The Navigator

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UTILITY COMPANIES ARE EXPANDING GRID INFRASTRUCTURE, BUILDING POWER PLANTS TO ACCOMODATE ELECTRICITY DEMANDS FOR ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

DEMOCRATS WIN MAJORITY IN U.S. HOUSE, SENATE, AND N.C. HOUSE SEATS

Democrats will represent Craven County in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives and N.C. Senate and House, according to unofficial Nov. 3 election results on the NC State Board of Elections website. Craven County Republican representatives kept their seats in the N.C. State Senate and House, but Democrats flipped control of the N.C. State House and narrowed the Republican majority in the Senate. Democrats also picked up one seat on the Craven County Board of Commissioners and another on the Craven County Board of Education. The "Write-In" candidate(s) received the most votes in the race for seats on River Bend's Town Council. The Craven County Board of Elections Canvass meeting will be held on Nov. 13.

INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION UNDERWAY

In the 1900s, millionaires promised machines would save time, money, and labor; now, Big Tech billionaires repeat same promises. Who's really benefiting?

Over time, political rhetoric and false claims eventually erode shared baseline of facts and leads to a more polarized society. We thought it was a good time to look back at history to try to make sense of what is happening now. After stripping away the nonsense and distractions, we found one thing to be true – human civilization cycles through devastating conflicts and profound progress that mostly centers around the need to secure, distribute, and protect AIR, WATER, FOOD, AND SHELTER.

America is in the middle of another Industrial Revolution and this time Big Tech companies are planning on investing enornous capital on data centers, energy networks, and hardware. Historically, machines were used to replace human labor, now, AI is not only replacing labor, but its also automating tasks and altering how we create, work, and communicate. It's time for our country's elected leaders to work together and determine who will benefit and who will be burdered from how the new technologies will be distributed.

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'DOES ANYONE REALLY CARE ABOUT AFFORDABLE HOUSING? HECK NO'

Reginal "Reggie" Barner, the CEO of the Barner Group/purported Interim Executive Director of the Housing Authority of the City of New Bern, asked Redevelopment Commissioners Commissioners Julius Parham, Sarah Proctor, Jimmie Dillahunt, Beth Walker, Kip Peregoy, Steve Strickland, Leander Morgan, Jr., Tabari Wallace, and Executive Director Zeb Hough, "Who do you want to be when you grow up?" He said he would drag them "kicking and screaming into the Housing Authority's world over these next few months on what we're going to do with Trent Court and the redevelopment." he said, "If I make you a partner with us on development, then that means you get a developer fee."

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Flock License Plate Reader/Camera

THE MECHANICAL MAN

An investor and his "Mechanical Man made headlines in several cities including New Bern in 1913. The figure turned out to be a human actor. Tthe fascination with creating humanoid robots continued.

In May 2025, President Donald Trump met with Saudi Arabia Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Riyad where "the U.S. and Saudi Arabia signed a $600 billion agreement that includes a defense contract and investments in artificial intelligence (AI)," as reported by Forbes. They also noted Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, AMD CEO Lisa Su, and Tesla CEO Elon Musk also met in Riyad and concluded their own deals. Within weeks, news outlets reported that Tesla was working on "Optimus," a humanoid robot; Meta plans to build AI-powered robots; and Boston Dynamic plans to build robot dogs.

Liquified Natural gas electric plant?

At the same time as city officials are considering issuing $150 million in revenue bonds to fund electric, water, and sewer projects and committing public resources to partner with an unnamed company to build a 19-megawatt (or larger) liquified natural gas electric plant; Amital Spinning Corporation is asking the city to allow them to use their property (257,000 sqft buildiing) for the "Continuation of existing manufacturing, processing, creating, repairing, renovating, cleaning, assembling of goods, merchandise and equipment." The company stopped manfacturing textiles around 2008. It looks like there's an electrical substation on the property that's located near New Bern's Water Plant.

AI AUTONOMOUS AGENTS

After winning the election, the U.S. president, announced the creation of the Department of Government Efficiency which would be headed by Elon Musk, the CEO of SpaceX/xAI/Tesla/Neuralink, and Vivek Ramaswamy, an entrepreneur. Trump rebranded the United States Digital Service to DOGE through an executive order and issued another order to remove "unnecessary barriers to Federal employees accessing Government data and promoting inter-agency data sharing..." It was later reported that DOGE gained access to sensitive records across multiple federal departments.

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DATACENTERS AND CRYPTOCURRENCY AND MINING FACILITIES

New Bern's Assistant City Attorney told the Planning and Zoning Board to think about how they are looking at data centers and cryptocurrency mining facilities during their regular meeting at City Hall on Oct. 15, 2026.



WHO ASSUMES THE RISK?

An editorial in The Herald newspaper said in 1922 that two theories continuously emerge when industry falls on hard times. One theory suggests "owners of industry assume the risk" and the other says 'The working class bear the burden of the financial loss resulting from hard times."

The same theories ring true today.

City of New Bern considering rate hikes to cover costs to finance municipal utility revenue bonds

Mass-scale rezoning

The public will have a chance to ask questions and learn more about Weyerhaeuser NR Company's proposed request to rezone 1,245 acres of agricultural and forestry land to high intensity, high density commercial and residential zoning districts during a drop-in meeting on Tuesday, Nov. 10, 2026, 3:30 p.m. - 5:45 p.m. at the Craven Community College Corporate Training Center. The New Bern Board of Aldermen will meeting at 6 p.m. on Tuesday night in second-floor courtroom at City Hall on Pollock Street on the potential rezoning of Craven County Parcel ID: 8-209-13000) from A-5F Agriculture to C-3 Commercial; Parcel ID: 8-211-011 from A-5F Agriculture and R-15 Residential to R-6 Residential; and PID: 8-209-18000 from A-5F Agriculture to R-6 Residential. The meeting agenda can be found here. The proposed development agreement calls for 2,700 residential units to be built within the next 11-15 years as well as retail, commercial, and other development, as noted here.

The properties are adjacent to a 4,250-acre tract owned by the Weyerhaeuser Forest Holdings, Inc. Part of that parcel is adjacent to the city's water plant and is within feet of the Amital Spinning Corporation, which has an old power plant on the property.

Development Services Director Jessica Rhue has said development agreements don't go through the Development Review Committee. They are worked out "between the elected officials of the city and the developer." She said the plans met the bare minimum requirements of the city's ordinance."

New Bern's elected officials directed staff to move forward with plan to hold a public hearing on increasing water, wastewater, and electric rates to cover the costs to finance the bonds, not the actual cost of a future issuances of municipal utility revenue bonds over a 5-year period during the Board of Aldermen meeting at City Hall on Oct. 13, 2026.

The financial plan calls for a 2.5 percent hike in electric rates each year for five years and a 4.5 percent hike in water and sewer rates each year between 2028-2032 to cover the "financing costs" of issuing municipal revenue bonds. The actual customer tiered rates to be determined. Additional rate increases to cover operating expenses and debt service on the potential $150 million capital plan and merger costs are unknown at this time.

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Duke Energy plans to combine two subsidiaries into one in NC and SC

Once upon a time, voters approved a Constitutional Amendment in 1977 that allowed electric-selling muncipalities to jointly own power plants with privately owned utilities. New Bern and 31 other NC Eastern Municipal Power Agency member municipalities jointly issued roughly $5 billion in municipal bonds to investors to finance ownership interest in Carolina Power & Light's generating units at Mayo and Roxboro coal plants and Brunswick and Shearon Harris nuclear plants. Four nuclelar reactors were planned at the Harris plant but only one was built due to cost overruns, decreased demand, and other factors. CP & L later became Progress Energy and merged with Duke Energy in 2012. Duke Energy Progress then bought back ownership shares from NCEMPA in 2015 and continued to provide wholesale power to the 32 municipalities through 2032, as reported here.Now, Duke Energy Progress is merging with Duke Energy Carolina to form the one investor owned utililty in NC and SC.

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The Navigator

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Editor's Corner

Who's in charge?

Last month, I wrote an open letter to the New Bern Board of Aldermen on behalf of readers to ask a few basic questions but have not received a response. It looks like New Bern is shifting to a paternalistic form of city government that harkens back to the 1910-20s and a political appointee appears to be managing a small bloc of elected officials through her broadcasting studio. Will our elected city council take back their power and start representing all the people in a city where the mayor should be "presiding" over meetings and not voting on all matters?

As Veterans Day approaches, it's important to remind our elected and appointed officials of their duties and the fact that U.S. service men and women did not fight, sacrifice, and/or and die for our rights and freedoms for those rights and freedoms to be taken away by politicians.

It's also worth noting that the aldermen meeting consent agenda lets officials lump several items into one and approve all items without having to talk about the issues "to save time." We're all for saving time and money, but there's no telling how it's being spent if there's no public record of it as transparency is the bedrock of accountability. Prior to 2025, the board only used this for routine, non-financial items.

On Tuesday night, the aldermen will consider setting a public hearing on Dec. 8 to enter into a $3.5 million "installment financing agreement for the purchase of 3200 Wellons Blvd.; approving a Memorandum of Agreement with the Drug Enforcement; and other things without discussion. Does the purchase of the Old Sun Journal building have anything to with another "Economic Development Incentive" deal for corporation(s) that was discussed during a closed session meeting or is the board conducting signficiant business during three-by-three meetings to prevent a quorum?

Lasty, I fully support public servants who work hard every day to provide vital services and resources to our community. I hope our elected leaders will stop manufactuing wedge issues to try and create distrctions that divide our community.

COMPANY TOWNS

Elon Musk is planning company towns for Tesla, SpaceX and Boring Co. workers

"SpaceX plans to build a $24 billion data center in Texas — and is seeking local property tax breaks for the project," according to Politico.

INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

(Continued from front page)

History tells us that the first two Industrial Revolutions transformed human society by shifting from human hand-power, draft animals, wood for energy, and water and wind mills to mechanized production that was powered by the steam engine. The combination of electricity, interchangable parts, and the assembly line revolutionized manufacturing. The massive build-out of rail ways, roads, electric grids, and telecommunication infrastructure networks reshaped human civilization and transformed localized economic structures into a machine-drive national and global economy. The first revolutions began in the U.S. in the late 18th-19th century and the second revolution took place post-Civil War through the early 20st Century.

The country also saw the birth of big business and corporate monopolies in industries like steel, oil, coal, electricity, and railroads which allowed them to control the market, set prices, and limit competition. Industrial millionaires often called "robber barons," corporations, financiers, some media companies, and others marketed the idea that machines would "save time, labor, and money."The wealthy got wealthier by benefiting from government policies, land grants, protective tariffs, and tax incentives; while many children, men, and women struggled with harsh labor conditions and economic displacement. Vagrancy laws were put in place after after slavery was abolished to prevent homelessness and unemployed children and adults from walking around without permission. Minor criminal offenders were often convicted and leased to indiviuals and corporations as part of their workforce.

The U.S. government eventually passed antitrust laws in an attempt to break up monopolies and regulate big business. A Harvard Business School article noted it could be argued that the era (1920s) was characterized by its "experimentation in business-government relationships, interfirm information sharing practices, and robust private antitrust litigation."

Several cities saw a need for more water in 1920-1921 which caused utilities to cut the power to 60 factories due to severe drought conditions, according to news reports.

Commercial enterprises and corporations controlled housing, schools, healthcare, libraries, leisure, and most aspects of daily life. Churches were built with corporate money. Private detectives and police forces were hired to monitor workers. Some residents enjoyed life in company towns while others were fired, evicted, and blacklisted from the industry when they asked for a living wage and decent working conditions. Currency known as scrip could be redeemed at company-owned stores which allowed the owners to inflate prices and keep workers in debt.

Tensions between coal, steel, railroad, and other industry financiersy and workers resulted in several strikes that sparked nationwide uprisings. After the control of railroads was returned to private executives in 1920, the U.S. Railroad Labor Board passed a 12 percent wage cut and removed wartime work rules and overtime benefits for maintenance and shop craft workers (boilermakers, carpenters, machinists, electricians, repair, maintenance, and sheet metal workers). This led to almost a half a million shopmen asking for a living wage and decent working conditions during the National Shopmen's Strike in July 1922. The railroad executives hired temporary replacement workers which led to tensions, bombings, and fights between cross the country.

Engineers, brakemen, conductors, and firemen didn't face the same wage cuts. They didn't join the strike, which let the trains to run in a limited capacity, according to newspaper reports.

History tells us that there have been times when U.S. attorney generals supported industries over human rights and secured court injunctions from federal judges to justify presidential orders that militarize action against workers seeking a living wage and decent working conditions which allowed marshals to strip the workers of their constitutional rights to assembly and free speech. Eventually, steam engines failed saftey inspections because the temporary workers lacked skilled training and weren't available to maintain steam locomotives.

The public backlash against the harsh government intervention contributed to the political fallout for the Harding administration and Daugherty. It eventually led to the repeal of the Railroad Labor Board and the passage of the Railway Labor Act of 1926, which established a new framework for resolving labor disputes in the rail industry. This is only one historical example of how rapid growth, if left unchcked by compromise, can lead to disasterous consequences.

Labor wages in the 1922

The Independent newspaper described the agriculture industry in 1922 by saying it was argued "that lower wages enable industry to employ more people and produce more commodities..."

"It is surprising to note how far the country is from having a grasp on the simplest of economic facts. It doesn't seem to occur to a lot of folks that the nation heads straight for disaster again just as soon as it begins to produce more than it can consume."

"The Secretary of Agriculture advises the farmers of the West to burn their corn for fuel so as to take it off the market and boost the price. Cotton and tobacco farmers of the South are encouraged by staid and conservative bankers, their governors, congressman and senators, to curtail their acreage and build warehouse in which to store their surplus products, assuring them that the less they produce the more they will get for their labor," he wrote.

"The wage laborer was asked to take less and less for his labor and produce more...All business, including farming, is dependent upon the spending ability of the man or woman who works for wages. Business thrives only when labor has money to spend. It is the laborer working for good wages who trades liberally at the stores, keeps the merchant, the jobber, the manufacturer, the railroads and the banks busy. Cut down his wages and the laborer curtails his buying at the retail store; the retailer curtails his orders to the jobber; the jobber cancels his mill orders; the mills shut down; freight cars stand idel and the banker lies awake nights wondering how to finance all of his customers in a hole. And yet everybody is clamoring for a reduction of wages. Let's have another cut, seems to be the slogan of every branch of industry," the editor said.

A healthy community?

When politicians use their government positions to control healthcare, food, housing, education as commodities to advance personal agendas rather than fill basic needs, it creates a system of inequities, undermines public trust, and distracts public officials from their mission of serving the citizenry.

THE MECHANICAL MAN



(Continued from front page)

First Lady Melanie Trump and Figure 03, a humanoid robot, walked together in the White House for the "Fostering the Future Together" global initiative meeting in March 2026. The robot said it was "grateful to be part of this historic movement to empower children with technology and education."

It's been widely reported that the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency is planning to buying robotic dogs from Boston Dynamics and people have demonstrated against the sale.

Craven Count changes CARTS routes; adds taxii-like service

Craven County Board of Commissioners approved changes to Craven Area Rural Transportation System that reduced the fixed bus routes from three to two. They also, implemented an OnDemand+ pilot program that is "Similar to a taxi service, passengers may request a ride, and a nearby CARTS driver will be dispatched to assist. Same-day rides will be available from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., with a fare of $5 per ride... A new pickup location will be added at the New Bern Mall at the main entrance between Annabelle's and Buffalo Wild Wings. Fixed-route fares will remain $1 per passenger, with service operating Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.," according to a press release. For details, call 252-636-4917.

Transformation of textile and tobacco industries to Aerospace Corridor

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The third wave of the Industrial Revolution in the mid-to-late 20th Century (1960s-90s) was driven by nuclear energy, computers, telecommunications, the internet, and programmable logic controllers.

In early 1971, Carolina Power & Light Company applied for permits to construct a four-unit Shearon Harris Nuclear Power Plant in Wake and Chatham Counties. In May, the investor-owned power company advertised that they asked for permission to increase their rates on an emergency basis. It said, "...People are using more electricity in their homes, and expanding industries and new industries, which create more jobs and new payrolls, will depend on us to supply the power they must have to operate. And electricity will be needed to run new devices for treating waste and reducing pollution in our air and water." The ad said CP & L needed to raise rates so they could finance the new facilities. "...between now and 1978 we have already planned for facilities which will cost the staggering sum of $2.4 billion" which "will come from people who are willing to invest their savings in CP & L." Then, the U.S. faced an energy crisis and an oil embargo in 1973.

North Carolina voters approved a Constitutional Amendment in 1976 that ultimately allowed the City of New Bern and 31 other electric-selling municipalities to form the North Carolina Eastern Municipal Power Agency in the eastern part of the state to purchase ownership interest in seven generating units at Mayo and Roxboro (coal) and Shearon Harris and Brunswick power plants owned by CP & L Co. through the issuance of multi-billion dollar municpal bonds. Nineteen municipalities in the Piedmont and western part of the state formed North Carolina Municipal Power Agency 1 to jointly own generating units at nuclear power plants with Duke Energy Carolina.

The two oil crises brought economic recessions and forced plant shutdowns, layoffs, and dislocations which were componded in 1979 by an accident at Three Mile Island Nuclear Power Plant. Electricity consumption dropped, industrial slowdowns, increased interest rates, and other factors left the electric-selling utilities with excess capacity and billions of dollars in stranded construction debt.

In 1980, news reports said CP & L Co. was moving foward with construction of the Shearon Harris plant as the operator and manager. They would provide fuel, transmission service, and sell all the supplemental power to the agency for "its participating cities need (over and above the amount of power they will receive from their share of the agency's ownership interest)." An article said, "As a tax-exempt municipal corporation, the agency can sell electric revenue bonds at an interest rate that is as much as 5 percent below what capital costs the private company."

A nuclear reactor exploded at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant near Pripyat, Ukrainian SSR, now Ukraine in April of 1986. In July 1986, CP & L sent a letter to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission with resolutions from NCEMPA's agency members that supported the prompt licensing and operation of the Harris Plant. New Bern's resolution said NCEMPA owned 16.17 percent of the Shearon Harris Nuclear Power Plant and "...the availability of an adequate supply of electricity is essential to create jobs, promote business development, and ensure the prosperity of the people of New Bern and Craven County...the city had confidence in the regulatory process and CP & L's ability to operate the power plant "in a manner that will protect the health and safety of the people of New Bern and the State..." Only one of the four nuclear reactors were built due to cost overruns and the decrease in demand, as reported here.

Carolina Power & Light Co. merged with Florida Progress Corp. in 2000 and rebranded as Progress Energy in 2003. CP&L, a subsidiary of Progress Energy, was renamed Progress Energy Carolinas.

The city council decided to spend $9 million to purchase two-way advanced metering devices for the electric and water systems to "save time and labor" in 2014. The devices transmit two-way radio frequency signals that interrupt the electric flow to certain appliances like water heaters, air conditioners, heat strips, and other things at times of electric peak demand when the utility is charged the most for the purchase of electricity. Customers get a flat rate credit for signing up for the load management program that allows the city to control appliances on a monthly basis, according to meeting minutes.

The board agreed to NC Eastern Municipal Power Agency's sale generating assets at the four power plants to Duke Energy Progress for $1.2 billion in 2015. Also that year, the cities of New Bern and Havelock, Craven County, developers, corporations, and others decided to create a group called "Craven 100 Alliance" that uses public and private funds for "economic development" projects in Craven County in 2015. We asked for a copy of the C1A's meeting minutes and the director said it is "a private nonprofit, and it does not publish its minutes."

The Foreign Trade Zone #214 was expanded in 2016 to include Craven County and 21 other counties. Wayne, Lenoir and Craven counties are being marketed as the North Carolina Aerospace Corridor. The NCAC's website says that it "has an aggressive economic development model in place and has found great success utilizing this model while transitioning from tobacco and textile industry clusters to aerospace, food, housing, biotech and pharmaceutical."

In 2020, a small bloc of city, county, state, and federal elected officials met to discuss a mass-scale effort of installing broadband internet on New Bern's electric distribution system's infrastructure.

During the lame duck session in June 2022, then aldermen Sabrina Bengel, Jameesha Harris, Bobby Aster, Barbara Best, and Jeffrey Odham voted to add three focus areas of New Bern (including "opportunity zones") including West New Bern to the land use plan. Mayor Dana Outlaw also voted for the motion. The new board approved an electric line extension policy that gave incentives to developers which have been said to have cost the city millions of dollars since. Utility rates have been raised to cover the costs of water, sewer, and electricity to cover the costs of extending services to new developments.

The aldermen and mayor later voted to use the city's Electric Utility Fund to pay $3 million for the costs of design, locating services, materials and supplies, repairs, and other things. MetroNet began installing "high-speed" internet in 2022. It was initially said that they would provide IPTV, but that was cancelled because the provider said they wouldn't benefit from provding the service to customers.

Duke Energy is planning to merge two utilities into one in the Carolinas

(Continued from front page)

Duke Energy Progress and and Duke Energy Carolinas are set to merge into one electric utility in NC and SC in January 2027. New Bern officials asked a DEP representative in June 2026 if Duke was interested in buying the city's electric distribution system. The representative said, "Not at this time."

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

(Continued from front page)

He told a story about how he borrowed $1 million from a bank to build a $10 million housing development. He received 9% Low-Income Housing Tax Credits from the state and sold them to the bank which they put towards their corporate income tax for 10 years. The amount equaled $900,000 a year for ten years which meant it only cost Barner $1 million to build a $10 million development. He said he used money from other tax credit programs and other revenue streams to fund the rest of the development and walked away with $1 million from the deal.

He said if the RDC "do a $10 million deal it allows you to earn 15% developer fee. So, if we earn $1.5 million in developer fees and I make you my 30% partner then you earn a developer fee and then that'll help."

"Datacenters are not a campaign issue," political appointee says

Americans are experiencing the fourth Industrial Revolution with the digitalization of manufacturing industries as they're connecting to physical devices, machinery, sensors to a network for real-time data sharing and remote monitoring. Some people are embracing the technology while others are concerned with data privacy, ethical AI deployment, cyber security, wealth gaps, and economic disruption.

Leading up to New Bern's November 2025 municipal election, the mayor's political appointee to the Housing Authority told her radio/internet alternate reality show listeners (voters) that "Datacenters are not a campaign issue" from her broadcasting studio. She also campaigned for the mayor and a few candidates who ran for office and won.

Hypercscale datacenters were a campaign issue in 2025 and continues to be as public utlities prepare to expand water, sewer, electric, and solid-waste capabilities to accomodate developers. It's time for officials to be honest with consumers who will be footing the bill for years to come.

DEREGULATION

The Trump administration proposed rolling back federal rules to cut methane emissions from oil and gas operations.

The Environmental Protection Agency revoked the agency's 2009 "endangerment finding," that's a scientific conclusion that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases emitted by burning fossil fuels are a danger to public health and welfare," according to the Associated Press.

The EPA has sought public comments as they work to redefine the scope of the clean water law to limit wetlands.

Proposed No Wake Zone in Brice's Creek

A few months ago, New Bern City Attorneys said, "We are going to look at extending the city limits out to the center of each river in areas where it's not currently. Um there are places where we cross the river because we're contiguous. There are places where we go to the center of the river and there are places where we follow the shoreline. So, in places where we follow the shoreline, we're going to push those limits out to the middle of the river."

The city has asked the NC Wilfife Commission to approve a request for a No Wake Zone in Brices Creek.

ARE CITY OFFICIALS HELPING POLITICAL APPOINTEES TAKEOVER PUBLIC HOUSING?

A self-professed wannabee mayor and former city aldermen started hosting a radio show in 2014 while she also had access to government information as a political appointee on the Craven County Tourism & Development Authority. For 12 years, she flitted from appointed office, to elected office, to appointed office, and used her titles to frame her personal agenda on "Education and Opportunities for Young People and Families; Electricity/Utility Rates and Service; Crime and Crime Prevention; Job Creation; Transportation and Local Roads; Economic Development & Non-Profit Services; Public Housing/Social Services, while also advertising her personal businesses. Eventually she built a broadcasting studio for her show inside her commercial buidling.

In 2015, she told listeners that people needed to relinquish their property for economic development and also talked how the city could inspect potential minimum housing code violations and impose fines if property owners didn't comply within a certain time; demolish the property and acquire the property via the tax foreclosure process. She also talked about how she "commandeered" the Housing Authority" and her plans to demolish public housing and redevelop the waterfront property on the Trent as private property. She also talked a lot about developing the former Days Inn property on Broad Street, then the city did it. The politician used her public title and her show's guests in what appeared to be attempts to undermine and mischaracterize an established community to justify taking peoples homes and properties within a 500 plus acre area of New Bern. Some residents have said their properties have been in the family for over a century. The "Redevelopment Area" encompasses Duffyfield, Five Points, Lawson Creek and other areas. Part of the area was consumed by the "Great Fire of 1922" which displaced 3,000 white and mostly black people who lived in Army tents for two years. One woman died during the fire.

New Bern elected officials created a Redevelopment Commission with their political appointees to take dozens, possibly hundreds, of houses and land from locals. The RDC is supposed to make decisions as a "public body" but it looks like the commissioners have gone block by block, targeting houses looking for potential minimum housing code violations, as they described during public meetings. Some said they tried to talk to the residents but they wouldn't answer the door (out of fear of losing their properties and being left homesless).

It's unclear if there were back-door agreements that took place years ago or whether the dozens or more properties are being taken and demolished strickly by using eminent domain and/or citing property owners for miniumum housing code violations resulting in owners not being able to afford to pay the fees imposed and/or property taxes so they lost their property via tax foreclosure and they were sold to the highest bidder – mostly developers. Some residents have said the new development is causing their property taxes to increase, which could cause them to lose their homes and properties. I've attempted to get answers, but the aforementioned officials refuse to respond to requests for information. New Bern's social media maven mayor tells his followers that "it's in the plan," but it's not.

In 2021, after the city hired a lobbyist who worked for Craven County's former U.S. Congressman as a campaign advisor to help the aldermen to help the city obtain a Choice Neighborhood Implementation Grant for the Greater Five Points Neighborhood Plan.

The Housing Authority of the City of New Bern hired Reginal B. "Reggie" Barner, Sr., the CEO of The Barner Group, as a development consultant. Barner was Tiffany Askew (then NBHA executive director)'s boss at the Aiken Housing Authority years ago. She resigned in 2022 after a small group of commissioners didn't include her in a private meeting about a proposed development contract for Trent Court which later fell through. She had accused Sabrina Bengel of threatening her earlier that year. The NBHA commissioners voted to hire Barner as the interim executive director during a remote meeting. The vote and his contract agreement are unclear as it happened during a remote meeting without any paperwork.

When Barner, as the CEO of The Barner Group, asked the City of Florence to cover the costs of infrastructure for one of his housing projects in 2009, the mayor questioned the structure and fiduciary duties of the Florence Downtown Development Corporation.

The Florence mayor said, "As a citizen from the outside, it is not clear if the FDDC is part of the city or not and when they see the FDDC acting they think it is the city. The FDDC is a non-profit corporation, no different than other nonprofits. But the FDDC gets a position of favor because of its integration with the City of Florence," he said. The Florence mayor said he had concerns about the conflicts that arise when a non-profit organization is staffed by the city and gets ahead of other non-profits because it is the city. When the city funds a non-profit organization, such as the FDDC, and they operate as a non-profit, answerable only to a board of directors, the city loses control.

Citizens of New Bern are asking some of the same questions about the Redevelopment Commission, especially when some of the commissioners – who are developers and real estate agents – are planning developing city-owned, public property during special luncheons with other developers while doing RDC business.

Housing Authority's Board of Commissioners have and continue to eliminate hundreds of public housing units that are occupied by children, elderly, disabled, veterans, and people many people who are working low-paying job. The commissioners are creating a bunch of private corporations, then appointing themselves to a board of directors to either managing the properties and/or sell them to developers who build market rate, moderate, and low income units and hold the titles to the land for x amount of years and then the . When the RDC buit the three new houses in 2023 with over a half a million from the General Fund, it was disclosed that change orders were processed to accomodate Barner's request before the city approved a deal to sell the houses to the Housing Authority. In their official capacity, the NBHA purported interim directo and chairman, City of New Bern mayor, city staff, and chairman have framed the public narrative from the vice chaiman's recording studio ahead of key aldermen votes. The videos have since been deleted.

The current Board of Aldermen have not publicly discussed any details of the plan, like who is going to manage the property. Instead, under the new business portion of an aldermen earlier this year, Barner told them, "We're looking at leveraging $15 million in projects over the next 8-10 years, plus the additional amount for the road, water and sewer infrastructure to be a total of approximately $20 million for the project." Without seeing anything in writting, they approved a motion that directed City Manager Foster Hughes and Mayor Jeffrey Odham to work with Barner on submitting the proposed $25 million grant application, which has not been the case when the city submits grant requests. After the application was sent to The U.S. Departmetn of Housing And Urban Development, we obtained a copy of the application but were only able to view some of the 400 pages. The city is required to provide a match, which has been said to be $7 million of "in-kind services and materials." (Kind of like the 2009 deal with the City of Florence). The plan calls for the city to donate the former Days Hotel site on Broad Street as well as the redevelopment of the former hotel site, the former FR Danyus School/former site of West Street School; and Trent Court as mixed-income market rate, moderate, and low income units.

The Board of Aldermen will consider selling 703 and 721 First Avenue with a combined acreage of 1.48 acres for $63,000 in the Redevelopment Area to the Housing Authority on Nov. 10 at 6 p.m. at City Hall.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP DATA SHARING?



A New Bern Housing Authority Board of Commissioners meeting

(Continued from front page)

Federal funding was cut from several programs and departments after DOGE reportedly gained access to sensitive records across multiple federal departments. PBS and other outlets reported, "260,000 to 270,000 federal workers left service in 2025 through mass firings, buyouts, and hiring freezes..."

The president signed an executive order that "authorizes both intra-agency and inter-agency sharing and consolidation of unclassified records."

The proposed CNI federal grant application calls for a "data-sharing agreement" where USI (Housing Authority consultant) will track and collect data that allows for regular reporting on People Metrics, documenting program impact and outcomes, and reporting on People Leverage commitments. USI will enter into a data sharing agreement with property management to ensure resident data can be shared on an "as needed" basis to achieve the goals of the People Plan. At a minimum, the data haring agreement will cover resident contact information, eviction risk status and other basic information to facilitate case management outreach and housing stability supports. USI will also expand sharing agreement with schools/school districts sufficient to track student-level data for Trent Court residents. USI will also communicate the plan and results to shareholders, partners, and residents..."

In July 2026, Craven County Commissioners Chadwick Howard, Jason Jones, Dennis "Denny" Bucher, Dean Mason, Shevel "Sherry" Hunt, and Beatrice Smith agreed to pay a newly formed private tech company, Polimorphic, an additional $10,000 for a new contract that is said to be "cutting-edge AI and customer service solutions for citizens." It allows a tech company to provide "citizen tracking."

An article on Polimorphic's website –"Poli on the Road: Learnings from North Carolina" article on says the company visited Craven, Duplin, Gaston, Pineville, Polk, Rowan counties and met with government agencies. It says there is an opportunity for "Implementing an AI voice line for inbound calls could alleviate the pressure by automatically responding to status requests or simple inquiries." The article also talks about systems that handle single food or Medicaid application and said there is an opportunity to introduce interview bots and multilingual AI to "handle intake and triage nutrition and food benefits."

The commissioners accepted state and federal funds in October to implement the Trump administration's new Medicaid expansion work and community engagement rule (ages 19-64) without a disabililty. The director of DHS said the board they have to hire and train at least 11 workers and reclassified 2 positions to recertifify 540 enrollees every six months to verify people are working, going to school, or volunteering. He said the state is linking commerce, health, education, and systems together so they could verify the information. If they can't verified an applicant's imigration status, they would refer them to ICE for investigation..

We contacted county officials and asked where the data is being stored; who has access to the information; and if there were any hyperscale data center or crypto mining facility in the works locally but have not received a response by press time.

Foreign Trade Zone

Craven County Industrial Park was designated as new magnet site in the Southeastern North Carolina Foreign Trade Zone #214 service area which encompasses 22 counties in Southeastern NC. This means U.S. Customs agents treat manufacturing warehouses, industrial storage facilities, and other properties operating within the FTZ as if they are outside United States territory for duty payments. The FTZ is like an international "free trade zone."

Businesses operating within the zone don't pay taxes, tariffs, and duties on imporated foreign merchandise until the final product enters the the domestic U.S. market. Duties are eliminated on products that are temporarily imported into the zone but aren't used in the zone. Users can also defer taxes on products that are inded for U.S. consumption until they exit the FTZ, according to Central Pines Regional Council. A council member said, "U.S. Customs and Border Patrol officers come in, point out things to secure and the zone uses Automated warehouse systems."

U.S. Customs & Border Patrol website says, "Although FTZs are treated as being outside formal U.S. Customs territory for duty purposes, they operate strictly under the supervision and regulation of U.S. Customs and Border Protection...Qualified public or private corporations that may operate the facilities themselves or contract for the operation sponsors foreign-trade zones. The operations are conducted on a public utility basis, with published rates. The North Carolina Aerospace Corridor was marketed and established in 2016. "The North Carolina Aerospace Corridor has an aggressive economic development model in place and has found great success utilizing this model while transitioning from tobacco and textile industry clusters to aerospace, food, housing, biotech and pharmaceutical," according to their website.

The city's strategic plan changed from attracting retirees to a quaint, historic city to entertainment.

