

Southern Municipal Finance Society



Disaster Recovery, Rebuilding, and Resilience Conference

September 23 – 25, 2026

Keynote:
The Hon. Bo Hess
Council Member
City of Asheville, NC



City of Asheville

Recovery, Rebuilding and Resilience

Councilmember Bo Hess
September 24 2026



About Asheville

Population - ~100,000

Land Area - 45.6 square miles

Elevation - 2134'

Critical Infrastructure includes:

Domestic Water System

Interstates 40 & 26

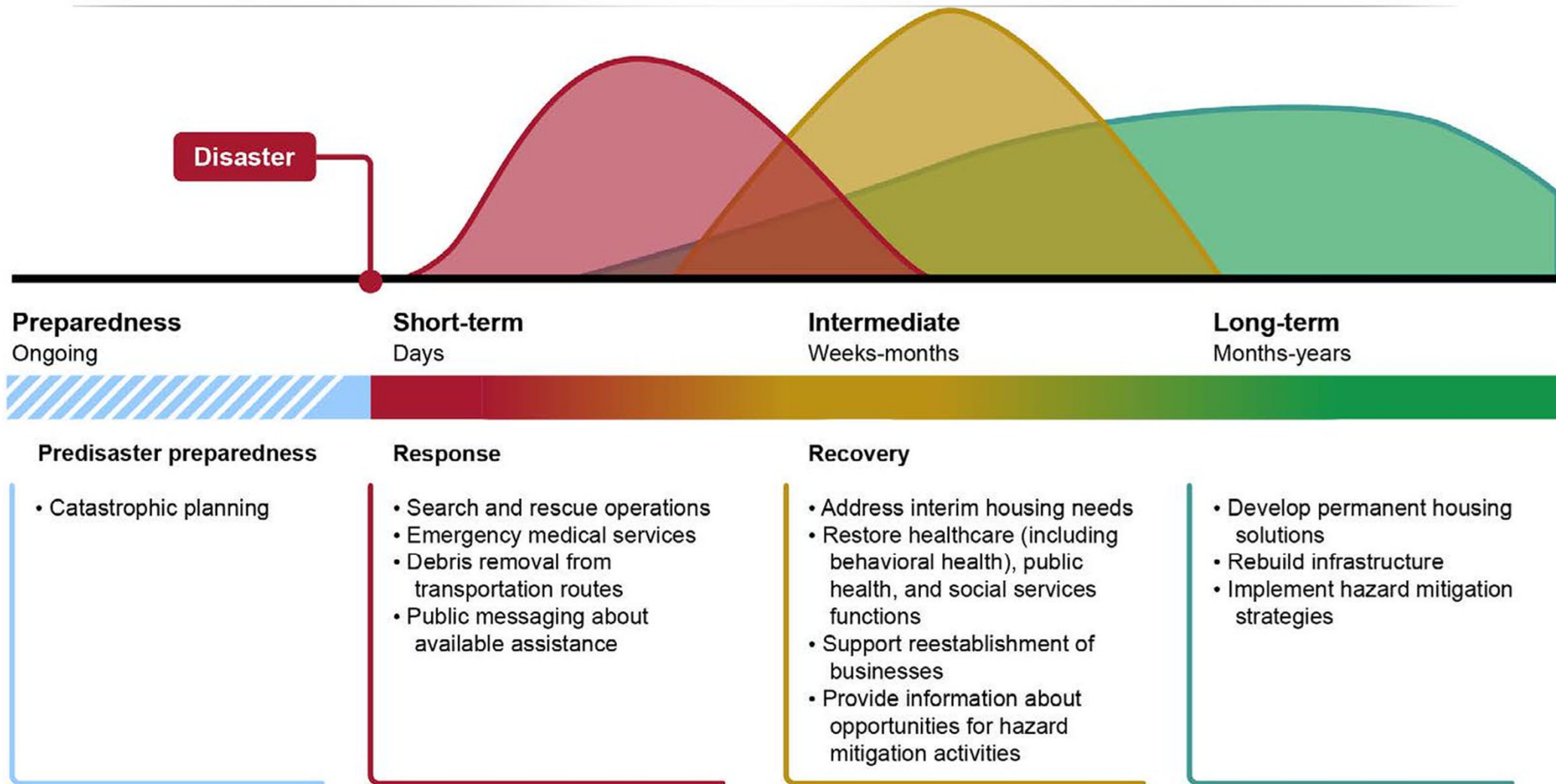
Healthcare Hub for WNC

Major Telecom Hub for WNC

Federal Facilities



Disaster Recovery Timeline



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Homeland Security policy. | GAO-22-104039

Planning Ahead: Emergency & Continuity Operations Plans



Finalized & Updated

Plans updated in 2024, right before the storm



Staff Training

City staff and elected officials received comprehensive training for both plans.



