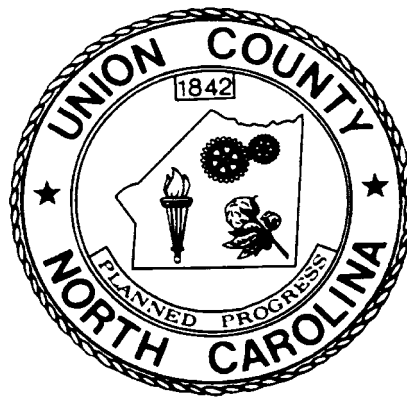


UNION COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA



2003-2004 MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED BUDGET

Presented by

Mike Shalati
County Manager

Inquiries, Comments and Acknowledgements

The County invites comments from the reader on aspects of the budget document that warrant improvement and continued refinement. Inquiries, comments or requests regarding the FY2004 Union budget document should be directed to:

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Finance Department
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Year after year, individuals throughout the County organization contribute significantly to the effort of developing the budget. I wish to acknowledge those directors, officials and their departments and agencies for developing their programs and services consistent with Commission's policy priorities in a fiscally responsible manner. Because of their efforts, County Manager Mike Shalati is able to present to the Chairman and Commissioners a budget that implements the Commission's goals and proposes a framework for restoring the financial strength of the County.

Contributing to that success is a number of Finance Department staff members. The FY2004 budget represents the County's first effort at establishing a formal and comprehensive conversation and discussion with County agencies in preparing and developing the County's budget. The creation of "liaison" positions in the Finance Department have been critical to our success in developing a budget process and budget document that more adequately serves as a policy document, operations guide, financial plan and communications device.

Andrea Robinson's successful effort at coordinating the work of the Finance liaisons and the entire budget process is recognized and acknowledged by me. The effort of Vivian Drake, Amanda Harrington, Angela James, and Sabrina Watts as our liaisons in shepherding agencies through the budget process, is appreciated and their contributions to this document is also acknowledged. Our team's dedication and professionalism throughout the budget process resulted in a timely, fresh and informative budget document.

Thank you.

Kai Nelson
Finance Director
May 19, 2003

Table of Contents

Introduction

Budget Message	1
Reader's Guide	7
Governmental Structure and Organization.....	8
Profiles of the Commission	10
Boards, Committees and Commissions	11

Goals and Financial Guides

County Goals	13
Financial "Best Practices"	14

Budget Overview

Revenue Overview.....	17
Expenditure Overview	19
Where the Money Comes From and Where the Money Goes	22
Where Your County Taxes Go	23
Fund Balance Projections	24
Summary of Revenues, Expenditures and Changes in Fund Balances.....	27
Positions by Department and Agency	32

Department and Agency Summaries

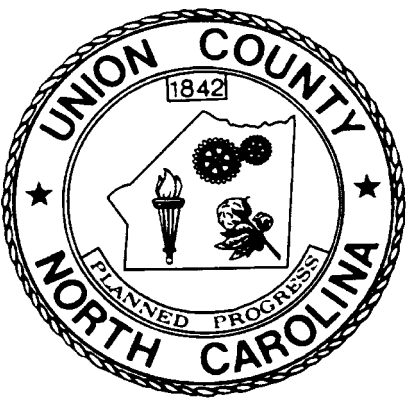
General Fund	
General Government	
Board of Commissioners.....	34
Vision 20/20	36
Central Administration.....	38
County Dues and Memberships.....	40
Internal Audit.....	42
Legal	44
Personnel.....	46
Finance	48
Tax Administration	50
Court Facilities	54
Elections	56
Register of Deeds	58
Information Technology	60
General Services	62
Public Safety	
Law Enforcement.....	68
Communications	74

