



Operational Priorities Overview

The Stokes County Operating Plan (SCOP) is a tool used to develop and communicate the County's operational priorities for the upcoming fiscal year and the five-year planning period. Operational planning is the process of selecting operational enhancement, process improvements funding methodologies to achieve strategic goals and objectives. During FY 2025, Stokes County began the important process of building our strategic framework and annual operational planning process. Our new strategic framework uses the widely accepted, balanced scorecard approach. To build this approach, the Stokes County Board of Commissioners adopted the following mission and vision statements:

Mission: Protect, promote and enhance quality of life for Stokes County residents and visitors.

Vision: Stokes County is a dynamic, thriving community that is rich in natural beauty and embraces the future while respecting its rural heritage and history

Our mission statement tells us why we exist. Our vision statement tells us something about the broad, long-term, qualitative outcomes we aspire to achieve.

The next step that we took was to develop strategic goals and strategic objectives. Strategic goals are broad, enduring goals that represent components of mission accomplishment. Strategic objectives tell us more about how we achieve each strategic goal. Everything that employees, volunteers and other representatives of Stokes County government do in the exercise of their duties supports one or more strategic objectives. As a result, those activities also support attainment of strategic goals and mission accomplishment.

The Stokes County Board of Commissioners adopted a Balanced Scorecard including thirteen strategic goals and 37 supporting strategic objectives. Ten of the strategic goals are customer focused; they orient on the delivery of services that our residents and other stakeholders expect or desire. One strategic goal is internally focused: professionally manage a high performing organization. One additional strategic goal is workforce oriented: attract and retain an engaged workforce. Finally, another strategic goal orients on financial health: maintain a healthy financial condition.

For each strategic objective, our Board of Commissioners has also approved a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to be used to measure mission accomplishment. Since this is Stokes County's first year in building this approach to measuring organizational effectiveness and operational priority identification, results were not yet available to assist in planning for the FY 2026 budget and five-year operating plan.



#1: Safeguard the County

- 1.1: Deliver Effective Emergency Communications Services
- 1.2: Deliver Effective Law Enforcement Services
- 1.3: Deliver Effective Fire Marshal Services
- 1.4: Deliver Effective Building Inspection Services
- 1.5: Enable & Support Effective Rural Fire Districts
- 1.6: Deliver Effective Emergency Management Services
- 1.7: Deliver Effective Animal Control Services
- 1.8: Deliver Effective Pre- and Post-Trial Services

#2: Promote Education & Workforce Skills Development

- 2.1: Effectively Resource K-12 Education
- 2.2: Effectively Support Workforce Development Training

#3: Support Socially & Economically Vulnerable Residents

- 3.1: Deliver Effective Income Maintenance Services
- 3.2: Deliver Effective Social Work Services
- 3.3: Deliver Effective Senior Services
- 3.4: Deliver Effective Veterans Services

#4: Promote and Safeguard Public Health

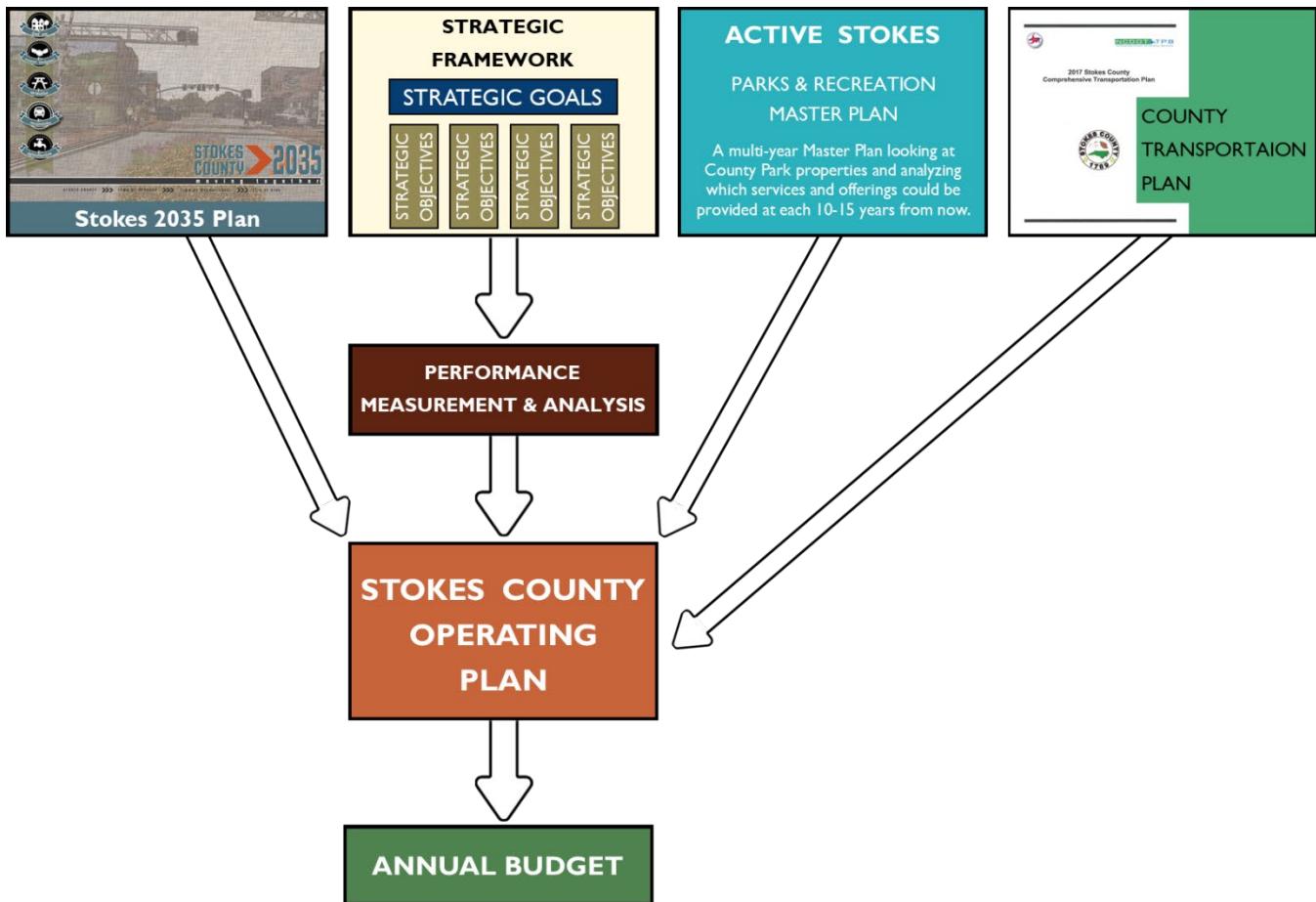
- 4.1: Deliver Effective Nutrition Services
- 4.2: Deliver Effective Clinical Services
- 4.3: Deliver Effective Opioid Services
- 4.4: Deliver Effective Environmental Health Services
- 4.5: Deliver Effective Water Supply Services
- 4.6: Deliver Effective Wastewater Services
- 4.7: Deliver Effective Emergency Medical Services