Continuous Updates

Plans undergo annual updates for ongoing improvement.



Emergency Operations Plan (EOP)

Provides a comprehensive framework for how the City of Asheville will prepare for, respond to, and recover from disaster events.



Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP)

Identifies and plans for how the City will continue providing essential functions during an emergency, enabling successful EOP implementation.

Emergency Operations Plan: Preparedness Overview

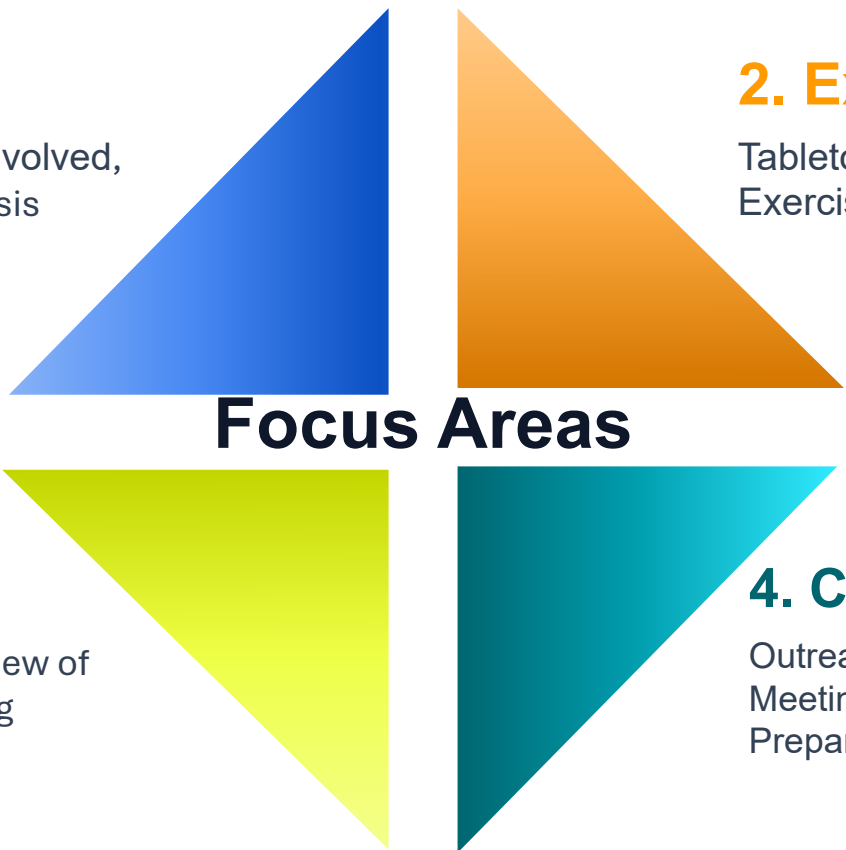
1. Planning

12 Months, All City Departments involved,
Threat & Hazard Vulnerability Analysis

2. Exercises

Tabletop & Full Day Functional EOC
Exercises, After-Action Reports & Testing

Focus Areas



3. Incident Review

Lived Experience Integration, Review of
historical incidents & understanding
resource capacity

4. Community Engagement

Outreach Channels, Surveys, Community
Meetings, Key Regional Stakeholders &
Preparedness Objectives

Planning Ahead: Public Safety Station 13



Public Safety station 13 opened in 2023 — Serves as our Emergency Operations Center for critical response & coordination



Planning Ahead: North Fork Dam Improvement (2021)



The North Fork Reservoir and Water Treatment Plan serve as the City's primary drinking water source, providing 70% of Asheville's water.

- Raised the dam by 4 feet
- Improved the principal spillway and added an auxiliary spillway
- Modified the raw water piping through the dam and to water treatment plant;
- Earth buttressing to reinforce the main dam and saddle dam for seismic stability

Fiscal Responsibility and Disaster Preparedness

- **Entered the disaster with strong savings**, giving us a financial cushion
- **Cash reserves gave us flexibility** to fund immediate response while awaiting reimbursements
- **Disciplined capital planning (CIP)** helped prioritize infrastructure needs and long-term costs
- **Brought in a disaster recovery consultant** to expand capacity and guide the recovery process
- **Maintained our AAA bond rating** despite disaster-related financial uncertainty

Hurricane Helene Impacts



Photo by Stephan Pruitt/American Red Cross

Storm Overview

Two Storms Hit the Area

Hurricane Helene made landfall as a Category 4 storm, then weakened to a tropical storm by the time it reached Asheville.

RAINFALL

~30 in

40 Trillion Gal.

WIND GUSTS

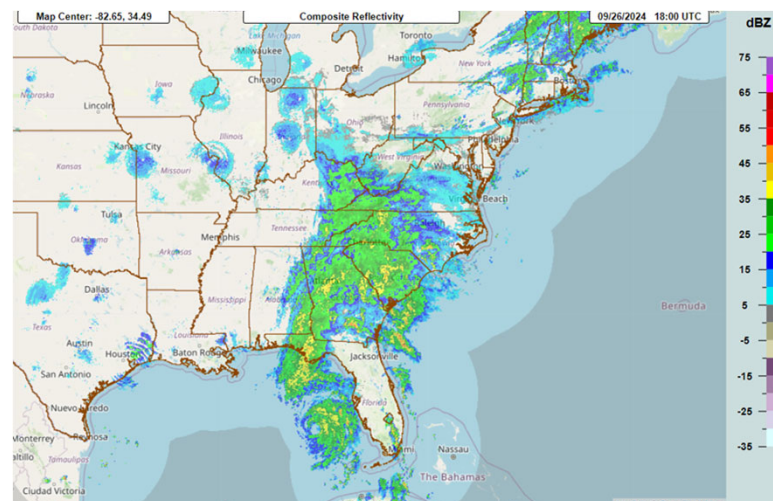
78 mph

Eyewall broke down

FLOOD PEAKS

**French Broad:
24.67 ft**

Swannanoa: 26.1 ft



Impact on the Community

- Many people lost access to running water & electricity
- Debris scattered heavily across the region
- Several critical bridges were destroyed
- Roads and Interstate highways were completely shut down





**North Fork 36" Bypass Waterline
SEP 30**



Immediate Response Overview

City of Asheville Emergency Operations Center

Central Incident Support & Response Coordination

156 DAYS ACTIVATED
to support & coordinate

Rescue & Direct Relief

300+

Search & Rescues

1,000

Emergency Evacuations

800+

HazMat Mitigations

4 Million

Water Bottles (5 PODs)



Operations & Recovery

100+

Outside Agencies Responded

1,500+

Structures Assessed

1,000+

Miles Searched

52 Days

Water System Restored



Community Care & Emergency Basic Services



Mobile Showers

Providing clean shower facilities and hygiene access for impacted residents.



Laundry Services

Mobile washing and drying stations to support daily essential needs.



Water & Supplies

Distribution of emergency drinking water, rations, and critical relief items.



Sanitation Units

Deployment of portable restrooms and handwashing stations across key sites.

Debris Collection & Removal Overview

Total Volume

927,885 cubic yards

Total Debris Collected

Collection Breakdown:

504,179 cu yds

Right of Way Collection

431,000 cu yds

Vegetative Storm Debris Mulched

300,760 cu yds

Waterway Collection

122,916 cu yds

Mud and Soil Collection

Watershed Clean-up

6,500+ Tons

Woody debris removed from the waterway within the North Fork Reservoir watershed

Private Property Assistance

970 Properties

Debris removal completed on private properties

Aid for Businesses Reopening & Operating

- **Launched City Staff FAST Team** to guide businesses and residents through permitting and recovery questions
- **Cleared debris in business corridors**, coordinating with reopening events like RAD Fest
- **Improved lighting and safety** in hard-hit business districts