Table of Contents

General Fund (continued)	
Public Safety (continued)	
Homeland Security	76
Fire Services	78
Inspections	80
Animal Control	82
Medical Examiner	84
Emergency Medical Services	84
Juvenile Detention	84
Economic and Physical Development	
Planning	86
Economic Development	88
Cooperative Extension	90
Soil Conservation	92
Forest Management	94
Human Services	
Public Health	96
Social Services	98
Delinquency Prevention & Remediation	100
Nutrition Services and Transportation	102
Veterans' Services	104
JCPC	106
Mental Health	108
Turning Point	108
UDI (Sheltered Workshop)	108
Community Shelter	108
Community Action	108
Council on Aging	108
Criminal Justice Partnership	108
Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS)	108
Education	
School Traffic Control	110
Union County Public Schools	112
Community College	116
Literacy Council	116
Cultural and Recreational	
Library	118
Parks and Recreation	120
Arts Council	122
Historical Properties	122
Union Symphony	122
A. Jackson Historical Foundation	122
Proprietary Funds	
Water and Sewer	124
Solid Waste	126

Table of Contents

Proprietary Funds (continued)	
Stormwater	128
Other Funds	
Volunteer Fire Departments	130
Emergency Telephone System	132
Reappraisal	134
Union At A Glance	
Geographic Location	137
Union At A Glance	138
The Water and Sewer System	139
The County	145
Fiscal Information	
Basics of Budgeting	149
Budget Format	153
Basis of Accounting	155
Revenue Assumptions	156
Bond Referendums	159
Union County Schools Debt Service	160
History of Tax Rates for Counties in Region	161
History of County Budget	163
Future Budget Projections	164
Alternative FY2004 Budgets	166
Appendices	
Positions by Class Title	167
Capital Outlay Detail	180
Glossary	205



Budget Message

May 19, 2003

Union County Board of Commissioners
County Courthouse
Monroe, North Carolina

Gentlemen:

I hereby submit to you, for your consideration, the recommended budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2003 and ending June 30, 2004. The budget contains \$114.8 million in recommended General Fund expenditures for FY2004, virtually unchanged from the current budget amount of \$115.0 million. The budget is balanced with an appropriation of \$6 million from reserves and a 7.95 cents tax rate increase – which would raise the general tax rate from 47.05 cents to 55 cents – ***the first such increase in the general tax rate in over 10 years.***

While I am not pleased with recommending a tax increase, the County has reached a crossroad in its finances and simply cannot continue its current path without risking insolvency. Decisive leadership in developing a prudent plan toward fiscal recovery is absolutely essential. Your staff and I look forward to assisting the Board in meeting the challenges facing our community – strengthening our quality schools, providing superior utilities, expanding public safety and recreation opportunities, providing for the health and welfare of our citizens and neighbors, and enhancing our library system – all of which contributes to improving the quality of life for our citizens.

Strong Fiscal Pressures Impacting County's Budget

There are a number of significant factors that are influencing the County's General Fund budget.

First, spending decisions in fiscal years 2002 and 2003 have contributed to budget deficits of \$7.6 million and \$6.4 million, respectively. This ***deficit spending*** has reduced the County's reserves by \$14 million and created a budget that is structurally in the red – with expenditures exceeding revenues. Discipline must be restored in the County's budget decisions where major spending actions are mapped to either recurring new revenues or reduction in programs.

Successful ***bond referendums*** in 1998, 2000 and 2002 will ultimately add \$177.7 million in general obligation debt to the County's balance sheet. The passage of the bonds provides for significant capital investment in our quality schools and upon completion of the projects will add two high schools (includes the conversion of the Career Center), one middle school, four elementary schools and additions and renovations to virtually every school campus throughout the County. This capital investment program, based on the schools' calendar for completion, will require annual debt service of \$22.1 million by 2006 – ***an increase of \$12 million annually*** from 2001's requirement of \$10.1 million (see page 160 for an illustration of schools debt). Fiscal impact statements associated with the three bond referendums totaled 16 cents. ***While the County has avoided increasing taxes associated with the growing debt burden for schools, it has accomplished that principally through deficit spending.***

Budget Message

Third, our growing **community college, libraries and court system** require facilities to meet the expectations of a growing population. Recognizing the importance of the agri-business community, the County has committed resources to construct an agri-business/meeting center in conjunction with consolidating its permitting and inspections functions. These capital investments, while requiring greater debt service and operating costs, will contribute to Union County “as the county of choice as people elect to live, work and do business in our safe, healthy and vital neighborhoods.”

A fourth factor that is impacting the County’s budget is a long history of providing the necessary resources to fund quality education, improve libraries and parks, expand public safety and provide for the health and economic well being of the County’s citizens. This effort is reflected in **County spending that has increased 163%** from 1993’s \$43.9 million to 2004’s \$114.8 million without an increase in general property taxes (see page 163 for an illustration of General Fund expenditures).

