. 30 plans to expand its Lee County manufacturing facility with a tax base investment of \$1 billion, the largest such investment in Lee County history. The announcement came weeks after the Sanford City Council and the Lee County Board of Commissioners agreed to an economic incentive worth more than \$85 million.

The county will give the company \$46 million, and the city will give \$39.5 million over 12 years, contingent on payment of annual property taxes and the company maintaining at least 1,950 jobs at an average wage of more than 65,000.

Caterpillar's investment includes plans for a new modern manufacturing facility in Sanford, designed to increase production of compact track loaders and telehandlers to meet customer demand. The project supports Caterpillar's Cat Compact strategy, which is focused on delivering a more streamlined and convenient experience for small contractors and growing businesses.

BOARDS SEEK GRANT FOR NEW MIDDLE SCHOOL

The Lee County Board of Education and the Lee County Board of Commissioners voted in September to allow Lee County Schools to apply for a state grant that would fund the construction of a new middle school.

The grant award would total more than \$86 million and require a 5 percent match from the county. The grant would not cover the cost of land acquisition. The project would see East Lee and West Lee middle schools combined into a single campus at an undetermined location. The schools currently total 1,029 students; a combined campus would serve up to 1,200.

Notification of the grant award is expected in November. If awarded, the project would have to begin construction within two years.

— by Gordon Anderson

Historic academic turnaround

All 14 graded schools show improvement as district posts widespread academic gains

Courtesy of Lee County Schools

Lee County Schools is celebrating one of the most significant academic milestones in district history following the release of the 2025-2026 North Carolina School Performance Grades: no district schools are designated as low-performing.

The achievement represents a remarkable turnaround. Lee County Schools had five schools designated as low-performing following the 2024-2025 school year. One year later, all five have exited that designation, bringing the district total from five to zero.

"This is an extraordinary accomplishment for Lee County Schools and something our entire community should celebrate," said Superintendent Dr. Chris Dossenbach. "It speaks to the tremendous work taking place throughout our district and, more importantly, reflects what can happen when an entire school system is focused on improving outcomes for students."

The results also place Lee County Schools among a select group statewide. Lee County Schools is one of just 24 of North Carolina's 115 school districts with no schools designated as low-performing for 2025-2026. It is also the only district in the Sandhills region with zero low-performing schools.

Sherry Womack, Chair of the Lee County Board of Education, said the achievement reflects the work of the entire school community and the district's commitment to continued improvement. "This achievement reflects the hard work of our students, educators, school leaders, families and staff across Lee County Schools," Womack said. "The Board of Education and administration have worked together to establish clear priorities, strengthen accountability and make thoughtful decisions about how we use our resources to support student success. No Board or administration can produce results like these alone; the credit belongs



Superintendent Dr. Chris Dossenbach credited the district's improvement to a greater focus on instructional quality, consistent expectations, regular analysis of student performance data and a willingness to evaluate whether programs, practices and resources are producing meaningful results for students. He also recognized the Lee County Board of Education for its continued support.

to the people who turn our plans and priorities into action every day. This is an important milestone, but it is not the finish line. We must continue building on this progress and remain focused on even better outcomes for our students."

Academic progress was widespread. All 14 of Lee County Schools' graded schools showed improvement in their School Performance Score, academic growth measure, or both. Six schools improved enough to move up at least one full letter grade, and no school received an F.

Several schools posted significant year-over-year gains. In fact, half of the district's graded schools increased their School Performance Score by at least five points in a single year. East Lee Middle School recorded the district's largest increase, improving by 14 points, while also posting the highest academic growth score in the school's history. Broadway Elementary and W.B. Wicker Elementary each increased by eight points, while Greenwood Elementary and Lee County High School each improved by seven points. Southern Lee High School and Lee Early College each improved by five points.

W.B. Wicker and Broadway both

ranked among the top 10 percent of K-5 elementary schools statewide for student growth. W.B. Wicker posted the highest academic growth of any school in Lee County Schools, while Broadway continued a sustained upward trajectory, marking its third consecutive year of strong gains in overall school performance. West Lee Middle School also exceeded student growth expectations for the second consecutive year, reflecting continued academic progress. Strong student growth was evident across the district as well. Eleven of Lee County Schools' 14 graded schools met or exceeded expected academic growth, including six that exceeded growth expectations.

"We are incredibly proud to see these results reflect the hard work happening in our schools every day," said Dr. Natalie Kelly, assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. "Progress like this does not happen because of one person or one initiative. It takes teachers, staff, administrators, students and families working together with a shared commitment to helping every student thrive. These results validate that collective effort while also motivating us to continue the work ahead."

Permit issued for data center on Lower Moncure Road

By Gordon Anderson
gordon@rantnc.com

The Sanford-Lee County Planning Department has issued a permit for construction of a data center on Lower Moncure Road, *The Rant* has learned. The permit, dated Sept. 25, allows for the construction of a more than 300,000-square-foot data center at 4015 Lower Moncure Road. It is valid until March 24, 2027.

Virginia-based PointOne announced the 90-megawatt data center project on June 8 in conjunction with developer Helix Ventures. The building will sit on 56 acres and be owned and operated when complete by Dallas-based CyrusOne. CyrusOne operates more than 60 data centers worldwide.

The permit lists the value of the structure at \$185,388,791. Kelsey Fehr, vice president of strategic operations and stakeholder relations for PointOne, said that number “represents that capital investment

for the building structure alone” without any equipment. She said CyrusOne’s capital investment in related equipment like chillers, generators, and sound attenuation, in addition to IT equipment from customers, brings the total value of the project to roughly \$900 million.

Regarding the issuance of the construction permit, Fehr told *The Rant*, “PointOne is committed to bringing a responsible, thoughtfully designed data center to Lee County in partnership with CyrusOne. As the project moves forward, we are focused on engaging local vendors and contractors where possible, helping ensure that more of the investment and economic activity generated by the development stays within the community. Construction is expected to begin this fall, marking an important milestone in bringing this project to life. As development progresses, we look forward to creating jobs, supporting local businesses, and generating broader economic opportunities in the area. We are

committed to being a responsible community partner and believe this project can make a positive, lasting contribution to the Lee County community while delivering the infrastructure needed for the future.”

The proposal came after months of speculation and even uproar in Lee County about data centers. The issue spilled into public discourse toward the end of 2025, when it was reported that a company called Deep River Data was interested in accessing natural gas from an old test well in order to power an AI data operation. Concerns about fracking, as well as potential adverse impacts from that project — which was never officially proposed or submitted for approvals — led local leaders to adopt a rule set governing data centers in Sanford and Lee County. Those rules, among other things, banned fracking-associated data centers.

PointOne’s announcement on June 8 was followed by still more protest of a data center in the area. Citizens packed

multiple meetings of the Lee County Board of Commissioners over the summer, using the public comment period to demand a data center moratorium as well as the addition of stricter data center provisions — most prominently provisions regulating noise — to the county’s Unified Development Ordinance. The board has so far declined to take up the issue, and chair Samantha Martin reiterated to *The Rant* earlier in September that the project’s fate would be decided by administrative review.

The permit indicates the contractor for the project will be Hitt Contracting of Falls Church, Virginia. The cost of the permit was \$76,591.20.

Fehr told *The Rant* in June that the project is considered “phase one” of the development, which would total 430 acres. The remainder of the development hasn’t been planned, she said, and end users and use types are currently unknown other than they would be light industrial uses.

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CANDIDATE Q&A | 2026 ELECTION

Editor's Note: Answers received from candidates running for local and state offices are unedited. All candidates received equal opportunity to answer questions posed by The Rant.

LEE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

There are three contested races for the Lee County Board of Commissioners this fall. In District 1, which covers central and parts of eastern Lee County, incumbent Democrat Robert Reives Sr. faces Republican challenger Louis Williams. In District 2, which covers eastern and northern Lee County, Republican incumbent Kirk Smith, the board's chairman until mid 2026, faces unaffiliated write-in candidate Jonathan Boyce. In District 4, which covers western Lee County, incumbent Republican Eric Davidson faces Democratic challenger Jamey Laudate. Davidson was appointed to the board to fill a vacancy; both he and Laudate are former members of the Lee County Board of Education.