#5: Record, Protect and Provide Access to Property Records and Vital Records

- 5.1: Deliver Effective Register of Deeds Services

Goals	Strategic Objectives
#6: Ensure Land Use Compatibility and Preservation of Rural Character	6.1: Deliver Effective Zoning & Zoning Enforcement Services
#7: Promote a Thriving Business Community	7.1: Promote Economic Development 7.2: Deliver Effective Agricultural Support Services
#8: Support Environmental Preservation	8.1: Provide Effective Solid Waste Services 8.2: Deliver Effective Soil and Water Services
#9: Promote Active Living and Cultural Opportunities	9.1: Provide and Maintain Ample Parks, Walkways and Recreational Opportunities 9.2: Deliver Effective Soil and Water Services
#10: Promote Election Integrity	10.1: Provide Fair, Free and Impartial Elections
#11: Professionally Manage a High Performing Organization	11.1: Communicate with & Engage Residents & Stakeholders 11.2: Provide a High Level of Customer Service 11.3: Continuously Improve and Innovate 11.4: Maintain County Assets
#12: Attract & Retain an Engaged Workforce	12.1: Provide a Supportive and Rewarding Work Environment
#13: Maintain a Healthy Financial Condition	13.1: Provide Effective Tax Valuation and Collection Services 13.2: Meet or Exceed Established Financial Targets

The Stokes County Operating Plan (SCOP) is the means by which strategic plans, goals and objectives are translated into actionable and resourced plans for mission accomplishment. In addition to the strategic framework, long-range strategic plans also support the development of the operating plan. These long-range plans include Stokes County 2035, the Stokes County Parks and Recreation Master Plan (under development) and the Stokes County Transportation Plan. Outcomes and implementing strategies included in these plans are selectively incorporated into the annually developed SCOP. Each year, staff builds a new, recommended FY budget built on plans identified for that year in the previous year's operating plan and improvements identified during the annual operational planning process.



Annual Operational Planning Process

FY 2026 will be the first year during which Stokes County leaders will use the annual operational planning process described below. Leaders were able to use portions of this process in FY 2025 to develop this operating plan.

Leaders from senior staff and management kick off the Operational Planning Process (OPP) with the Senior Leaders Pre-Retreat Meeting in October or early November. The purpose of this meeting is to analyze and correlate key data and KPIs, and conduct an environmental scan to understand market forces and other external trends that will influence future plans. A key outcome from this meeting is the update of codified Opportunities for Improvement (OFIs) that senior staff and the Board of Commissioners should consider for inclusion in future operations plans.

In late November or early December, the Board of Commissioners Pre-Retreat meeting is held with the Stokes County Board of Commissioners, management and senior staff. The purpose of this meeting is to review data and key findings, conduct an environmental scan, and to review and update the strategic framework if needed.

Next, the Board of Commissioners holds its annual two-day retreat in December or early January. At this retreat, the Board of Commissioners affirms or modifies the County mission and vision, identifies BSC Areas of Focus for the five-year plan, sets KPI performance goals, and selects OFIs for inclusion in the upcoming five-year operating plan. Areas of Focus are strategic objectives for which the Board desires to place special resourcing emphasis in order to improve performance. OFIs include operational enhancements, projects, staffing changes, and capital improvements.

OPERATIONAL PRIORITIES DEVELOPMENT

To determine the County's financial capacity to fund the Stokes County Operating Plan (SCOP), staff prepares a financial forecast that is included in the *Five-Year Financial Forecast* section of the SCOP. Several assumptions are made relative to revenues and expenditures based on historical trends and future projections. The five-year projections include the five-year Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) and address all projected costs associated with Board approved OFIs. The five-year financial forecast is developed to ensure fund balance remains at a minimum of 30% of budgeted expenditures in accordance with the Board's adopted Fund Balance Policy. In addition, the five-year financial forecast is developed to ensure projected operating margins fall within acceptable levels to allow for adequate levels of future capital investment, and to ensure debt service ratios are acceptable and don't place an inappropriate burden on the County's ability to resource future operational requirements.

In developing the five-year CIP, the Strategic Planning Team reviews and determines the Fleet and building component replacement schedules and plans for other major capital improvements with the respective department heads. Based on overall financial projections, the senior budget team determines which capital investments are best suited for installment financing to ensure there is adequate financial capacity for any required annual debt service.

The following diagram indicates the key steps and timing of the Operational Planning Process:

