

THE WILMINGTON CURRENT

**CITY OF WILMINGTON
FY24 BUDGET**

**WILMINGTON'S
FIRST URBAN
FOREST MASTER
PLAN**

**CLEAR RUN
BRANCH
STORMWATER PROJECT**

**NC YEAR OF
THE TRAIL**

**AFFORDABLE
HOUSING UPDATE**

WCITY OF
WILMINGTON
NORTH CAROLINA

**PUBLIC INFORMATION REPORT
FALL 2023**

UNDER CONSTRUCTION: CLEAR RUN BRANCH

The Clear Run Branch project is the largest stormwater capital improvement project in the City of Wilmington's history. The \$11 million effort will improve the water quality of Clear Run Branch, enhance the natural habitat, and mitigate chronic flooding around New Centre Drive and College Road.

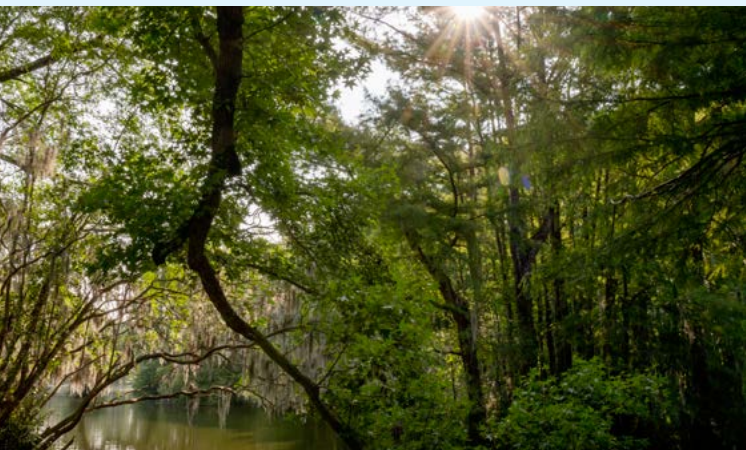
This is a two-phase project. The city anticipates the completion of phase 1 this October. Phase 2 will begin in 2025.

Phase 1: Install large box culverts (pipes) to convey stormwater under College Acres Drive and Mallard Street. This phase also includes major stream restoration and floodplain creation to increase flood storage capacity and improve the natural characteristics of the Clear Run Branch stream.

Phase 2: Install large culverts to capture and convey floodwaters from the S College Road/New Centre Drive commercial areas into the drainage improvements installed during Phase 1. This phase includes incorporating as much green infrastructure as possible to help filter out pollutants and reduce the amount of runoff flowing from impervious surfaces into Clear Run Branch, then ultimately Bradley Creek. ■



This new bridge on Mallard Street is part of the Clear Run Branch drainage project.



TREES & URBAN FOREST

The City of Wilmington, in collaboration with the wider community and stakeholders, has developed its first Urban Forest Master Plan. The master plan is an integral part of Wilmington's urban forestry program.

The included tree inventory and management plan are essential tools to help protect and enhance the city's urban forest. That is, the trees that surround us every day, including those along our streets, in city parks and natural areas, and those growing around our homes, workplaces, and businesses.

Taking inventory of these trees provides important empirical data for the city's Urban Forestry Division, which is tasked with maintaining an estimated 40,000+ city trees. The plan provides strategy for tree maintenance, planting, removal, and replacement. Additionally, it will enable the city to prepare for short-term and long-term resource allocation, and develop risk management strategies.

This plan is also designed to foster community ownership by engaging and educating residents on the environmental and social benefits trees provide. An abundant and healthy urban forest has been proven to help mitigate the effects of climate change and improve quality of life by:

- Reducing summer temperatures by shading and cooling streets, buildings, and the surrounding environment
- Improving air quality and the public health effects of air pollution
- Positively impacting our mental and physical health
- Providing homes, food, and shelter for birds and other wildlife
- Intercepting and absorbing stormwater and improving water quality of local lakes and streams
- Beautifying the community and creating a sense of place
- Protecting home and real estate values ■

Check out the full plan here!