Q: For months, citizens have appeared before the Lee County Board of Commissioners to express opposition to a proposed data center on Lower Moncure Road. Some have called for changes to the Unified Development Ordinance and a temporary moratorium on data centers. In September, a developer successfully challenged Chatham County's data center moratorium in court, allowing a data center proposal there to proceed. What is your position on the data center proposal in Lee County, and do you think a moratorium or changes to the UDO would be effective tools for the county in addressing future data center proposals?

Reives: No response.

Williams: No response.

Boyce: I am one of those concerned citizens who has stood with my neighbors who oppose the process of how this data center mega complex came to our county. I have been to the meetings month after month. I have spoken up. This issue shows why we need new leadership.

When citizens give their time to speak for our county, that takes courage. That shows they care about our future while defending our present and respecting our past.

Yes, there is a court case in neighboring Chatham County. But that story is not finished. Even if the case goes a certain way, it does not mean Lee County should wait. We can lawfully act and must do so to protect ourselves.

A full stop on all data centers could put us at legal risk. But updating our rules for future development does not. Our current rules let in companies that take more than they give. That must change.

We can and must do better. Let's update our rules so we have the legal power to protect our citizens. Let's protect our water, power, and land before saying yes. I have and will continue to fight for that change.

Smith: As a member of the Joint Planning Commission (made up of elected leaders, planning board members, and staff from Broadway, Sanford, Lee County) starting last fall, we initiated and completed a set of rules for the Uniform Development Ordinance concerning Data Centers. I supported the rule set developed for data centers as it is one of the first in North Carolina utilizing best practices from across the country. Senate bill 730 has incorporated some of our data center rules.

I suspect our neighboring communities with moratoriums are reviewing Lee County's rule set as they meet their moratorium deadlines. As for the Lee County moratorium, we already have rules in place, so there is no need for a temporary pause. Furthermore, I am not sure the taxpayers would be willing to incur the costs and expense of a lawsuit like the Chatham County lawsuit. The proposed data center will benefit the county taxpayers through increased tax revenue to sustain the impact of residential growth in the City of Sanford.

The members of the Central Electric Cooperative will not incur any rate increases as the Cyrus One developers are paying for the electric service upgrades. We all depend on a data center.

Davidson: As a member of the Lee County Board of Commissioners since July 20, 2026, I have been in meetings and discussions about data centers. For clarity, regardless of how many buildings (ten or fewer) are built on this site, legally, a moratorium will NOT apply to ANY of these buildings.

Three lawyers have attested to this. If future sites are considered for data centers in Lee County, our current UDO regulating data centers has been lauded as one of the first and one of the best in North Carolina. Our UDO is continually being reviewed for areas that can be improved, especially as new technology becomes available and UDOs are being written for other areas in North Carolina and around the United States.

Lee County has at least two standards in place that can slow or deny data center approval. One involves water, and the other involves electricity.

If our water source cannot provide enough water to meet a data center's needs, or if there is not enough electricity to power a data center, a data center is unlikely to come to Lee County. I am on record at a Board of Commissioners' meeting attempting to offer a motion for a moratorium.

Laudate: Generally speaking, it's not too much to ask the richest companies on the planet to take measures to protect our residents and our resources, or find somewhere else to do business. I will take any and every action that we have legally available to us, to limit data centers and their impact on our people and our resources. The state of North Carolina — by law — prohibits "down-zoning" (making ordinances more restrictive after they are already established), which could limit the county's options moving forward.

The current ordinance is flawed and the process was not transparent at all in my opinion, and I fear that Lee County has painted itself into a corner with the current data center. Specifically, the current ordinance doesn't protect neighboring residents from sound produced by the data center... we need to change that. But all of the above doesn't mean that it's impossible. I look forward to sitting down with County Attorneys, and potentially outside attorneys, to see what can be done.

Q: Lee County has experienced significant residential and industrial growth in recent years, with local governments frequently using economic development incentives to attract new employers and investment. What should the county's priorities be when recruiting new businesses, and under what circumstances, if any, should the county decline to offer incentives to a prospective employer?

Reives: No response.

Williams: No response.

Boyce: Our county has a special history. District 2 holds both our past and future. Legacy farms sit near new neighborhoods. Families who worked this land for generations now share it with newcomers.

We must protect what makes Lee County unique. Our farms and rural charm are not accidents. They are choices we made.

We no longer need to chase any business willing to pay or give unchecked tax breaks. Companies come, promise jobs, then take our resources without giving back. We already have something powerful. We have skilled farmers and

agricultural experts right here. Why not work with them? Agriculture is part of our DNA.

The SanLee Plan exists. It outlines who we want to be. But we keep building around it instead of following it. Yes, industry brings money. And so does farming done right.

If we say we value agriculture, we should make decisions that show it. New businesses must fit our plan, not the other way around. Let's hold ourselves and developers to that standard.

I am also actively looking into possibilities that will incentivize conservation and agriculture. This is an investment into the land that has long-term benefits for our county and its residents. When we reward stewardship, we keep our farms productive and our rural character intact. That is how we grow without losing ourselves.

Smith: As a former member of the Sanford Area Growth Alliance (SAGA) Executive Board, the Town of Broadway, City of Sanford, and Lee County strive to attract manufacturers that compliment, and / or do not compete with our existing industries.

Economic development incentives are one of the tools the Town of Broadway, City of Sanford, and Lee County have to offer prospective industries. Industry must agree to a set capital investment along with number of employees and salaries, (Cyrus One did not qualify for an incentive), to be eligible for an incentive. The SAGA Executive Board has rejected industries and manufacturers they felt did not contribute to our industrial culture and environment. We have successfully attracted differing and unique industries such as Astellas Pharmaceutical, Kyowa Kirin Pharmaceutical, STERIS PLC, blending well with our health sciences community.

This adds to the importance of the E. Eugene Moore Manufacturing and Biotech Solutions Center as Central Carolina Community College supports training for our local industries. Our priorities in recruiting new businesses must blend in with our community. The SAGA Executive Board continues working with the: North Carolina Department Commerce using Job Development Investment Grants, One Carolina Fund, and NC Biotech Center as funding sources.

Davidson: In most cases, Lee County Government does not directly recruit new businesses to Lee County. The Sanford Area Growth Alliance (SAGA) recruits businesses and industries to our area. SAGA includes a staff and a Board that direct the recruitment of businesses and industries that are a "good fit" for Lee County. Those factors include, but are not limited to, the number of jobs to be created and the average wage employees earn. The type of product produced and/or sold can be a significant

factor, as well as how a new business or industry intersects with businesses or industries already operating in Lee County or nearby areas. The best type of business or industry for Lee County is best known by the subject matter experts who are part of the staff of SAGA and SAGA Board members. Incentives to entice a prospective employer are expected in today's competitive environment. This doesn't mean that everyone who wants to come to Lee County will receive some kind of incentive. The incentive is a tool available to SAGA, but local government has the authority to offer it at its discretion. And, yes, in some situations, an incentive will not be offered.

❑ Laudate: Economic development incentives can be an effective way to create opportunities for current residents, when they are structured and used responsibly. Priority should be given to businesses that align with the goals of our current Plan SanLee growth plan, increase average wages, prioritize LOCAL hiring, without placing additional strain on infrastructure and services or increasing the tax burden on current residents. Incentives should come with clear, measurable expectations and accountability. If a proposed project cannot meet these basic criteria, public incentives should not be awarded.

Economic development should benefit the people who already call Lee County home while helping build a stronger economic foundation for the future.

Q: County commissioners make decisions involving millions of dollars in public spending, economic development projects, land use and other issues that can significantly affect residents. What, if anything, would you change about the way the Board of Commissioners conducts its business to make county government more transparent and accessible to the public?

- ❑ Reives:** No response.
- ❑ Williams:** No response.
- ❑ Boyce:** Building relationships is key to transparency. When residents feel heard and informed, they become partners in our county's success. That is how we create a better tomorrow together.

Some information must stay private for safety, security, or legal reasons. I admit I am still learning the safest way to balance openness with protection. That is why I want to collaborate with our citizens. This is solvable, and we must be smart about it. Our citizens deserve honesty, even if not every detail can be public right away.

Here is my plan:

- First, citizens should know when information is kept private and why.
- Second, I propose oversight committees of trusted volunteers with security

- backgrounds. They review closed-door materials and report what can be shared publicly. This builds trust while protecting what must stay secure.
- Third, we must verify that developers making promises keep them, and that citizens are not burdened when they fail to follow through. Consequences must exist for broken commitments.

Together, we can find that balance. When we earn trust through honest communication and real accountability, Lee County becomes stronger for everyone.

❑ Smith: Criticism that Lee County lacks transparency is unfair to county staff and the Board of Commissioners. The county shares public information and notices through its website, social media channels, and the Sanford Herald. Its website also provides links to the Town of Broadway, the City of Sanford, the State of North Carolina, and the federal government. Disclosure is restricted, only when state law permits the Board to meet in closed session. For example, when the CEO of the Sanford Area Growth Alliance briefs commissioners privately, the CEO must comply with a nondisclosure agreement required by a prospective business or industry considering Lee County. During my tenure as Board Chair, as a Free-Speech advocate, I insisted that staff provide additional public comment sheets overriding the policy of a 30-minute Public Comments limit on our agenda. As for land use issues, private property owners in the county have the right to sell their property to either business, industry, or housing developers. The housing developers desiring to maximize their land always request voluntarily annexation into the city to gain access to public sewer service. Once that voluntary annexation process moves to the City of Sanford, the County has no say in the action.

❑ Davidson: I strongly support being as transparent as possible in Lee County Government. Some situations cannot be discussed in public by law. These instances obviously limit complete transparency. We should remind the public each time these scenarios occur that, because of legal constraints, we can't be fully transparent in our dealings. We should continue to ensure all meetings and work sessions are live-streamed, as much as possible, and that recordings are available for people who can't watch or attend in person. The more we communicate what is happening and why it is the way it is, the more trust grows. Also, responding as promptly as possible to public records requests builds trust and confidence in our commitment to transparency.

❑ Laudate: In my conversations with constituents, I hear a growing distrust of local elected officials. Lee County residents have been told that growth would help lower taxes, yet tax bills have continued to rise. Projects like the data center have also left many residents feeling that what was promised was not what was ultimately

delivered. People are paying attention, and they deserve to be heard.

Lee County needs a Citizens Advisory Board that gives residents a meaningful opportunity to discuss and prioritize local issues, recommend actions, and participate more directly in the democratic process. Right now, the primary avenue for residents to be heard is through public comment at a commissioners' meeting, which does not provide the opportunity for an ongoing, two-way dialogue between residents and their elected officials.

The next Board of Commissioners will have an important responsibility to rebuild public trust and strengthen communication with the community. After 40 years in Lee County, I believe restoring that trust should be a priority.

Q: Lee County's population and tax base are growing, but growth also increases demand for services such as emergency response, public safety, recreation and other county facilities. Which county services or facilities do

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you believe are most at risk of failing to keep pace with growth, and what should the Board of Commissioners do about it?

- ❑ Reives:** No response.
- ❑ Williams:** No response.
- ❑ Boyce:** Some say we can afford growth. Others worry we are already stretched thin. Both sides want Lee County to succeed. The path forward is clear: measure our capacity honestly, then build to match it.

School capacity is an urgent need. With rapid growth coming, we must act now so classrooms are ready when families arrive. Planning ahead for what is evident is coming means no surprises and no overwhelmed schools.

Fire safety is another priority. New industries bring new challenges like hazardous materials, lithium batteries, and greater risk for larger fires. Our response teams need the right tools to handle whatever comes. Hoping an incident doesn't happen is not a strategy. Here is my plan to keep services ahead of growth:



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- New developments should help pay for the extra services they create. Taxpayers should not carry the full burden alone.
- Track our budget closely so we can spot problems early and fix it before it becomes a crisis.
- Use technology to help staff be efficient. This helps bring better results without unnecessary cost.

Growth should be a gift, not a burden. We can welcome families and industry while protecting what makes this place home. Let's build responsibly, together.

❑ **Smith:** This is precisely why we need the expansion of industry and commercial business in Lee County. Residential growth (77%) has outpaced Commercial and Industrial growth (23%). The bulk of the residential growth is within the city limits or property recently annexed into the City of Sanford.

According to our County Manager the ideal residential number should be 62% and industry 38% of property tax revenue. Today, the average single-family home generates in annual property tax revenue \$1,558. That amount is even less when you consider the rapid growth in apartment and town home complexes.

The 2026-2027 Annual Budget, Lee County's contribution for each student attending our public schools is \$2,522. Imagine the average single-family home with more than one child attending public school, that additional burden falls on fixed income citizens living in Lee County. The annual budget constraints placed on staff by the Board results in the Manager strategically deciding which departments receive additional employees to cope with the population growth in the County. Either the County attracts additional industry or commercial enterprises reducing the burden on homeowners or consider rate increases to continue to make "Lee County a great place to live, learn, work, and play."

❑ **Davidson:** I believe Lee County is struggling to keep pace with growth in at least two major areas. Those areas are schools and the jail. Because constructing new buildings or renovating existing facilities takes time, the situation continues to worsen in both areas. There is not a quick fix for either.

Another factor that we must address is how to pay for these facilities. Without shifting more tax income from people to industry, we will continue to struggle to fund the budget.

However, there is hope because more industries and businesses are coming to Lee County. In the meantime, we must spend and save conservatively and look for creative ways to lower expenses. I believe the Performance Audit that the Board of Commissioners has authorized will be a great tool to help us achieve these goals.

❑ **Laudate:** This is where a performance audit could be extremely beneficial. A performance audit would compare Lee County with similarly sized counties, including department-level staffing and budgets, to identify where we are in line with our peers and where spending may be higher or lower.

During my time on the Board of Education, Lee County Schools conducted a similar performance audit in 2022 and identified significant savings. The audit proved well worth the investment, allowing the district to redirect those savings toward programs with greater need. Lee County Government should do the same. The county's last performance audit was conducted in 2012, when the annual budget was \$63,082,264. The 2026-27 county budget is \$128,306,503—more than double what it was then.

With that level of growth in the budget, there is a lot to review and potentially recalibrate. A comprehensive performance audit could help identify opportunities to improve efficiency, control costs, and ensure that funding remains aligned with the county's highest-priority services and facilities, so that they don't fall behind.

LEE COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

There are three open seats on the Lee County Board of Education this fall, all elected on an at-large, countywide basis. Incumbent Republicans Alan Rummel and Laura Stryffeler are running for re-election, while Republican newcomer Karla Koballa and Democratic former member Patrick Kelly are looking to join the board. Voters may choose three

candidates, and the top three vote getters will win seats.

Q : What do you see as the greatest academic challenge currently facing Lee County Schools, and what specific steps should the Board of Education take over the next four years to improve student performance?

❑ **Kelly:** The greatest academic challenge facing Lee County Schools is ensuring that recent growth translates into sustained, grade-level achievement for every student.

We should be proud of our progress. Lee County Schools went from five low-performing schools to zero, and all 14 graded schools showed improvement in performance, growth, or both. But zero low-performing schools cannot be the finish line. Our next challenge is ensuring more students perform at or above grade level and are prepared for what comes next.

Over the next four years, the Board should strengthen foundations in reading and math by identifying learning gaps early and providing targeted interventions. We must use student data to guide instruction, direct resources, and measure whether strategies are working.

We must also recruit and retain excellent teachers and provide meaningful professional development that supports classroom needs. At the same time, we should expand CTE, college courses, industry credentials, and community partnerships that prepare students for life after graduation.

The Board must set clear academic goals and consistently ask: Are more students proficient? Are achievement gaps closing? Are graduates prepared?

Our schools have momentum. Now we must build on it and ensure every student has the opportunity to succeed in Lee County.

❑ **Koballa:** Our greatest challenge is making sure every child in Lee County has the opportunity and support to reach his or her full potential. There has been some encouraging academic progress, and we need to build on that success.

We should continue focusing on reading and math, early intervention for students who are struggling, and giving teachers the resources they need in the classroom. Using student perfor-

mance data to identify where additional help is needed and make sure our resources are being used wisely.

Every child deserves a quality education and the opportunity to graduate from Lee County Schools prepared for college, a career, or military service just like I did.

❑ **Rummel:** After nearly four years on the Board and seeing the changes we've made to make sure academics are the focus, I'd say family engagement is one of our biggest challenges in driving student success. That's why it's one of the four main focus areas of our strategic plan. Last year's results show that the district's work to use data and direct resources toward student needs is paying off.

But schools cannot do it alone. Families have responsibilities, too: getting children to school ready to learn, reinforcing expectations at home, and taking concerns about their children's behavior seriously.

Too often, schools are treated as an enemy instead of a partner. When parents automatically dismiss a teacher's concerns or excuse disruptive behavior, it undermines the classroom and affects every other child trying to learn. Supporting your child includes holding them accountable.

Given another term, I'll continue to personally advocate for families to be engaged in their children's education. I'll support initiatives that help families understand their children's progress and become more involved. Families should expect schools to do their part, and schools should be able to expect the same from families.

❑ **Stryffeler:** No response.

Q : Recruiting and retaining qualified teachers and other school employees remains a challenge for public school systems. What can the Lee County Board of Education realistically do at the local level to make Lee County Schools a more attractive place to work and to retain the employees it already has?

❑ **Kelly:** Recruiting and retaining great employees requires more than filling vacancies; it requires creating a school system where people want to stay. While the Board cannot control the state salary schedule, we can control how we support, value, and invest in our employees locally.

The Board should continue evaluating competitive local supplements and compensation for both certified and classified employees while ensuring available resources reach the people working directly with our students. We should also continue the partnership we have with the Lee County Educational Foundation Sloan Scholars program. Retention is equally important. We need to listen to employees about why they stay, why they leave, and what would make their jobs more sustainable. That means supporting strong school leadership, reducing unnecessary administrative burdens, providing meaningful professional development and advancement opportunities, and ensuring employees have the resources needed to do their jobs well.

Most importantly, we must recognize that our teachers, instructional assistants, bus drivers, custodians, cafeteria workers, support staff, and administrators are the people making a difference for students every day.

If we want excellent schools, we must create an environment where excellent employees feel supported, respected, heard, and valued. Recruiting brings people to Lee County Schools; how we treat and support them determines whether they stay.

❑ **Koballa:** Our teachers and school employees are incredibly important to the success of our children and we should do everything reasonably possible to support them. The Board cannot control the state's salary schedule, but we can make decisions locally.

The Board has already taken steps to improve employee compensation, including supporting a classified staff compensation plan and proposing additional funding for employee supplements.

I would like to see us continue looking for responsible ways to remain competitive, particularly in positions that are difficult to fill. Keeping good employees is about more than salary. People want to feel appreciated and respected. They want good leadership, safe schools, and to know their work makes a difference. We can support beginning teachers by encouraging experienced teachers and staff to mentor to those just starting out. By listening to employees, they can tell us what is working and where improvements are needed.

❑ **Rummel:** Speaking specifically to the local level, one thing the Board can address without waiting for more funding is student discipline. Pay matters, but so does what people have to deal with every day at work. Staff across the district deal with some wild things, and making sure leadership does two things is key:

- Give staff, especially teachers, the training and support to have tough conversations with families. When a student is acting out and disrupting the other 20 kids, the family needs to hear that clearly and be part of fixing it.
- Back staff up when those conversations don't work. When a parent decides their child's behavior is acceptable, that doesn't make it acceptable in a classroom full of other students trying to learn. We need clear policies and administrators willing to enforce them.

If someone is expected to be a punching bag (figuratively or sometimes literally) day in and day out, what else would we expect but for them to leave?

This won't solve every staffing challenge, but it's something the Board can take seriously right now. If we want good people to stay, they need to know we'll support them when things get difficult.

❑ **Stryffeler:** No response.

Q : Student discipline and school safety can affect both the learning environment and the ability of teachers to do their jobs. How would you assess Lee County Schools' current approach to discipline and safety, and what, if anything, would you change?

❑ **Kelly:** Lee County Schools has taken important steps to make our schools safe, and I believe we should continue strengthening those efforts. When it comes to discipline, we must have consistency, accountability, and supporting the teachers and staff who manage student behavior every day.

Students need clear expectations and consequences, and those expectations should be applied consistently across our schools. At the same time, discipline cannot simply be about removing a student from the classroom. We need to understand the cause of repeated behavior, involve parents early.

I would also make teacher input a priority. When disruptive behavior repeatedly takes time away from instruction, we need to listen to the employees experiencing it and ensure administrators have the resources and support to respond effectively.

We should continually evaluate security procedures, communication, emergency preparedness, and partnerships with law enforcement while also investing in counselors, social workers, and

mental-health supports.

Every student deserves a safe environment in which to learn, and every employee deserves a safe environment in which to work. Discipline and safety policies should protect both while keeping learning at the center.

❑ **Koballa:** I think safety in Lee County Schools is very important. The schools already have secured entrances, safety drills, anonymous reporting, and additional security measures at our high schools. Parents should be involved whenever appropriate and students should understand that their choices have consequences. At the same time, every child is different, and some students need additional academic, behavioral, or emotional support.

I would like the Board to continue receiving information about discipline and safety so we can understand where additional resources may be needed.

❑ **Rummel:** This is a good question considering my last answer talked about student behavior. I think the current approach is "better than many" in that the district has high expectations and does its best to enforce those expectations within existing laws. The problem is, the laws allow for abuse from students toward both other students and staff.

The Board created a Discipline Committee to begin serious discussions about this very topic. I've not been able to attend this committee personally, but I have been discussing a possible transition that would allow me to focus on this area.

❑ **Stryffeler:** No response.

Q : The Board of Education sets policy and oversees the superintendent, while the superintendent and staff are responsible for the school system's day-to-day operations. How do you define the proper role of a school board member, and how should the board hold the superintendent and administration accountable without becoming involved in day-to-day management?

❑ **Kelly:** I believe the role of a school board member is to govern, not manage. The Board should establish policy, set priorities, approve and oversee the budget, and ensure that the district remains focused on student achievement. The superintendent and administration are responsible for determining how those priorities are carried out through the day-to-day operation of our schools.

Accountability begins with clear expectations. The Board should establish measurable goals for student performance, finances, employee recruitment and retention, discipline, and other district priorities. We should receive regular updates, ask meaningful questions, evaluate results, and hold the superintendent accountable when goals are not being met.

At the same time, individual board members should not direct employees or attempt to manage individual schools. We should listen to parents, employees, students, and community members, but concerns should be addressed through the appropriate chain of command.

A strong Board-superintendent relationship requires communication, transparency, trust, and accountability. The Board determines what we expect our school system to accomplish and provides appropriate oversight. The superintendent and staff determine how to accomplish it. When everyone understands and respects those roles, the focus can remain where it belongs: providing the best possible education for our students.

❑ **Koballa:** A school board member's first responsibility is to the students and families we serve. Our job is to listen to the community, establish policy, approve the budget set priorities, and work with the superintendent to move the school system forward. The superintendent and staff are responsible for the day-to-day operation of our schools. Board members should respect that responsibility and not try to manage individual schools or employees. The Board must also make sure the goals we establish are being met. That means reviewing academic and financial information, asking questions, listening to recommendations, and evaluating the superintendent's performance based on clear expectations.

The best school boards and superintendents work together while understanding that they have different responsibilities. We may not always agree, but we should always treat one another with respect and keep the children of Lee County at the center of our decisions.

❑ **Rummel:** I love how this question defines the roles of the Board and superintendent. The Board sets direction, and the superintendent manages day-to-day operations to carry out that direction.

A big part of accountability is having both groups understand and respect those roles, and we do currently. When that happens, accountability is clearer because the strategic plan sets goals the superintendent is responsible for delivering on.

If the goals are not met, the Board and superintendent should discuss why and take appropriate action. That doesn't necessarily mean disciplinary action. It could mean providing an additional resource or supporting changes the superintendent needs to make in order to be successful. Either way, there needs to be follow-through to see whether those changes are working.

❑ **Stryffeler:** No response.

N.C. House District 51

In the race for District 51 of the North Carolina House of Representatives, Republican Charles Taylor, currently a member of the Sanford City Council, faces unaffiliated business owner April Montgomery. They are vying to replace Republican incumbent John Sauls, who has held the seat since 2016 but is not seeking re-election. There is no Democrat in the race. House District 51 includes all of Lee County and part of Moore County. Both Taylor and Montgomery are from Lee County.

Q : North Carolina expanded Medicaid in 2023, and the General Assembly has continued to make changes to the program, including new eligibility and work requirements. What is your assessment of Medicaid expansion so far, and what changes, if any, would you support in the next session?

❑ **Montgomery:** Medicaid expansion has done what it was meant to do: give working North Carolinians access to care they couldn't afford. Nearly 30% of our state, about 3.1 million people, relies on Medicaid, including roughly 725,000 adults covered through expansion. With unemployment at 3.5%, these aren't people who won't work. They're people in jobs that don't offer insurance or don't pay enough to buy it.

The new eligibility and work requirements don't make care cheaper or people healthier. They add paperwork that decides who keeps coverage. NC DHHS estimates 250,000 people could lose it, more than three times the population of Lee County.

They also overlook caregiving. My 88-year-old father-in-law moved closer to us. He isn't a burden but keeping him healthy takes real time. My husband and I have flexible jobs with good benefits, so we can be there. Most families can't. Making caregivers prove they qualify for a narrow exemption penalizes people for doing exactly what we'd hope they would do.

Coverage is only half the problem. Neither expansion nor these requirements address the rising cost of care, which affects everyone. As costs climb, fewer families can afford care, and public dollars keep flowing into a system where patients can't see prices, skewing any rational market response. Medicaid should be a bridge; letting people suffer because they can't afford care is inhumane. Keeping that bridge standing means lowering what care costs.

Next session, I would support passing Senate Bill 316, which cleared the Senate with bipartisan support but stalled in the House. Requiring hospitals to publish prices and give estimates

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would help patients lower costs and stretch every public dollar further.

❑ **Taylor:** Medicaid expansion is important due to skyrocketing cost of healthcare. Affordability is a huge issue especially with the underserved population.

Because of these affordability concerns we need to continue to assist people in accessing affordable quality health care. I do feel that work requirements should be mandatory for all able-bodied participation.

Q: As communities like Lee County grow, state and local governments face increasing demands for roads, water and sewer infrastructure, schools and other public facilities. What role should the state play in helping fast-growing communities pay for infrastructure, and are there changes you would support to the way North Carolina funds those needs?

❑ **Montgomery:** The state should partner with fast-growing communities and reward growth that makes the most of what we've already built. That means favoring denser development in our existing towns, where roads, pipes, and schools are already in place, over sprawl that is expensive to serve and eats up farmland.

But infill is harder to finance in small and mid-sized cities like ours, where local markets often can't support the cost of upgrading aging water and sewer lines. The Viable Utility Reserve already funds water and sewer rehabilitation, but only for systems in financial distress. I'd expand that approach to help growing communities that direct growth toward their town centers instead of outward.

I'd also allow local governments to adopt fair, transparent capital facility fees tied to the actual cost new development creates, so current residents aren't subsidizing growth. Local utilities can already charge new development for water and sewer capacity, but state law provides no similar tool for schools, roads, or parks. Communities front those costs with savings or debt, and in high-growth areas like ours, existing resources are strained, with limited opportunity to address them.

❑ **Taylor:** Currently in the City of Sanford alone we maintain 146 miles of road. We are behind on our paving schedule which is typically 15 years. The city gets unfunded mandates to maintain additional roads. One of the key issues in the next 10 years is balancing local control vs state control. This is a key item that I feel has been a struggle.

Lee County is behind already by 3 schools, also on the horizon is public safety centers for both city and county. Industrial growth has been strong and has paid for much the infrastructure needs. The area the state can

play an important role is that of "Growth and Retention", something that is currently absent in North Carolina Department of Commerce.

Q: What is one law or policy currently in place in North Carolina that you would make a priority to change or repeal if elected, and what would you replace it with?

❑ **Montgomery:** I would repeal North Carolina's sales tax exemptions for data centers, which cost the state an estimated \$50 million a year, and replace them with a clear set of state-wide good-neighbor standards.

In place of tax breaks, I'd set guardrails that every data center must meet. Closed-loop water systems. Clean energy that doesn't raise rates or reduce power availability for the surrounding community. No noise nuisance or public health harm. A decommissioning plan backed by real financial security, so communities aren't left with an abandoned building. And no tax abatements or preferential treatment at any level of government.

Whether a data center belongs in a particular community should be that community's decision. The state's job is not to choose for them. It's to make sure that wherever a data center goes, it pays its own way and operates as a good neighbor.

❑ **Taylor:** We need to continue to have more choice in education for middle-class families. In concert with school choice, we need to improve and fully fund public schools. There is also an opportunity to implement programs to increase longevity with our educators in the classroom.

Secondly, affordability of healthcare. Third, providing rate payers with a stronger voice in energy policy.

We also need to provide guidance to Counties and Municipalities on issues that are impacted at the local level. Good example is SB730 that started as an energy bill in the Senate but morphed into a Data Center bill. The state can provide so much guidance on this issue that impacts every county in the state.

We also need to make sure data centers pay their own way and support rate payer policy to protect any unnecessary increases at the same time support energy companies to develop and modernize newer technologies to create energy.

Finally, when 16- and 17-year-olds commit violent crimes, they should be tried as adults. As a result, I will support a change in the law to allow 16- and 17-year-olds who are charged with violent offenses to be tried as adults.

❑❑❑

Read answers to all questions from local candidates (including answers published in the September edition of The Rant Monthly) online at rantnc.com.

HANEY NAMED LCS BEGINNING TEACHER OF YEAR

Courtesy of Lee County Schools

Lee County Schools recognized Sarah Haney of Lee Early College as the district’s Beginning Teacher of the Year, honoring an educator who has quickly made an impact through engaging instruction, high expectations and strong relationships with students.

Though Haney is still early in her teaching career, colleagues say she already demonstrates the classroom presence of a veteran educator.

“Sarah is an incredible beginning teacher who brings a perfect combination of skill, confidence, and genuine care for her students to the classroom,” said Dr. Kisha Timberlake, Principal at Lee Early College where Haney teaches social studies. “She has a unique ability to keep students engaged and challenged while maintaining a calm, welcoming, and relaxed learning environment.”

Haney’s Beginning Teacher Coach, Anne Knuth, said that classroom culture is one of her greatest strengths.

“Sarah is an exceptional educator,”



Sarah Haney, a social studies teacher in her second year at Lee Early College, was surprised with the news that she had been selected as Lee County Schools Beginning Teacher of the Year for 2025-2026. Haney (center) is pictured with Superintendent Dr. Chris Dossenbach (left) and Principal of Lee Early College Dr. Kisha Timberlake.

Knuth explained. “She sets high standards and expectations for her students and because of the culture she has established in her classroom, students rise to meet those expectations.”

For Haney, creating that culture begins with relationships. One of her biggest challenges this year has been encouraging students to open up and engage in meaningful classroom con-

versations. She has responded by intentionally building trust and creating interactive lessons that invite students to participate.

“I build relationships with them, which helps us establish trust with each other,” Haney said. “Building relationships with the students to foster those conversations and designing fun and interactive lessons has greatly helped.”

Parade to follow new route

The City of Sanford’s annual Christmas Parade — which for years has followed a nighttime route along Wicker, Steele and Carthage streets — will take a new path this December, the city announced.

At its Sept. 1 meeting, the City Council approved Downtown Sanford Inc.’s request for street closures to accommodate the change. This year’s parade will begin at the intersection of Steele and Carthage, travel southwest along Carthage, turning left onto Vance Street, then left on Wicker Street and through downtown to Moore Street. After one final left turn on Carthage near Depot Park, the parade will end at Steele Street.

DSI says the amended route will hopefully “reduce the potential impact on the parade from the North Carolina Department of Transportation’s construction schedule for road improvements anticipated for the western end of the downtown district.”

According to the city, NCDOT is planning significant updates to Carthage between Wicker Street and Fire Tower Road, which will include the addition of sidewalks, bike lanes, concrete medians and pedestrian crosswalks. NCDOT also plans to install roundabouts at the intersections of Carthage Street and Wicker Street, Fields Drive, and Fire Tower Road.



Santa Claus will follow a new route at this year’s annual Sanford Christmas Parade in early December.



CCH DEDICATES ITS OPERATING ROOM TO DR. STEVEN JURISICH

Central Carolina Hospital lost a beloved surgeon with the passing of Dr. Steven Michael Jurisich on Sept. 14. A native of New Orleans, “Dr. J” was known in Sanford for his genuine care, compassion and kindness, forming relationships that extended far beyond the walls of his office.

Prior to his death, the hospital dedicated the operating room in his honor, recognizing his decades of service, surgical excellence, and unwavering commitment to patients and families in Sanford and the surrounding region.

The newly dedicated operating room serves as a lasting tribute to Dr. Jurisich’s remarkable career and enduring impact on Central Carolina Hospital and the community he has faithfully served.

“When I first met Dr. Jurisich, it was immediately clear the impact and leadership he has had at Central Carolina Hospital,” said Dave Santoemma, CEO. “I remember one of our first dinners together — we could hardly finish our meal because so many people stopped by to thank him for saving their life or caring for someone they loved. That moment truly reflected the trust, gratitude and deep respect this community has for him.”

Jurisich leaves behind his wife, Amanda Jurisich, five children and 15 grandchildren.

COUNTY TO UNDERGO PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Lee County will undergo a performance audit for the first time in almost a decade and a half after the Board of Commissioners in September approved a Florida-based company to do a review of the county's procedures and processes.

The county will spend \$149,000 to have Evergreen Solutions conduct the performance audit. Evergreen's proposal was one of 12 that ranged from \$79,000 to more than \$342,000, and was said at the board's Sept. 21 meeting to have scored the highest on the proposals for its mix of scope and cost.

The board approved looking into a performance audit during its budget process over the summer, and the 12 proposals came in response to a request by the county. Evergreen has conducted past performance audits for both Lee County and Lee County Schools.

BRUSH & PALETTE CLUB ANNOUNCES 61ST ANNUAL ART SHOW, OCT. 10-17

Sanford Brush & Palette Club announced it will hold its 61st Annual Art Show on Oct. 10-17. This year's event is titled, "Stepping Out and Stepping In!" and will be held at the Harper Center in First Presbyterian Church in Sanford.

"We are on an exciting artistic journey, exploring new paths and leaving lasting footprints," said Club President JuliAnn Robinson. "We are delighted to welcome both new and long-term members and look forward to sharing the beautiful work of talented artists from our four-county area with the public."

This year's show will feature a broad range of artistic expression in various media. New this year is a special county fair exhibit celebrating the excitement and distinctive experiences of the annual fair.

CONSTRUCTION STARTS ON TRANSPORTATION FACILITY AT LCS

Lee County Schools broke ground in September on a new transportation facility, marking the beginning of a long-awaited project designed to better support the employees and infrastructure responsible for safely transporting more than half of the district's students across the county each day.

District leaders, members of the Lee County Board of Education and Lee County Board of Commissioners came together with transportation employees, architects and contractors in a field just behind the district's current Bus Garage off Cox Maddox Road to break ground and celebrate the start of the project.

For over 50 years, Lee County Schools transportation employees have worked from the Bus Garage facility that was constructed in the 1970s, adapting to the limited and outdated space available as the district's bus fleet — as well as the requirements to keep them up to standard daily — expanded significantly.

"Today represents more than the start of construction of a new building," said Superintendent Dr. Chris Dossenbach. "It represents an investment in the people and infrastructure that make it possible for Lee County Schools to serve our students each and every day."

The new facility will provide the Transportation Department with modern space and resources designed specifically for its operations. The project is expected to improve the district's ability to maintain its fleet, increase operational efficiency, and provide employees with a better working environment to fill the needs of maintaining a modern bus fleet.

Lee County Board of Education Chair Sherry Lynn Womack reflected on the conditions transportation employees have worked through for decades and the significance of finally providing a facility designed around their needs.



Artist renderings of LCS New Transportation Facility scheduled for completion in late 2027.

"For more than 50 years, our transportation staff has made it work," Womack said. "They have made do with limited space, worked around outdated facilities, and they have found places to put buses, vehicles, equipment, and supplies along with everything else that comes with operating a school system."

Womack said the project represents much more than a new building.

Transportation plays an integral role in the district's daily operations. Transportation Director Justin Covert noted during the ceremony that with more than half of the district's total student population riding buses each day, classrooms and campuses across the county would look very different without buses on the road.

"There would be a lot of kids that wouldn't make it to school. They just couldn't get there without the transportation department doing what they do to make it happen," he said. "As long as there are buses on the road, there are repairs to be made, and we are going to do our best to make that happen each day."

LOCAL SALVATION ARMY ANNOUNCES RELOCATION

The Salvation Army of Lee County is relocating its Thrift Store and Service Center to a new location as part of an effort to better meet the needs of the community and strengthen its ability to serve individuals and families.

The current location at 1740 S. Horner Boulevard closed effective Sept. 30. The Salvation Army has transitioned operations to its new location at 1726 S. Horner, which is currently undergoing improvements and preparations to better accommodate its services. The relocation represents an investment in the future of The Salvation Army's presence in Lee County and its continued commitment to serving the Sanford community.

"We are so grateful for this community," said Dotty Dalphon, service director, The Salvation Army of Lee County. "We're excited about what's ahead. While our location may be changing, our commitment to this community remains the same."



**CCCC SOCCER
MAKES DEBUT IN
CONFERENCE PLAY**

Courtesy of CCCC

Central Carolina Community College’s men’s and women’s soccer teams made their debut as Region 10 conference participants in September — a big step up from the club team status they held last fall, in the program’s first year.

“There’s more hunger for sure, just because it’s our first year competing in conference,” said sophomore Johnny Jimenez, who is studying Information Technology at CCCC. “It means a lot to us to make a name for ourselves in our first year and really let a lot of the competition know who we are.”

Home games and practices are held at Lee County Athletic Park in Sanford. The teams have also been traveling to

play opponents such as Wake Tech, a neighboring rival, and Patrick & Henry Community College in Virginia.

Men’s Soccer Head Coach Brad McDougald said there are some highly skilled players on his team who may also get a chance to play at a four-year college in the future. “They’re playing for each other,” McDougald said. “They care about each other and they understand that they’ve got the chance to do something here that’s going to help them in life.”

Women’s Soccer Head Coach Giovanni Viana said this year’s women’s team has a mix of players who have experience with high-level competitive soccer and others who have played at a more recreational level. One of his standouts is sophomore Avery Lentz, who is studying to become a Physical Therapist Assistant at CCCC.

“It’s a great group of girls,” she said. “We all work very well together.”

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EVENT CALENDAR

OCTOBER 10

STREETFEST IN DOWNTOWN SANFORD

Downtown Sanford StreetFest, an annual celebration held on the second Saturday in October, brings the community together for a full day of music, food, culture, and fun in the heart of downtown. Stroll the streets and enjoy live music, delicious food, local vendors, artists and family-friendly activities — all showcasing the energy, creativity and diversity that make Sanford special.



OCT 2: Rec & Rhythm: An All-Star Celebration is a community-wide evening dedicated to honoring the volunteer coaches who build, encourage and inspire Lee County's young athletes. This high-energy event features live music, family-friendly activities, youth sports recognitions and a fun festival atmosphere. The night brings together families, athletes, and the community to celebrate the spirit of teamwork, service and play. Event runs from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Lee County Athletic Park in Sanford.

OCT 3: Grow and Flow Yoga at Kiwanis Park runs from 10 to 11 a.m. This free and rejuvenating yoga session will help you stretch, strengthen and center yourself in peaceful surroundings.

OCT 4: Hugger Mugger Brewing will host Yoga & Beer from 11 a.m. to noon. Join Sanford Yoga & Community Center for yoga in the quiet of the beer hall the first Sunday of every month and finish it off with a beer among friends.

OCT 4: Calling all alumni of the former Sanford High School, Sanford Junior High School and West Sanford Middle School ... join them for Alumni Day 2026 from 1:30 to 4

p.m. Everyone is invited to this event whether you attended the school as a teacher or student, as a family member, or a passionate supporter of the community. Learn More and RSVP: manncenterarts.org/alumni/

OCT 10-11: The Lee County Community Orchestra will perform at the Mann Center for the Arts at 7:30 p.m. on Oct. 10 and 3 p.m. on Oct. 11. Event is free to the public.

OCT 10: Chris Cole will perform at The Smoke & Barrel in downtown Sanford at 8:30 p.m.

OCT 10: Agape Lavender Lab will be on hand with their full collection of lavender-based products at the Sanford Farmers Market downtown from 8:30 a.m. to noon.

OCT 11: Second Sunday concerts at Kiwanis Park is free outdoor concert series held on the second Sunday of each month during the spring and fall at Kiwanis Family Park. Live music starts at 5 p.m.

OCT 12: Meditations on the Mat runs from 7-8 p.m. at Seva Yoga

in downtown Sanford. Join Gabby Murillo, Reiki master and meditation expert for a monthly space to pause, breathe and return to yourself.



OCT 15: Downtown Sanford will host Third Thursday Downtown Trick or Treating from 5 to 7 p.m. Downtown Sanford will transform into a Halloween haven for families and little ghouls alike.

OCT 15-NOV 1: Little Women will be featured on the Temple Theatre main stage. Experience the soaring melodies and heart-wrenching journey of the March sisters as they navigate the trials of the American Civil War and the triumphs of finding their own voices. Ticket information at templeshows.org.

OCT 15: Join Alchemy Wellness Center for a deeply grounding Medicine Drum Sound Bath held every third Thursday of the month from 6-7:30 p.m. This immersive sound journey weaves the steady, primal rhythm of the drum with intention, presence and collective healing.

OCT 16: Colby Jack & The High Lifes will perform live at The Smoke & Barrel in downtown Sanford at 8:30 p.m.

OCT 17: Sanford Parks hosts Honey Talk with Jody at 11 a.m. at Kiwanis Park's shelter. Master Beekeeper Jody Moore will share how Sanford produces its honey and teach fascinating facts about these important pollinators. After the session, stick around for a bee-themed craft to take home. Event is free.

OCT 17: The Mann Center for the Arts will host a Scholarship Gospel Concert presented by the Deep River Missionary Baptist Association from 4 to 6 p.m. (doors open at 3). Performers include SanfordAires, The Anointed Ones, William Sisters, Spiritual Legends and Armunda Handcock.



OCT 10: The 2026 Triple Crown Charity Car Show will run from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Dennis A. Wicker Civic Center. 1) Just like 2025, the show will feature three classes: Automotive Legends Exhibit — 31 Legendary Vehicles displayed inside of the climate-controlled main hall civic center. 2) Selects Display — 30 special vehicles that represent the best restored and custom-built vehicles in the area. 3) Open Class Car Show — Open to all makes and models of cars, trucks, motorcycles and more. Anyone with a vehicle can drive in, make a \$20 charitable donation, park their vehicle and have it judged by knowledgeable judges.

OCT 17: The Central Carolina Theatrical Arts Department will host a 5K Halloween Fun Run at 7 a.m. at Kiwanis Park. Entry fee is \$10, and costumes are encouraged (masks not permitted).

OCT 22-24, 30-31: The Boo & Brew Ghost Tour returns! Step into the eerie past with a self-guided culinary and historical ghost tour of Sanford, where history and hauntings intertwine. Hear spine-chilling tales of six ghosts said to roam the city's most iconic buildings, from restless spirits in a long-closed furniture store to mysterious apparitions haunting a former train station. Your ticket (\$25) includes a paranormal field kit and a free beverage voucher.

OCT 23: Erik Hawks will perform at The Smoke & Barrel in downtown Sanford at 8:30 p.m.

OCT 23: Next Stop Comedy returns to Wild Dogs Brewing in downtown Sanford at 8 p.m. Each month brings a new stand-up comedian with acts seen on TV and heard on your favorite podcasts. Visit next-stopcomedy.com to learn more.

OCT 24: Sanford Parks will host a ChalkWalk and Artisan Fair from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The event is a vibrant celebration of art and creativity, in partnership with the Lee County Arts Council.

OCT 26: MonkeyKat Books will host an Acotar 6 midnight release party from 10 p.m. to midnight.

OCT 31: Sanford Parks and the fire departments will host a Candy Drop at Kiwanis Park beginning at 4 p.m.

OCT 31: Sanford Farmers Market will host a special "Happy Halloween at the Market" Farmers Market from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

NOV 7: St. Luke United Methodist Church will host a Bazaar & Craft Fair from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Discover one-of-a-kind treasures and shop local this holiday season.

NOV 8: The final Second Sundays Concert at Kiwanis Park will run from 5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

NOV 13: The Mixtapes will perform at Smoke & Barrel in downtown Sanford at 8:30 p.m.



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CROSSWORD: The 2010s

ACROSS

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- 16. Real estate land unit
- 17. Enter user name and password (2 words)
- 18. *Instagram's parent company
- 20. "Fine by me"
- 21. Strong virile man
- 22. Caviar alternative
- 23. *Bruno Mars' hat
- 26. Highest-reaching
- 30. Before of yore
- 31. Quill-dipping vessel
- 34. Popular aquarium show star
- 35. Schoolmarm's whip
- 37. Neither here ____ there
- 38. Opposite of cation
- 39. Hurry up, acr.
- 40. Blood infection
- 42. Not corn or edu
- 43. Arranged in order
- 45. Inside info
- 47. Aye's opposite
- 48. B2C business
- 50. Hyperbolic tangent
- 52. *Katy Perry's 2010 hit
- 55. Battle royal

- 56. One R in R&R
- 57. Nightcrawler
- 59. *Hipsters' facial trend
- 60. Prima donnas' problems
- 61. Not in favor
- 62. Public promotions
- 63. Even, to a poet
- 64. CISC alternative

DOWN

- 1. *Pete Davidson's TV show
- 2. Ragamuffin
- 3. On a deck, perhaps
- 4. Cowboy, in South America
- 5. Popular warming drink
- 6. Chef's garb
- 7. Opposite of domineering and bold

- 8. Hindu serpent deity
- 9. Legendary King Priam's city
- 10. Chicken coop dweller
- 12. Taxi driver
- 13. Ship with a single mast
- 14. * ____ GO game
- 19. Spooky
- 22. Decay
- 23. Greek cheese, pl.
- 24. Remove from existence
- 25. ____'s, blended Scotch whisky
- 26. High rocky hills
- 27. Celestial hunter
- 28. Open disrespect
- 29. Sour-tasting
- 32. Capped joint
- 33. *Funko ____!

- 36. *Toy for the fidgety
- 38. Off kilter
- 40. Dirty dwelling
- 41. Specks in the sea
- 44. Oohed and ____
- 46. Atmospheric pressure line, on weather map
- 48. Military blockade
- 49. Fire-raising
- 50. ____ off on a golf course. past tense
- 51. Exclamation of sorrow
- 52. * ____ solo, Alex Honnold's feat
- 53. Raja's daughter
- 54. Baby fox and baby beaver
- 55. Business school degree, acr.
- 58. Habitual twitching

CROSSWORD

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2026 NC CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS VOTE AGAINST ALL THREE

Reasons to oppose each proposed amendment

01 VOTER ID

The amendment would put a photo ID requirement for all voters, including mail and absentee voters, in the state Constitution.

REASONS TO VOTE AGAINST

- Photo ID is already required under state law. This amendment would add the requirement to the state Constitution.
- Mail voters already must submit a copy of an ID or complete a Photo ID Exception Form. The amendment could add confusion or barriers to that process.
- The amendment does not itself guarantee exceptions for voters with disabilities or religious objections; future lawmakers would set the details.
- Military IDs cannot legally be photocopied. Deployed service members may also have limited access to a copier, and some older voters face similar access barriers.
- Opponents say rural voters, older voters, and people using ID exceptions could be affected disproportionately.

02 INCOME TAX CAP

The amendment would lower the maximum state income tax rate in the Constitution from 7% to 3.5%. The current individual income tax rate is 3.99%.

REASONS TO VOTE AGAINST

- The cap would lock recent tax cuts into the Constitution and prevent future legislators from raising the income tax rate above 3.5%, including during recessions, disasters, or emergencies.
- The biggest tax savings would go to people who make the most. One estimate says those who make \$770,000 or more could save about \$25,000, while those who make less than \$25,000 could save about \$34.
- Less state revenue could mean less funding for schools, teacher pay, health care, infrastructure, public safety, and disaster response. The source ad cites an \$18 billion annual funding estimate.
- Local governments could face pressure to replace reduced state support with higher fees, fines, or local taxes, offsetting household savings.

03 PROPERTY TAX LEVY LIMIT

The amendment would direct the General Assembly to create limits on growth in total property tax revenue collected by local governments.

REASONS TO VOTE AGAINST

- The amendment contains no specific formula, cap, or exceptions. Lawmakers would write those details after voters approve the constitutional change.
- Counties and towns could lose flexibility to respond to population growth, inflation, emergencies, and changing community needs.
- Opponents warn of reduced funding for schools, libraries, police, fire, EMS, parks and recreation, elections, transit, and other local services.
- Renters would not receive a direct property tax cut, even though they also rely on local services.
- Large property owners, corporate landlords, data centers, luxury apartment owners, and out-of-state developers could receive greater dollar benefits than typical homeowners.
- Because large companies own more valuable property, they could save much more than homeowners. One example estimates a \$33 savings for a typical homeowner and \$96,000 for Duke Energy from the same one-cent tax-rate cut. Another estimate puts homeowner savings at about \$84 a year.
- Lawmakers could instead give property tax help directly to seniors, people with disabilities, and homeowners with low incomes—people who may need relief most.

SOURCES

NC General Assembly: S.L. 2024-58, S.L. 2026-4, S.L. 2026-5; NC Department of Revenue: Tax Rate Schedules. Additional estimates and arguments: Carolina Forward, NC Housing Coalition, and You Can Vote.

SAMPLE BALLOT SAMPLE BALLOT SAMPLE BALLOT SAMPLE BALLOT

☐

Sample Ballot
Lee County, North Carolina
November 3, 2026

BALLOT MARKING INSTRUCTIONS

A. With the marking device provided or a black ball point pen, completely fill in the oval to the left of each candidate or selection of your choice as shown.

B. Where authorized, you may write in a candidate by filling in the oval and writing the name on the write-in line.

C. If you tear, deface or wrongly mark this ballot, return it to request a replacement.

PARTISAN ELECTIONS		NC Court of Appeals Judge Seat 3 (You may vote for ONE)	Lee County Board of Education (You may vote for THREE)
US Senate (You may vote for ONE)		☐ Craig Collins ☒ Christine Marie Walczyk <i>Democratic Party</i>	☐ Laura Stryfeler <i>Republican Party</i> ☐ Alan Rummel <i>Republican Party</i> ☐ Karla Koballa <i>Republican Party</i>
☐ Michael Dublin <i>Democratic Party</i> ☒ Roy Cooper <i>Democratic Party</i>	NC State Senate District 12 (You may vote for ONE)	☐ Patrick Kelly <i>Democratic Party</i> You do not have to vote for 3.	
☐ Shannon W. Bray <i>Libertarian Party</i> ☐ Michael Whitley <i>Republican Party</i>	☐ Jim Burgin <i>Republican Party</i> ☒ Tanya White Anderson <i>Democratic Party</i>	Lee County Clerk of Superior Court (You may vote for ONE)	
US House of Representatives District 13 (You may vote for ONE)		☒ Susie K. Thomas <i>Democratic Party</i>	
☒ Paul Barringer <i>Democratic Party</i> ☐ Steven Swinton <i>Libertarian Party</i> ☐ Brad Kontt <i>Republican Party</i>	NC House of Representatives District 51 (You may vote for ONE)	Lee County Sheriff (You may vote for ONE)	
☐ Charles M. Taylor <i>Republican Party</i> ☐ April Montgomery <i>Unaffiliated</i>		☐ Brian Estes <i>Republican Party</i>	
NC Supreme Court Associate Justice Seat 1 (You may vote for ONE)	NC District Court Judge District 12 Seat 1 (You may vote for ONE)	NONPARTISAN ELECTIONS	
☒ Anita Earls <i>Democratic Party</i> ☐ Sarah Stevens <i>Republican Party</i>	☐ Joy A. Jones <i>Republican Party</i>	Lee County Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor (You may vote for TWO)	
☐ Luke (Sawyer) Arnold ☐ John Gross ☐ Michael L. Gaster	NC District Court Judge District 12 Seat 2 (You may vote for ONE)	☐ Write-in ☐ Write-in	
☐ Michael C. Byrne <i>Republican Party</i> ☒ John S. Arrowood <i>Democratic Party</i>	☐ Travis N. Wheeler <i>Republican Party</i> ☐ Jason P. Kimble <i>Republican Party</i>	Lee County Board of Commissioners District 4 (You may vote for ONE)	
☐ Eric N. Davidson <i>Republican Party</i> ☒ Jamey Laudate <i>Democratic Party</i>	NC District Court Judge District 12 Seat 3 (You may vote for ONE)	☐ Eric N. Davidson <i>Republican Party</i> ☒ Jamey Laudate <i>Democratic Party</i>	
☐ George Cooper Bell <i>Republican Party</i> ☒ Tobias (Toby) Hampson <i>Democratic Party</i>	☐ Louis D. Williams <i>Republican Party</i> ☒ Robert Reives <i>Democratic Party</i>	Note: Your ballot will show only the commission race for your district. The three contested races are shown for reference.	
	Lee County Board of Commissioners District 1 (You may vote for ONE)	Continue voting next side →	
	☐ Kirk D. Smith		

SAMPLE BALLOT SAMPLE BALLOT SAMPLE BALLOT SAMPLE BALLOT

Lee County, North Carolina

November 3, 2026

Ballot Style 80014

REFERENDA

Constitutional Amendment

Constitutional amendment to require all voters, not just those presenting vote in person, to present photo identification before voting.

☐ For
☒ Against

Constitutional Amendment

Constitutional amendment to keep State income tax rate from being raised higher than three and one-half percent (3.5%).

☐ For
☒ Against

Constitutional Amendment

Constitutional amendment requiring limits on property tax increases by local governments.

☐ For
☒ Against

End of Ballot

LEE COUNTY • VOTING INFORMATION

EARLY VOTING

Hales Center - 147 McIver Street
McSwain Center - 2420 Tramway Road

Oct. 15-30 | Mon.-Fri. | 8:00 a.m.-7:30 p.m.
Oct. 18 | Sunday | 1:00-4:00 p.m.
Oct. 31 | Saturday | 8:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

ABSENTEE BALLOT REQUEST

Request deadline: October 20, 2026
votebymail.ncsbe.gov

FIND YOUR POLLING PLACE

vt.ncsbe.gov/RegLkup/
Lee County Elections: 919-718-4646

VOLUNTEER

www.leedemocrats.net

IF YOU ARE TOLD YOU CANNOT VOTE

DO NOT LEAVE THE POLLING PLACE.
In North Carolina, no voter should be turned away. You have options.

1. **ASK FOR HELP.**
Tell an election official you believe you are eligible to vote. Ask to speak with the Chief Judge or go to the Help Station.
2. **IF YOU CANNOT VOTE A REGULAR BALLOT, ASK FOR A PROVISIONAL BALLOT.**
You have the right to cast a provisional ballot if there is a question about your eligibility (registration, ID, address, precinct, or any other issue).
3. **NOT ON THE VOTER ROLLS? WRONG PRECINCT?**
You can still vote a provisional ballot. If you are voting due to the early voting period, you can also register or update your registration at the same day on site.
4. **ID ISSUES? YOU STILL HAVE OPTIONS.**
 - No ID with you? You can vote a provisional ballot and complete a Photo ID Exception Form at the polling place.
 - Have an acceptable ID but not with you, and can't get it in time? You can vote a provisional ballot and later take your ID to your county board of elections by the deadline.
 - If you do not have an acceptable ID, you may still be able to vote using a reasonable impediment (e.g., lack of the disability, work schedule, lack of transportation) and complete a Photo ID Exception Form.
5. **KEEP YOUR PROVISIONAL BALLOT INFORMATION.**
You will get a Provisional Identification Number (PIN). Keep it so you can check later to see if your ballot was counted.
6. **IF YOU ARE IN LINE, STAY IN LINE.**
If you are in line before the early voting site is closing time or before 7:30 p.m. on Election Day, you have the right to stay in line and vote.
7. **STILL HAVING PROBLEMS? GET HELP BEFORE YOU LEAVE.**
Call Election Protection for free, nonpartisan help: 1-866-OUR-VOTE | (1-866-687-8683).

☒ **DON'T LEAVE WITHOUT VOTING OR ASKING FOR A PROVISIONAL BALLOT.**

Your Vote
Own North Carolina

Paid for by the Lee Democratic Party

SOURCES: NC State Board of Elections | North Carolina Department of Justice | NCSBEinc.gov ncsbe.org Last update: 2024