The fifth and final element that is contributing to the County’s fiscal pressures is its failure to adjust the property tax rate to meet the higher service and program level expectations of our citizens. The County maintains **one of the lowest tax rates** in the region and is the only county in the region that significantly reduced its tax rate after a revaluation and kept it at that level to the present day. Adjusted for inflation, residential property owners pay less in Union County property taxes today than they paid 10 years ago (see page 161 for an illustration of both tax rates in the region and a residential property tax bill analysis).

Call to Action – A Roadmap to Restoring Fiscal Integrity

Fully one year ago, in deliberating the FY2003 budget, the Board recognized the implications of continuing budget trends in which expenses exceeded revenues and reserves being depleted. Since that time, the **Board has received two comprehensive briefings on the County’s finances** - once in August and most recently at the Board’s retreat. The financial projections and implications shared with the Board remain largely unchanged – expenses continue to exceed revenues and reserves are deteriorating rapidly. It is time to act - financial decisions must be made to stem this tide and set the County on a more prudent course.

A number of financial “best practices” have guided the development of the Manager’s recommended budget. Those “best practices” may be found on page 14 of the budget. One of those “best practices” is the **use of reserves**, in combination with tax increases, over several years to allow the County more time **in re-balancing the budget** so that expenses generally equal revenues. While I would prefer to recommend the use of reserves to cash defease a portion of our debt, given the budget’s structural imbalance, a wiser use of the reserves is to increase the Board’s flexibility in addressing the County’s budget problems.

Most County programs and services do not generate revenues sufficient to offset the cost of providing services; thereby relying heavily on property and sales taxes to fund the services. Although fees and permits generally do not add substantively to balancing the budget, I am recommending a **comprehensive review of all fees and permits** and where appropriate, increasing the amounts. The recommended budget does contain fee increases in Environmental Health (\$75,000) and Inspections (\$150,000) to fund their occupancy portion of the new One-Stop Permitting Center.

Budget Message

Another financial “best practices” recommendation included in the budget is the establishment of discipline and structure in budget and spending decisions through the development of **multi-year budgeting and capital improvement programming**. I have included in the budget, future projections for the period 2005-2007. Those projections may be found on page 164. The Board must begin to take a longer view toward budgeting than just appropriating funds and setting tax rates for the next year. **Spending and revenue actions not only impact today’s budget but also tomorrow’s.**

The **future budget projections contain anticipated tax rate increases** based on various assumptions such as increases in revenues and expenses for various programs and services and uses of reserves. It is a “roadmap” for the future – one that can be altered based on the Board and community’s vision for Union County.

The highest focus area and goal established by the Board is to “develop a more effective economic development program.” Restoring fiscal integrity to the budget can only be accomplished through the **diversification of the County’s tax base**, improving retail sales opportunities within the County and enhancing its economic tax base. The County must lead the way in partnering with the private and public sector in developing successful products.

A key responsibility of local government is to develop and manage services and resources as efficiently and effectively as possible and to communicate the results of these efforts to the taxpaying public. This fiscal year marks the beginning of the County’s effort toward developing **outcome budgeting and performance measures** for which the Board and public can evaluate County agencies in their delivery of services. Much work remains in improving outcomes, ensuring that desired results are those that matter to the public and developing meaningful measurements to quantify success. This budget represents our commitment to embark on such an effort.

Moving Forward in Spite of Obstacles – General Fund

The County must continue to move forward and provide the level of programs and services that our community, one of the fastest growing in the nation, expects.

Funding for general government activities such as the Board, administration, legal, finance, audit, tax, elections, register of deeds and general services remain at or below FY2003 budget levels. The sole, major initiative in this area is the inclusion of lease purchase funds for the 1st year of a 5-year **replacement program for voting machines**. **General government expenditures for Union County are the 2nd lowest in the region**, with only Stanly County spending less money on a per capita basis for operating county government.

The recommended budget includes funds for **18 additional public safety positions** – 12 in law enforcement and 6 in communications relating to the City/County merger. Funds have also been included for the purchase and development of **a firearms qualifying facility and range**.

Health and human services funding remains at FY2003 levels, in spite of increases in Medicaid and public assistance programs. A net increase of 4.6 positions is recommended in the FY2004 budget.

The **enhancements in library and parks and recreation services** of the past several

Budget Message

years continues with the recommended budget. A total of 7 additional positions are included in the library budget to staff the Monroe addition, Union West and Marshville libraries. Over \$800,000 of capital improvements, excluding grant expenditures, is included in the budget along with additional resources for community grant funding. Unfortunately, funding has not been included in the budget to begin the full development of the Jesse Helms Regional Park.

More than half of local property tax dollars goes toward support of instructional costs and capital needs of our public schools and community college system. The recommended budget includes \$32.7 million (General Fund, Special School Tax and Sales Taxes) for schools' current expense, an increase of 7.42% or \$2,258,000 over the current year's budget. The increase is well above the projected increase in the County's tax base of 4.87 percent, which combined with sales tax, represents the principal and only means of funding the current expenses of the schools. While the recommended appropriation level does not fully fund the Board of Education's (BOE) request, it does provide for a **very modest increase in per pupil funding** and does fund, on a per pupil basis, the additional 1,520 students projected to enroll in our schools this fall. Several tables appear on pages 114 and 115 and describe in greater detail the County's funding levels of its public schools.

School capital outlay funding from current resources is recommended at **\$3 million** – an increase of \$200,000 but below BOE's request of \$5.6 million. Over \$1.1 million of the request relates to the purchase of mobile classrooms. The Superintendent, Schools' CFO, County CFO and I have met briefly on the capital request. My proposal to the Superintendent and Schools' CFO was that I believed a more integrated financing relationship should exist between the Schools 5-year facility plan (funded from County current resources) and the bond financed projects. Savings from facility projects (new construction, additions and renovations) that are funded with bond proceeds and are completed "under budget" should be re-directed to the 5-year facility plan. My recommendation is that County and School staff review the status of bond financed projects and determine the level of savings that can be directed to meet the current and pressing capital needs funded from current County resources.

Much has been stated and written previously in this budget message regarding the bond financed School capital improvement program. The recommended budget includes debt service (partial cost in FY2004 and full cost in FY2005) for a **\$55 million bond sale** so that the Schools can continue their capital program and open the Career Center (Aug '05), Rocky River Ridge HS (Aug '05), MS (Aug '05) and ES (Aug '04), Parkwood District ES (Aug '05) **on schedule**.

Utility Progress with Critical Decisions for Solid Waste – Enterprise Funds

A proactive approach in addressing a **looming financial crisis in the solid waste fund** will be required in the coming fiscal year. Solid waste expenses are projected to exceed revenues by \$439,000 in FY2003 and \$713,000 in FY2004. This two year combined loss in excess of \$1.1 million threatens the financial viability of the solid waste fund. Fee increases and operational changes in the manner in which Union County manages its solid waste program will need to be implemented in the coming fiscal year.

The recommended budget includes funds to continue the extensive capital program of the water and sewer utility. While no rate or fee increases are recommended in the budget, I am recommending, as endorsed by the Board, that we conduct a comprehensive analysis of our

rates and fees to insure that the fees are recovering our capital costs and that the rate structure adequately covers operation and maintenance costs, debt service and operating capital.

The budget includes **funds** to keep salaries competitive (market adjustment of 3%), and reward performance (1%) – programs necessary **to retain an experienced, high quality work force**. The budget also includes additional funding of the **medical insurance program. Renewal costs** proposed by the County’s current provider would have required a **32%** increase in funding. The recently concluded efforts at developing a cost effective alternative **will require less resources** from the FY04 budget. During our forthcoming budget deliberations, we will provide the Board with adjustments in our recommended budget to reflect the new medical insurance program.

Alternative Budgets

I have included two budget alternatives (page 166) – neither requiring a tax rate increase and neither recommended. The first budget alternative would appropriate \$14.3 million from reserves – and fail in any fashion to address the structural imbalance in the County’s budget. The second alternative would appropriate about \$7 million from fund balance and make unacceptable cuts in the budget – curtailing library operations and services, eliminating public safety positions, delaying the opening of new schools, cutting additional compensation for employees, and instituting a hire freeze for all General Fund positions.

Credit Ratings and Schools CIP in Jeopardy

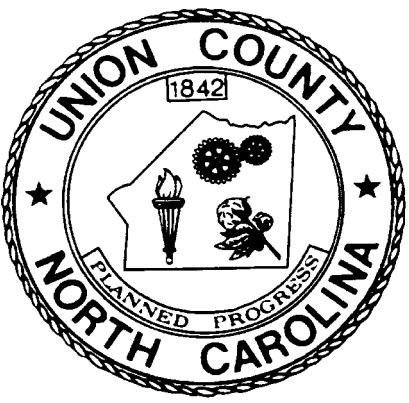
These are difficult times facing Union County government and our community. They are not unanticipated. We must show leadership and vision in developing a “roadmap” toward financial integrity. Our recent visits with the rating agencies provide an insight into the factors influencing the County’s credit rating. The credit rating agencies and the Local Government Commission will be looking closely at Union County this fall as we seek to continue the Schools CIP with a bond sale. They will want to see progress in the form of discipline and structure in our budgeting and spending processes. We must be able to show tangible action in addressing our budget problems or face the possibility of losing our enviable “AA” credit rating and incurring higher interest costs or even a possible rejection of the bond sale by the Local Government Commission.

I look forward to working with the Board in developing that roadmap.

This budget message, as well as the complete budget document, may be accessed on the Internet at www.co.union.nc.us or any of the public libraries in Union County.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mike Shalati
County Manager



This budget document describes how Union County government plans to meet the community's needs. The Union Budget Book is not only an assembly of information required for making policy and resource decisions; it is also a resource for citizens interested in learning more about the operations of their county government.

This Reader's Guide has been provided to inform the reader where particular information may be found. Union County's 2003-2004 budget document is divided into seven major sections: Introduction, Policies and Goals, Budget Overview, Agency Summaries, Union at a Glance, Fiscal Information and the Appendices. Each section is outlined below:

- **Introduction**

The Introduction includes the budget message from the County Manager regarding the 2003-2004 budget, the Reader's Guide, descriptions of the function of county government through boards, commissions and committees, and information on the County's Commission. Also included is the appropriations ordinance upon its passage.

- **Financial Guides and Goals**

This section provides information on County Commission's fiscal and program priorities for 2003-2004 and financial "best practices" that guide the formulation of the Manager's recommended budget.

- **Budget Overview**

The Budget Overview contains tables detailing budget sources, revenues and expenditures. Additional information includes tables on fund balance projections, and position authorizations.

- **Agency Summaries**

This section is comprised of individual agency mission statements, services and programs, outcomes, budget summaries, budget highlights and other fiscal or performance information.

- **Union at a Glance**

This section contains community profile information on Union County, its geographic location and information on the County's water and sewer system.

- **Fiscal Information**

The Fiscal Information section takes the reader through the budget process and details the budget calendar and practices established by the County to comply with the Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act. Information is also included on the description of the financial and fund structure and major revenue assumptions.

- **Appendices**

The Appendix section includes information about capital outlay, new regular full- and part-time position information, regular full- and part-time positions by class title by department/agency and fund, and a glossary of terms.

Governmental Structure and Organization

Form of Government

Union County adopted the Commission/Manager form of county government 1965. This type of government was developed in 1909, and today is among the most prominent forms of local government in the United States.

Under the Commission/Manager form of government, the County Commission (also referred to as the “Board”) performs the legislative functions of the County establishing laws and policies. The County Board of Commissioners appoints a manager who ensures that the laws and policies are carried out. The County Manager is responsible for managing the County’s employees, finances and resources. The Board also appoints an attorney, who represents the Commission in all legal matters.

County government is comparable to a private corporation under the Commission/Manager form of government. Citizens are both stockholders and customers, the elected body represents the board of directors and the manager is the paid professional responsible for the daily operations of the corporation.

County Board

The Union County Board of Commissioners is an elected body representing the citizens of Union County. Under the current electoral system, the Board consists of five commissioners.

Terms of Office

All five Board members are elected at-large. Commissioners serve four-year staggered terms. Annually, during its first meeting of December, the Chairman and Vice Chairman are elected by and from the Board of Commissioners.

The Chairman acts as the official head of county government and presides at County Commission meetings. The Chairman is a voting member of the Commission.

Commission members are not full-time County employees, but they are financially compensated for their time and expenses.

Commission Meetings

The Board of Commissioners meets regularly in formal session on the first and third Monday of each month. Board meetings are held in the 9th floor Board Room, 500 N. Main Street, Monroe. Regularly scheduled meetings are televised on the local cable community access channel. All meetings start at 7 p.m. and are open to the public. The Commission holds special meetings when necessary; notice of the meeting must be given to the public and media 48 hours prior to that meeting.

Commissioners Appointments to Boards and Committees

At the Board’s annual organizational meeting in December, the Board appoints its members to various boards and committees to serve as a liaison between the various boards/committees and the Commission. Often, but not always, elected officials as well as citizens serve on those committees. Commissioners’ appointments to the various boards and committees are:

- *Catawba River Board - Chairman Standridge*
- *Centralina COG – Commissioner Sexton*
- *Economic Development Commission – Chairman Standridge*
- *Fire Commission – Vice Chairman Rushing*
- *Farmers Market Committee – Commissioner Sexton*

Government Structure and Organization

- *Board of Health – Commissioner Loflin*
- *Library Board of Trustees – Chairman Standridge*
- *LEPC – Vice Chairman Rushing*
- *Piedmont Area Mental Health – Chairman Standridge*
- *URMC Trustee Council – Commissioner Loflin*
- *Union Memorial Regional Medical Center – Chairman Standridge*
- *Yadkin Pee Dee Committee – Commissioner Loflin*
- *MUMPO – Commissioner Loflin*
- *Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee – Vice Chairman Rushing*
- *School Liaison – Commissioner Sexton*
- *Job Ready Partnership – Commissioner Standridge*
- *Partnership for Children – Commissioner Stone*
- *Juvenile Crime Prevention Council – Commissioner Stone*
- *Agricultural Advisory Board – Vice Chairman Rushing*

- *Carolinas-Union Healthcare – Chairman Standridge*
- *Vision 2020 Co-Chair – Commissioner Loflin*

More information on these boards, committees and commissions may be found in a later section in this Budget Book.

Citizen Participation

The County Commissioners cannot effectively provide policy for all County business; therefore, the Board has established over 20 boards, committees and commissions to assist the Commission in determining the need for public policies and laws. The Board of Commissioners appoints citizens to these boards and commissions.

Nominees to any of the County boards or commissions must be county residents. Some appointees must have special licenses or meet certain professional requirements to serve on a board.

Profiles of the Commission

The Union County Board of Commissioners consists of commissioners Paul Standridge, Stony Rushing, Clayton Loflin, Hughie Sexton and Richard Stone.

Biographical Information

Chairman Paul Standridge is serving in his 3rd consecutive term, having first been elected to the Board in 1992. Commissioner Standridge has also served as the Board's vice-chairman and chairman in previous years. Mr. Standridge is a graduate of the University of Maryland and semi-retired owner of Elkridge Farms, a hydroponics greenhouse.

Chairman Paul Standridge
500 N. Main Street
Room 921
Monroe, NC 28112
Phone (704) 283-3810
FAX (704) 282-0121
E-Mail: paul36@carolina.rr.com

Vice-Chairman Stony Rushing, serving his first term as a County Commissioner having been first elected to the Board in 2002, is a graduate of Piedmont High School and N.C. State University's Agricultural. Mr. Rushing is self-employed, and involved in contract farm management.

Vice-Chairman Stony Rushing
500 N. Main Street
Room 921
Monroe, NC 28112
Phone (704) 283-3810
FAX (704) 282-0121
E-Mail: stony@stonyrushing.com

Clayton Loflin is a second-term Board member having served his first term in 1992-1996 elected to a second term in 2000. Commissioner Loflin also served in the N.C. House of Representatives during the period 1988-1992. Mr. Loflin attended High Point and Guilford Colleges and is a commercial real estate consultant and owner of an animal health products distribution company.

Commissioner Loflin
500 N. Main Street
Room 921
Monroe, NC 28112
Phone (704) 283-3810
FAX (704) 282-0121
E-Mail: loco@perigee.net

First-term Commissioner **Hughie Sexton** was also first elected to the Board in 2002. Hughie Sexton previously served on the Weddington Town Council. Mr. Sexton is a graduate of West Mecklenburg High School and attended Central Piedmont Community College and the Hudson Studio and School of Photography. Commissioner Sexton designs and composes advertising for Knight-Ridder Newspapers and also is owner of Sexton Photography.