4TH OF JULY

Approximately 2,000 people joined the City of Wilmington and the Wilmington Symphony Orchestra at Riverfront Park to celebrate Independence Day with fabulous fireworks and music! ■



WILLISTON GRADUATION

A legacy graduation ceremony was held this July to honor members of the Williston Senior High Classes of 1969 and 1970, who were denied the opportunity to graduate from their school when it was abruptly closed by the school board at the time. The City of Wilmington jointly hosted this event in collaboration with New Hanover County and New Hanover County Schools. ■

AWARDS: WILMINGTON MEANS BUSINESS

The same year North Carolina defended its crown as CNBC's top state for business, Wilmington placed seventh on the list of Tier 1 "Best-Performing Large U.S. Cities" according to the Milken Institute's 2023 annual economic report. ■

"Wilmington has long been known for leisure and hospitality, but this ranking demonstrates our investments in job creation and economic development are paying off in a big way. Our resilient tourism market was a big contributor to our post-pandemic rebound, but also our local economy has become much more diverse thanks to significant investments in health services and technology. We have achieved a stronger and more dynamic workforce, which provides a good talent pool for employers, attracts new industry with competitive wages, and creates new opportunities for residents. Wilmington is not only competing regionally or even nationally, but we are competing and succeeding on a global scale to bring jobs, opportunity, and prosperity home to this community."

MAYOR BILL SAFFO

FILM CORNER

Dark Horse studios recently announced it will build 40,000 square feet of new stage space at its existing campus located off Market Street. The additional space will double the studio's size and enable it to accommodate twice as many productions annually. This expansion further solidifies Wilmington's position as one of the premier filming locations in the country. ■



FUTURE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Help us shape the future of transportation in the Wilmington region by participating in the newly-launched Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050 plan by the Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (WMPO).

This long-range transportation plan will be used by federal, state, and local government to guide transportation projects in our region for the next 25 years.

The plan will examine all possible transportation projects, including aviation, bicycle, pedestrian, ferry/water, rail, public, and roadway transportation to meet the needs of the growing Wilmington region, which includes New Hanover County and parts of Brunswick and Pender counties.

We need your input. Residents can offer their ideas by visiting the plan's website at wmpo.org/2050mtp/ to fill out a survey in English or Spanish and pinpoint trouble spots on an interactive map. The survey and map will be available until November 30, 2023.

A long-range metropolitan transportation plan for the region is federally required and must be updated every five years. **Please visit wmpo.org/2050mtp/ for more information about the Cape Fear Navigating Change 2050 plan.** ■

We need your input!



AFFORDABLE HOUSING



Tiny home community Eden Village

In recent years, the City of Wilmington has grown in both popularity and population. This growth speaks to Wilmington's desirability as a place to live, work, and play. It also presents challenges, including preserving and creating affordable housing opportunities.

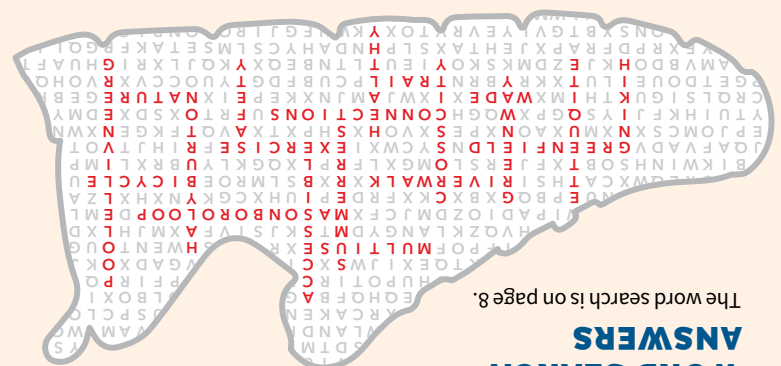
The city continues to make great strides towards addressing these challenges with this year's contribution of over \$16 million in gap financing towards future units in Starway Village, Sterling Reserve, Canopy Point, and Driftwood Apartments.

