



WILSON CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE

2025 Policy Agenda

The Wilson Chamber of Commerce is the leading voice of the Wilson business community, with its membership representing many of the largest employers in the county. The Chamber holds the following positions in ~~five~~ six policy areas, each with equal priority, and will expect decision-makers to consider these positions when determining public policy. Underlined or ~~strike-through~~ text represents new components of the Agenda that have been added or removed for this calendar year.

EDUCATION

The Chamber supports policies which enable all education providers to sufficiently prepare students to enter the workforce. Educational opportunities should be readily accessible and capable of meeting the diverse needs of learners in Wilson County.

Policy Priorities

- **Direct adequate funding and resources to Wilson County public schools, teachers, support staff (e.g., nurses, counselors) and administrators, based on needs expressed from local leaders.**
- **Encourage the integration of STEM programming and digital literacy in schools to prepare students for technology-driven industries.**
- **Increase funding per full-time equivalent (FTE) student at Wilson Community College. Consider PROPEL NC, as a comprehensive overhaul of the North Carolina Community College System funding model, which will allow Wilson Community College to be more responsive to current and future educational and labor market demands.**
- **Provide greater access to professional development opportunities to private school personnel.**
- **Maintain current tax-exemptions for not for profit independent institutions such as Barton College.**
- **Improve early childhood education access and affordability through targeted programming that trains and retains early childhood education providers.**
- **Maintain tuition at public universities at reasonable levels that do not place Barton College at a competitive disadvantage to recruit students.**
- **Ensure curriculum standards meet community workforce needs by coordinating those standards with the required skills and qualifications expected by industry, and encourage industry to actively participate and fund such education and experience (i.e., internships, etc.) programs.**

AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT

The Chamber recognizes the unique role agriculture plays in our environment and economy. We support policies which encourage responsible environmental stewardship, and allows our agriculture community to thrive.

Policy Priorities

- Ensure consistency between the state and federal tax codes which seek to preserve or enhance tax exemptions on equipment and supplies.
- Support appropriate immigration reform that fulfills the labor needs of agricultural producers.
- Support educational and training programs that adequately prepare the agribusiness workforce and new farm business owners/operators.
- Continue recurring appropriations to the NC Tobacco Trust Fund and support of the Golden LEAF Foundation.
- Enhance efforts to promote Wilson County agricultural products in overseas markets.
- Promote sustainable and environmentally-friendly agricultural practices.
- Encourage the development of local food systems that insulate our market from disruptions to the global food supply chain.
- Encourage innovation that leads to growth that is sustainable, reliable, and ecologically responsible.
- Encourage programs that partner with local farm owners, and farm support businesses with potential new farmers to encourage new start-ups and to keep continued agriculture business in Wilson County.

PUBLIC SERVICES

The Chamber supports policies which encourage participatory policy development, transparent governance, and regulations that allow for fair competition and business growth. Community development should be driven by local initiative with direct and representative input from those most affected.

Policy Priorities

- Support efforts to fairly permit and regulate business and industry that does not adversely affect competition or the public interest, to include streamlining permitting and licensure requirements.
- Temporary/emergency restrictions imposed on businesses should be supported with sufficient evidence that such restrictions are essential to preserve public health, safety, and order, and have clear and attainable benchmarks for those restrictions to be repealed.
- Ensure that any emergency executive actions and declarations limit harmful disruptions to the business community while maintaining public health and safety. Likewise, government health services should partner with local businesses that have to meet health standards to provide public health education to patrons so those businesses can remain open and viable during public health emergencies.
- Recognize that Historic Downtown Wilson is a vital center of commerce that should be a priority for development, with efforts made to preserve its unique historical and cultural identity.
- As much as safe and practical, regulatory and public service decisions should be made by policy-makers nearest to the people those decisions will affect.
- The tax burden should be distributed to proportionately affect consumers, industries, or small business owners. The tax structure should be designed to reward growth and employee hiring across industries in all sectors.
- Review the efficacy of the state franchise tax.

- Grow workforce participation, and encourage skills attainment that creates a competitive workforce.

HEALTHCARE

The Chamber recognizes the economic benefit of a healthy community. We support policies that aid in the transformation of healthcare systems to improve health outcomes and quality of life for all citizens of Wilson County.

Policy Priorities

- Support legislation that reduces the financial burden on employers and workers to secure meaningful healthcare coverage and removes barriers to insurance options.
- ~~Support appropriate Medicaid reform that ensures ready and affordable access to primary care providers.~~
- Continue adequate funding to “safety net providers”, including the Wilson County Health Department, Carolina Family Health Centers, and other federally qualified community health centers.
- Grow the supply of healthcare providers by increasing educational and development opportunities in healthcare professions, especially to increase the supply of healthcare workers in rural and underserved areas.
- Ensure adequate support for the prevention of substance misuse, including appropriate funding for treatment and recovery services.
- Support public-private partnership to accelerate innovation in local healthcare systems, including the integration of telehealth services.
- Support legislation that reduces barriers and increases options for affordable and safe primary, specialty, and behavioral health care.
- Continue adequate funding to the key agencies providing services to aging and disabled adults. (Including Wilson County DSS, Area Agency on Aging, Wilson County Senior Center).
- Increase funding for school-based health providers at each public school.
- Prioritize incentives that promote healthy food choices, physical fitness, and preventive healthcare.
- The proliferation of Multi-unit Assisted Housing with Services (MUAHS) development in Wilson County has placed a disproportionate amount of stress on our healthcare system to provide adequate behavioral healthcare. MUAHS should be closely regulated to ensure that they do not compromise the quality of care for Wilson County residents.

TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

The Chamber understands the importance of fair access to community resources. We support public and private infrastructure that allows the safe exchange of goods, services, and ideas.

Policy Priorities

- Redevelop US Hwy. 301 in a way that responsibly utilizes limited local resources to optimize state and federal funding, to achieve specific measurable outcomes.
- Allow broadband technology to develop in a way that reaches every resident of Wilson County, without unnecessary regulatory barriers.
- Design public transit systems (including bus, on-demand micro-transit, and passenger rail services) with an aim to provide everyone in Wilson County with affordable and reliable

transportation options, including those specially designed to connect workers to emerging industrial growth at Wilson's industrial parks.

- **Encourage the sustainable development of the interstate highway system as an essential means for Wilson businesses to reach new markets and ports.**
- **Support legislation that preserves local control of water resources.**
- **Develop a reliable and sufficient funding stream to support the improvement of new and existing local transportation arteries. Safety, connectivity, and mobility of both vehicles and pedestrians, especially along congested corridors, should be given highest priority.**

HOUSING & NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT (NEW POLICY AREA FOR 2025)

The Chamber recognizes the need for safe, attainable, and responsible residential development that can support a workforce who can afford to live in our community. We support policies that increases the supply of diverse housing options that do not disproportionately impact public services.

Policy Priorities

- **Encourage public-private partnerships to rehabilitate existing housing stock and develop affordable housing options.**
- **Support incentives that enable long-term residents to remain in their homes amidst rising property values.**
- **Explore funding options that assist first-time homebuyers and low-income renters, helping them gain access to housing in revitalized areas.**

Adopted by the Wilson Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors this 11th day of December, 2024.

Heather Mercer (*Truist*), Chair, Board of Directors
Wilson Chamber of Commerce

Respectfully submitted and inviting inquiry,

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