Commissioner Sexton
500 N. Main Street
Room 921
Monroe, NC 28112
Phone (704) 283-3810
FAX (704) 282-0121
E-Mail: hughie_sexton@hotmail.com

Commissioner Richard Stone is serving in his 3rd continuous term, having first been elected to the Board in 1994. Mr. Stone graduated from Penn State University with 3 degrees: Mechanical, Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technology. Commissioner Stone is the retired owner of Signs & Stained Glass, Ltd. in Marshville.

Commissioner Stone
500 N. Main Street
Room 921
Monroe, NC 28112
Phone (704) 283-3810
FAX (704) 282-0121
E-Mail: storc2@trellis.net

Boards, Committees and Commissions

Citizen participation on Union County boards, committees and commissions serves two important purposes: citizens are directly involved in their local government and can influence the future of their community; and the County Board of Commissioners receives timely input and information regarding issues and potential impacts on citizens.

The various boards, committees and commissions serve in various capacities to the Board of County Commissioners within their respective areas of governmental policy and operations. Members are generally unpaid volunteers who devote many hours of their personal time to these community activities. Some boards may require appointees to have a special license or meet certain professional requirements.

- **Region F EMS Advisory Council**

Advises the COG Board on intergovernmental EMS matters and allocation of funds.

(33 members of which Union County appoints 4)

- **Adult Care Home Community Advisory Committee**

Promotes community involvement and cooperation with domiciliary homes in meeting the needs of the elderly and disabled.

(8 members with a maximum of 20)

- **Board of Adjustment**

Hears appeals and requests for variances from County zoning ordinances.

(5 members, 2 alternates)

- **Board of Equalization and Review**

Reviews schedule of values and hears appeals.

(5 members)

- **Economic Development Commission**

Promotes economic interests of Union County.

(9 members)

- **Farmers Market Committee**

Prepares regulations for operating the Market.

(5 members)

- **Fire Commission**

Advises the Board on matters relating to fire protection.

(8 members)

- **Board of Health**

Advises the Board on matters relating to public health.

(11 members)

- **Historic Preservation Commission**

Promotes the historical heritage of Union County and advocates for conservation of historical properties.

(13 members of which Union County appoints 4)

- **Industrial Facilities and Pollution Control Financing Authority**

Provides access to financing for economic and pollution control projects.

(7 members)

Boards, Committees and Commissions

- **Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee**
Advises the Board on policy matters pertaining to the County's park resources and recreation activities.

(9 members and 1 Commission representative)
- **Social Services Board**
Advises the Board on matters relating to social services.

(5 members)
- **Planning Board**
Develops long-range, continuing and comprehensive planning programs for the orderly growth and development of the County.

(7 members and 2 alternates)
- **Union Regional Medical Center Community Trustee Council**
Approves the Medical Center budget and medical staff appointments.

(10 members)
- **Workforce Development Board**
Responsible from developing policy and overseeing local workforce development initiatives.

(20 members of which Union County appoints 3)
- **Jury Commission**
Prepares list of prospective jurors.

(3 members of which Union County appoints 1)
- **Local Emergency Planning Committee**
Advises the Board on emergency planning.

(As many as deemed necessary)
- **Library Board of Trustees**
Advises the Board on policy matters relating to the County's library system.

(9 members)
- **Piedmont Area Mental Health Board**
Sets policy for the mental health programs serving Cabarrus, Stanly, Rowan, Davidson and Union counties.

(20 members, 4 each from participating counties)
- **Nursing Home Advisory Committee**
Monitors nursing homes in the County.

(6 members with a maximum of 12)
- **Agricultural Advisory Board**
Promotes agricultural values and general welfare of the County.

(9 members)
- **Criminal Justice Partnership Board**
Responsible for establishing alternative punishment programs.

(26 members)
- **Home and Community Care Block Grant Advisory Committee**
Plans for the aging service system.

(23 members)
- **Region F Aging Advisory Committee**
Plan for the region's aging service system.

(3 members and 1 alternate)