Additionally, City Council voted in July to authorize the Wilmington Housing Authority to issue \$37.1 million in bonds for the development of Starway Village. This action underscores the goal to provide 278 units of affordable multi-family housing on the site of the former Starway Flea Market and sets a precedent for future projects.

City Council also voted to transfer ownership of two surplus properties to Cape Fear Habitat for Humanity to expand affordable housing. Similarly, the former Fire Station 6 on Carolina Beach Road has been donated to the Good Shepherd Center for development.

Finally, June marked the opening celebration for Eden Village, a tiny home community that helps the chronically unhoused. The city has donated \$250,000, including the proceeds from the sale of Optimist Park, toward the thirty-one tiny solar-powered homes. This neighborhood will offer a safe, supportive, and permanent environment for residents that will aid in transition from the streets to stability.

It is with a longstanding commitment to projects like these that the city is yielding real results and greatly expanding the local promise of opportunity and affordable quality of life. ■



CITY OF WILMINGTON FY24 BUDGET

At its June 20 regular meeting, Wilmington City Council voted to adopt the FY24 city budget. The FY24 budget took effect on July 1, the first day of the city's fiscal year. The \$351 million balanced budget is guided by the city's strategic priorities, which include increasing affordable housing opportunities, modernizing the city's infrastructure, and actively preparing for the city's future needs and growing demands on city services. The tax rate under the new budget remains unchanged. ■

 [Learn more: wilmingtonnc.gov/budget](https://wilmingtonnc.gov/budget)

Here are the key takeaways:

PRIORITIZING AFFORDABLE HOUSING:

Council is investing \$2.2 million to continue supporting and growing affordable housing programs, including the Homeownership Opportunity Program, a new program under the Healthy Homes umbrella, and gap financing for eligible developments that provide affordable housing opportunities.



PAVING THE WAY TO IMPROVED INFRASTRUCTURE:

Council continues to fund infrastructure needs to support our growing city. The FY24 budget allocates \$16.2 million for street and sidewalk preservation and maintenance projects. This includes \$8 million allocated to the Street Rehabilitation program, which represents a 33% increase (\$2 million) in funding for an additional 8-10 lane miles of rehabilitated pavement.

INVESTING IN THE WILMINGTON COMMUNITY:

We have a shared responsibility to invest in the valuable work of local non-profits, faith-based organizations, and other community-building programs that support our community's well-being. That's why the budget allocates just over \$2 million for local non-profits, human service agencies, civic partnerships, public cultural events, and economic development partnerships.



PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE:

The budget actively prepares for Wilmington's future by funding the purchase of a 12.5-acre office campus in northern downtown, which will add 1,000+ public parking spaces near Riverfront Park, consolidate multiple city operations into one building, and allow the city to sell several aging facilities. The budget safeguards a large fund balance (similar to a savings account) of at least 25 percent of the city's general fund, which allows the city to immediately fund disaster recovery needs and maintain top credit ratings.

HOW THIS IMPACTS PROPERTY TAX BILLS:

The property tax rate for FY24 budget remains unchanged from the previous year at 39.5 cents per \$100 valuation. Some modest fee increases are included to offset increased expenses, including a \$2 increase in greens fees for the municipal golf course, a 1% increase for stormwater service, and an average increase of \$2.18 on the rate for residential recycling and trash service.

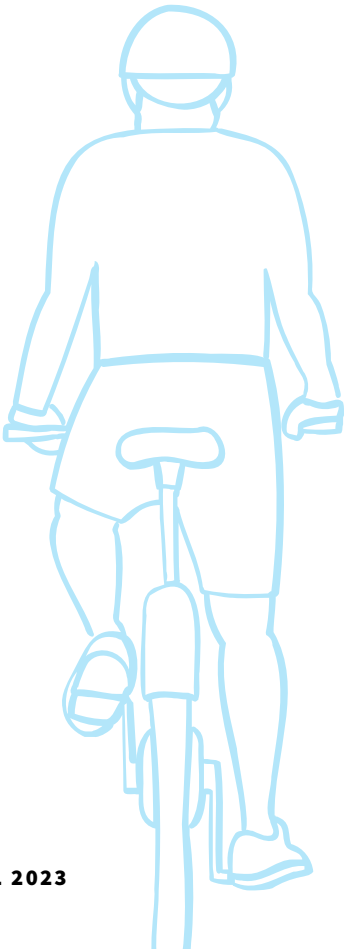


CELEBRATING THE YEAR OF THE TRAIL

2023 is the “Year of the Trail” in North Carolina, the Great Trails State. It is an opportunity to celebrate North Carolina’s thousands of miles of trails and highlight the importance of investing in these amenities for the health of our community. These trails are the backbone of North Carolina’s growing \$11.8 billion annual outdoor recreation economy, which includes 130,000 jobs.

In Wilmington, we are proud of our 32 miles of multi-use trails, greenways, and blueways. Keeping our bikes, hikes, and nature trails in tip-top shape is the key to supporting great quality of life. With the growth of our thriving city, complementing our existing system is part of a long-term plan to make the city more pedestrian and bicycle-friendly. These trails make Wilmington a healthy, accessible, and more enjoyable place to live.

Locals and visitors alike have a robust collection of trails to choose from in the Port City. Whether you are biking across town or taking a peaceful stroll through nature, there are all kinds of paths providing access to recreational, cultural, and educational destinations.



Here are just a few places to explore:

- **Greenfield Lake Park Trail** – 4.8-mile paved loop around Greenfield Lake
- **River to the Sea Bikeway** – 11-mile on- and off-road bicycle route from downtown Wilmington to Wrightsville Beach
- **The Riverwalk** – 1.75-mile scenic walkway adjacent to the Cape Fear River in downtown Wilmington
- **Summer Rest Trail** – 1.15-mile shaded path that ends overlooking the Intracoastal Waterway
- **Gary Shell Cross City Trail** – 5-mile multi-use, off-road trail running through Wade Park, Halyburton Park, and Empie Park
 - **Wade Park Loop** – 0.6-mile paved path around Wade Park
 - **Halyburton Park Loop** – 1.3-mile paved path around Halyburton nature preserve

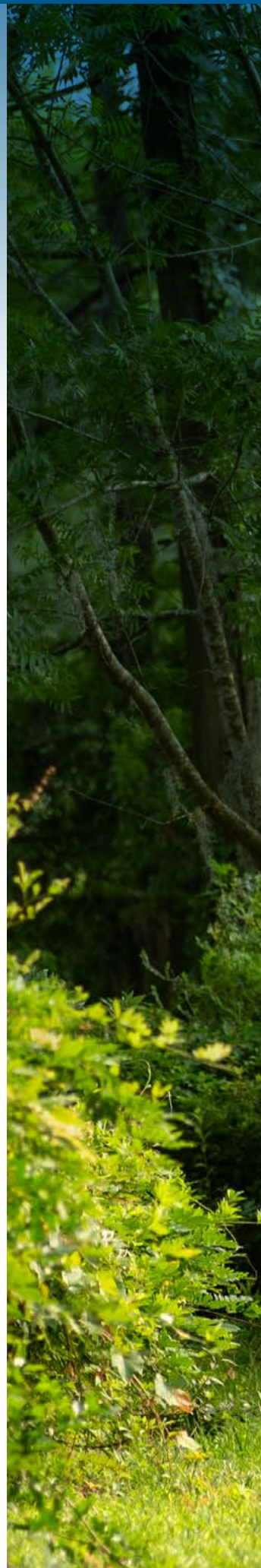
This “Year of the Trail” the city is developing two exciting projects which represent an additional 5.8 miles of multi-use paths aimed to support the rapidly expanding network of trails connecting our beautiful community.

Greenville Loop Trail

The Greenville Loop Trail is taking shape. Once completed, the 4.4-mile path will link schools, parks, shopping centers, and residential neighborhoods in the southeast quadrant of Wilmington.

Masonboro Loop Trail

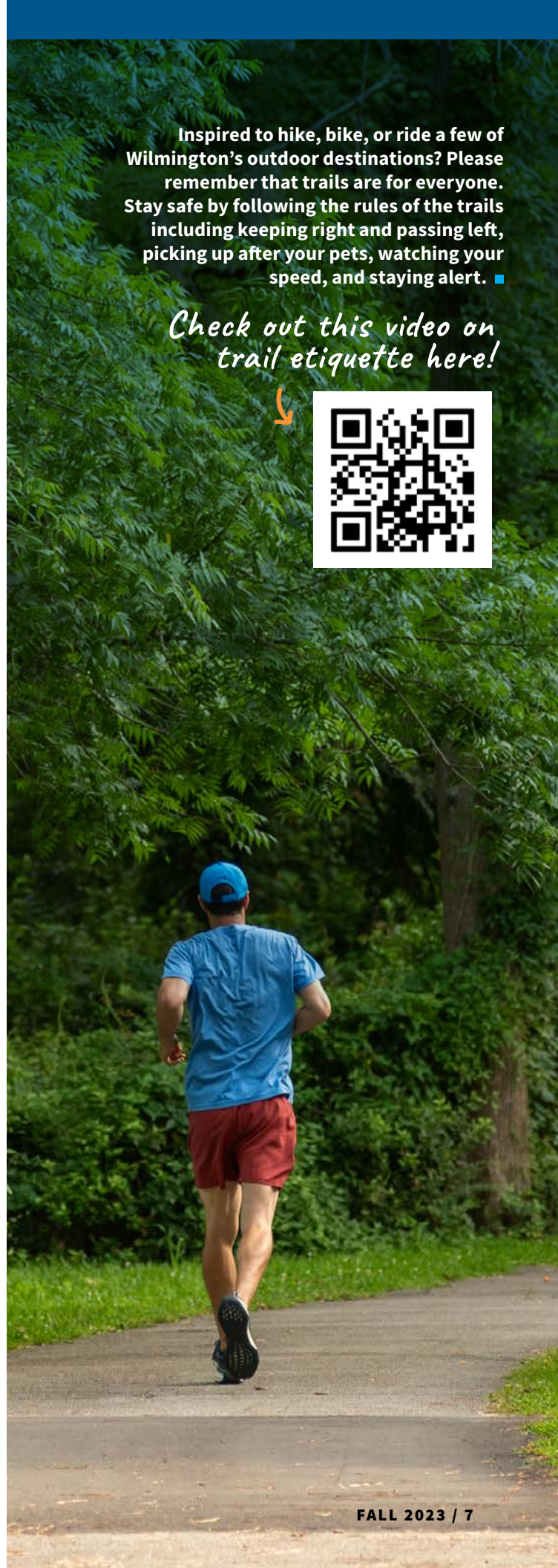
Construction on this 1.4-mile multi-use path is underway. Once complete, this Transportation Bond trail will run along the west side of Masonboro Loop Road from Pine Grove Drive to Navaho Trail.





Inspired to hike, bike, or ride a few of Wilmington's outdoor destinations? Please remember that trails are for everyone. Stay safe by following the rules of the trails including keeping right and passing left, picking up after your pets, watching your speed, and staying alert. ■

Check out this video on trail etiquette here!



MAIDES PARK INCLUSIVE PLAYGROUND

The City of Wilmington has received a \$470,044 Accessibility for Parks (AFP) grant for the Maides Park Inclusive Playground Project. The funds will be used in combination with existing city-budgeted funds to make it easier for children, adults, and veterans with disabilities to navigate the park, thus serving the entire community regardless of age and ability. ■

EDI LANGUAGE COLLABORATIVE

The City of Wilmington was selected along with nine other local governments to be a member of the inaugural Building Integrated Communities' (BIC) Language Access Collaborative, which is designed to build bridges of communication between North Carolina local governments and community-based organizations. ■



City of Wilmington team members Amy Schlag, Yosha Martinez, and Joe Conway join Maria Van De Bovenkamp from Clinica Latina for a photo at the first meeting of the inaugural class of the Language Access Collaborative.

CREATIVE CORNER: TRAIL MIX WORD SEARCH

Navigate upward, downward, and forward to find these 20 trail-related words!

- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| ACCESSIBLE | HIKING |
| BICYCLE | HALYBURTON |
| CONNECTIONS | MASONBOROLOOP |
| CROSSCITY | MULTIUSE |
| ETIQUETTE | NATURE |
| EXERCISE | RIVERWALK |
| GREENFIELD | SAFETY |
| GREENVILLELOOP | SUMMERREST |
| GREENWAY | TRAIL |
| HEALTHY | WADE |





ANNE MCCRARY PARK

COMPLETED: The City of Wilmington has invested \$29,050 in a new overlook deck at Anne McCrary Park. You can check out the views for yourself at 4000 Randall Parkway. ■

BETTER WAY TO GIVE



The City of Wilmington and the United Way of the Cape Fear Area have partnered to launch the “Better Way to Give” initiative. This initiative offers community members a comprehensive and compassionate alternative to giving directly to individuals who solicit money in public places by instead directing gifts to service providers that help these persons move from crisis to stability. For more information visit www.wilmingtonnc.gov/betterway. ■

Scan here to learn more or donate! →



NEW DOWNTOWN PARKING & OFFICES



On July 13, 2023, the City of Wilmington acquired a 12.5-acre property in northern downtown, which includes a 1,022-space parking deck, a large office building, and two adjoining development tracts. The purchase allows the city to add much-needed parking capacity near Riverfront Park and consolidate numerous city departments under one roof for better operations and customer service.

No tax increase was required to fund the purchase, which was included in the city’s FY24 budget. As operations transition to the new facility, the city intends to sell several vacated city buildings and surplus property to offset the \$68 million purchase price. The historic Thalian Hall/City Hall building will not be sold.

Mayor Bill Saffo said the acquisition represents “a creative and cost-effective solution to growing demands on downtown parking and city operations.”

“This adds over 1,000 parking spaces near our very successful Riverfront Park and Live Oak Bank Pavilion, brings together multiple city operations into one building, and saves millions of dollars by allowing the city to sell off aging facilities. Our capacity to make such a major investment in the future without a tax increase speaks to the city’s historically strong financial position,” said Mayor Saffo.

The city’s purchase price represents a \$43.3 million savings over an appraised market value of \$111.3 million for the facilities, and a \$55+ million savings over construction alternatives to meet the city’s parking and operational space needs.

The office campus originally opened in 2007 as the headquarters of PPD, now the clinical research business of Thermo Fisher Scientific. The company will continue to lease two floors of the building for a period of three years, with options to extend their lease. Leasing excess space not used for city operations at market

rate will allow the city to offset building operations costs.

Here's a look at the acquisition by the numbers:

- **1,022**-space parking deck
- **370,000** square-foot office building
- **\$68 million** purchase price paid by the City of Wilmington, which is \$43.3 million below appraised market value
- **\$55+ million** savings to the City of Wilmington over construction alternatives to meet parking and operational space needs
- **No property tax increase** to fund the purchase ■

Want to know more? Check out our FAQs here! →



WFD UPDATE

On Thursday, August 3rd, the Wilmington Fire Department held a groundbreaking ceremony for the upcoming Riverlights Fire Station. The new station, WFD Fire Station #6, will be on a three-acre parcel across River Road from Riverlights Marina Village. This fire station is needed to serve the growing area that includes Riverlights, Echo Farms, and areas along South Independence Boulevard. The new station location will cut down the response times to these areas by half. The design of this fire station was developed with input from the neighborhood to reflect the Riverlights architectural aesthetic.