North Fork 36" Bypass Waterline OCT 10



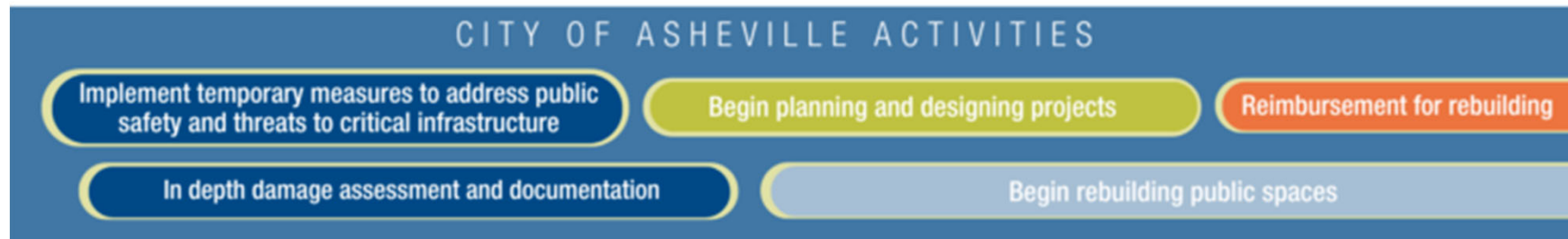
Meetings with Local, State and Federal Partners



Long Term Recovery

BUILDING BACK CITY ASSETS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

FEMA PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



Recovery Funding

FEMA PA	Funding to repair assets damaged by the storm. Limited mitigation funds available.
HMGP Grants	Cost-effective mitigation: riverbank restoration, retention ponds, engineered wetlands. Cost-effectiveness requirement favors engineered solutions.
CDBG-DR	Build back better for resilience, enhanced community access and recreation. May include green infrastructure and native species planting.
Other Grants / Funding	Scope is determined by the grantor. City seeks funding to address gaps for community-driven priorities.

Relief Funding & Programs for Economic Recovery

Business Stabilization

\$1.328M

Mountain BizWorks Grant

Provided business stabilization grants to Mountain BizWorks, a local CDFI, totaling \$1,328,000 to assist impacted small businesses.

Arts Support

\$200,000

Public Arts Reallocation

Reallocation of Public Arts Funds (\$200,000) directly to Arts AVL to provide emergency aid and resources for local artists.

Long-Term Recovery

\$52 Million

CDBG-DR Economic Program

Dedicated to economic revitalization through key initiatives:

- Revitalization of Flooded Commercial Districts
- Small Business Support Program
- Workforce Development Program

Impacts on Housing

35,222 Total FEMA Applications

14,589 homeowners and 20,633 renter households have applied for FEMA Individual Assistance.

2,188 Major Home Damage

Estimated owner-occupied homes that may have sustained major damage (damages over \$8,000).

1,827 Renter Property Damage

Estimated renter households with documented personal property damage.



Relief Funding & Programs for Housing Recovery

Rental Assistance

\$1,624,000

649 Households

Local and federal funds to assist low-income city households with rental assistance.

Home Repair

\$1,465,000

52 Residents

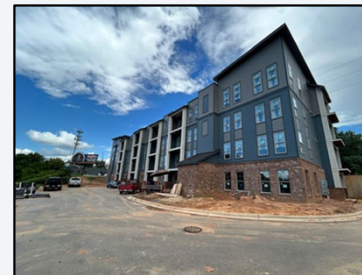
Affordable Housing Bond funds to assist low-income city residents with home repair.

Multi-Family Housing

\$17.89M

331 Housing Units

CDBG-DR funding for 331 affordable, disaster-resilient multi-family housing units.



Reconstruction/Repair

\$22.50M

50–60 Homeowners

CDBG-DR funding for home reconstructions for low-income city homeowners through Renew NC Program.



Infrastructure Impacts

ASSET DAMAGE

130

Damaged Locations

The City of Asheville has identified approximately 130 damages across City facilities, infrastructure, and public assets.

ASSESSMENTS

102

Site Inspections

Staff conducted **92** physical site inspections and **10** tabletop inspections to document impacts, validate eligibility, and scope recovery needs.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

\$875M+

Estimated Storm Damage

Total storm damage estimated at over \$875 million across all city facilities and public assets.

Infrastructure Relief Funding



CDBG-DR FUNDS

\$115M

Water & Parks Resiliency

Allocated for Water Resiliency Projects, Parks Recovery, and Resilience Hubs.

FEMA - PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

\$178M

City Asset Restoration

Dedicated funds to restore damaged city assets and public infrastructure.

HAZARD MITIGATION

\$400M

Grant Applications

Submitted for water system improvements, early warning systems, resilient infrastructure, backup power systems, and related projects.

Future Planning for Resilience

- Permanent pretreatment systems at North Fork and DeBruhl water treatment plants
- Unified Development Ordinance Rewrite
- Funding for Resilience Hubs
- French Broad Riverfront Infrastructure
- Swannanoa, Azalea Road and Park Infrastructure
- And many more.....
- Visit www.ashevillenc.gov.

Thank you from
Asheville!