Additionally, the 2023 Recruit Academy has graduated from their six-month training. In addition to more than 140 hours of physical preparation, each recruit completed nearly 1,000 hours of training. The group of 15 will now join the rest of WFD protecting and serving our city! ■



STORM PREP

The Atlantic Hurricane Season runs from June 1 to November 30, and generally peaks around the beginning of September.

The City of Wilmington recently joined the New Hanover County government for a hurricane exercise designed to prepare critical staff for emergency activations. Over 90 city and county employees gathered concurrently at the New Hanover County Emergency Operations Center and the City of Wilmington's Public Services Department Emergency Operations Center to rehearse a coordinated response.

"The exercise allows us to assess our capabilities and make critical adjustments to better prepare the city's response to hurricanes," said Craig Harris, Emergency Management & Resiliency Coordinator for the City of Wilmington.



Regular meetings of emergency personnel are one of the many ways the City of Wilmington ensures we are always ready for hurricane season. Here are a few things you can do at home to make sure you are also equipped for whatever may come our way:

- Put together an emergency kit that includes extra batteries, flashlights, a first aid kit, bottled water, and prescription medications. Your kit should include enough supplies to last for at least three days.
- Secure important documents such as birth certificates, social security cards, and tax records.
- Strengthen your home by covering windows, reinforcing doors, and bringing all outdoor furniture inside before a storm hits.

WPD UPDATE

July was a busy month for the Wilmington Police Department as they welcomed their newest officers at a swearing-in ceremony. More than a dozen officers joined the force after completing a year's worth of training, including four months of patrolling with and without a partner.

The WPD Mounted Unit has introduced its newest equine officers. Willie (left) and Romeo (right) have officially joined the four-man mount unit that serves and protects the downtown community.



Several WPD officers were recently presented with the "Life-Saving Award" in a July City Council Meeting. Officer Scott Bramley, Officer Michael Brannon, Corporal Britton Creech, Sergeant Brian Needham, and Lieutenant Paul Mussachio all received the recognition.






On Friday, August 11, 2023, WPD became one of the first agencies in NC to receive the North Carolina Law Enforcement Accreditation (NCLEA) issued by the North Carolina Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission.




In 2021, WPD was one of seven law enforcement agencies that were selected to participate in the new program as a pilot agency. Since then, WPD has successfully met all of the State's requirements for NCLEA Accreditation, including compliance with all state standards and successfully passing an on-site assessment in June 2022.

Looking forward, City Council has approved a five-year, \$3,857,811 contract for WPD equipment, which includes body and in-car cameras, tasers, live stream monitoring systems, and digital storage evidence. ■

STAY CURRENT

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CITY COUNCIL

Bill Saffo, Mayor
 Margaret E. Haynes, Mayor Pro-Tem
 Charles H. Rivenbark, Jr.
 Neil Anderson
 Clifford D. Barnett, Sr.
 Kevin Spears
 Luke Waddell

City Council meetings are generally held on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. in Council Chambers. Meetings are streamed live on:

- GTV8 (Spectrum channel 8)
- wilmingtonnc.gov/gtv (view previous meetings on-demand)
- youtube.com/user/cityofwilmington

CONTACT US!

City Information	910.341.7800
Cape Fear Public Utility Auth	910.332.6550
Code Enforcement	910.341.3266
Fire Non-emergency.....	910.341.7846
Parking.....	910.762.5678
Parks and Recreation	910.341.7855
Police Non-emergency	910.343.3600
Street Maintenance	910.341.7879
Stormwater.....	910.341.4646
Trash and Recycling	910.341.7875
Zoning.....	910.254.0900

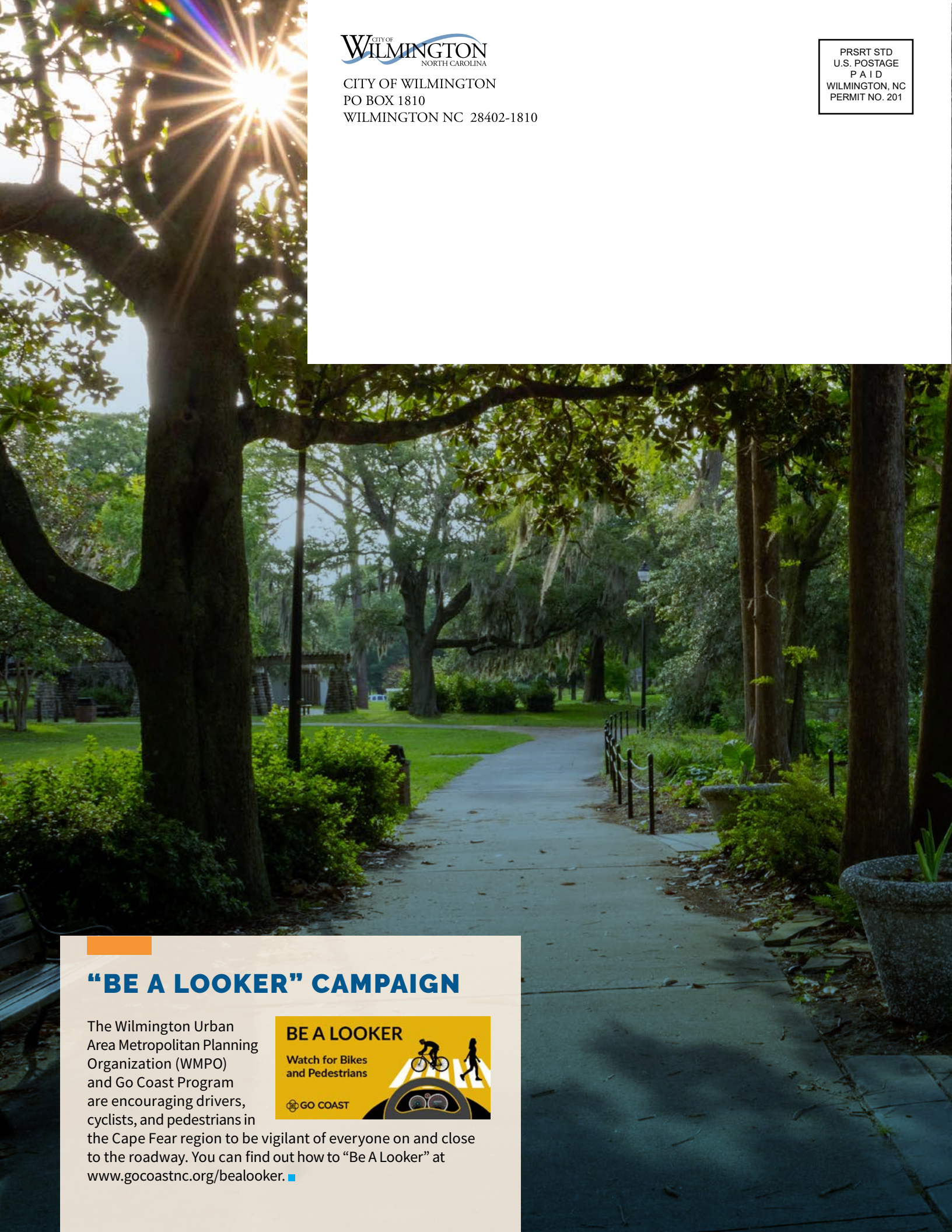


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“BE A LOOKER” CAMPAIGN

The Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (WMPO) and Go Coast Program are encouraging drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians in

the Cape Fear region to be vigilant of everyone on and close to the roadway. You can find out how to “Be A Looker” at www.gocoastnc.org/bealooker. ■