In 2026, the Chairman of the Housing Authority Vice-Chairman/Municipal Service District Advisory Committee/NC Restaurant and Lodging Association/Radio-alternate reality show host pushed an effort to pipe "Historical Facts" through a potential sound system in downtown New Bern about a business she owns interest in, but the committee shot down the idea.

RETURNING EDUCATION TO THE STATES?

Craven County Schools Finance Officer Heidi Daly told the Board of Education – Lee Kirkman, Lori Spiece, Jennifer Dacey, Amy Davis and Darlene Gibbs on Sept. 17 that the school system hadn't received federal funding allotments but they did receive the CTE (Career Technical Education) allotment. Patti Mason (District 1) and Lauren Kitzinger (District 6) were absent. A Craven County Schools document shows the total amount of the FY27 Federal Revisions is over $10 million.

The Craven County Board of Ed approved a budget amendment which included taking over $2.6 million from Fund Balance to cover local expenses. She noted everyone who is paid from federal, will have to be recoded as local.

A week later, U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon promoted the Trump administration's plan to disband the department during her tour in New Bern.

Craven County Schools Director of Public Relations Jennifer Wagner told us on Oct. 5 that CFO Daly wrote, "Until the federal funds are released, expenses that would normally be charged to those federal programs must temporarily be charged to the Local Current Expense Fund. This includes salary and benefit costs for employees in federally funded positions."

"Once the federal funds are released, eligible expenses will be recoded from the Local Current Expense Fund back to the appropriate federal funding source. Therefore, these expenses are not expected to ultimately impact the Local Current Expense Fund for the fiscal year."



Wild turkey crossing future highway corridor

FRCE inducts first HH-60W for maintenance at new GlobalTransPark facility



FRCE inducted its first HH-60W Jolly Green II for scheduled depot-level maintenance Sept. 21. The induction is also the first aircraft to undergo planned maintenance at the depot's new Global TransPark facility in Kinston, NC. (Photo by Heather Wilburn, FRCE)

Fleet Readiness Center East announced it has inducted its first HH-60W Jolly Green II for scheduled depot-level maintenance Sept. 21, marking the platform's first aircraft to be brought in for planned maintenance at the depot's Global TransPark facility in Kinston," according to a press release.

The release said, "FRCE Commanding Officer Col. Christopher C. McDonald II said this induction represents a significant milestone in the depot's support of warfighter readiness. "As the Department of War's Vertical Lift Center of Excellence, our responsibility is clear: deliver the capability and readiness our warfighters need, on time and on target!" said McDonald.

"None of this happens without the dedication, expertise and pride of our workforce," he continued. "Our people
are the foundation of this command, and their commitment to excellence is what allows us to deliver on our promises to the fleet. We are not simply expanding what we do; we are strengthening our ability to execute the mission today while building the capacity and capability required for tomorrow."

The press release said, "FRCE is North Carolina's largest maintenance, repair, overhaul and technical services provider, with more than 3,800 civilian, military and contract workers. Its annual revenue exceeds $868 million. The depot provides service to the fleet while functioning as an integral part of the greater U.S. Navy; Naval Air Systems Command; and Commander, Fleet Readiness Centers." The full article can be found here.

Craven County Schools' CTE trains students for industries

Craven County Schools' Career and Technical Education mission is "to empower all students to be successful citizens, workers and leaders in a global economy" and give "purpose to learning by emphasizing real world skills and practical knowledge," according to CCS documents.

"CTE is committed to providing relevant and rigorous training that reflects the skillsets needed by the workforce in Craven and surrounding counties. By training our students with 21st-century skills needed by our local and regional industries, we produce a highly skilled and qualified workforce that will meet the needs of those industries and therefore improve the overall economic capacity of the area, according to Early College East Hight School website."

Public Safety Training Center near West New Bern area

The aldermen have talked about building a potential power station, additional fire station, fire-rescue, police, emergency mangement, cybersecurity station with a communications center since 2018. The major subdivisions plat for Craeberne Crossing that has since been approved by a staff member shows a potential Fire Station near the future NC 43 Connector that's adjacent to land that was rezoned from agricultural/forestry to high intensity commerical district. The owner had previously told the board that he would consider entertaining a fire station on the property. NewBernNow.com's editor has asked the aldermen, "If crime is down, why has the city installed all of the cameras and paid third-party tech companies to provide agentic AI surveillance and tracking services? Is this a requirement to build a data center? We have not received a response by press time.

This comes at the same time that dozens of public safety training centers (PSTC) are being built for local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, firefighters, and other entities across the country. The NC General Assembly allocated $12 million for the county to build a PSTC for local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, firefighters, and other entities. The community collee is building one near West New Bern.

CRAVEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE WANTS TO EXPAND LEASE OF CITY OF NEW BERN-OWNED PROPERTY TO TRAIN ENTRY LEVEL POSITIONS

Craven Community College President Raymond Staats told the county commissioners on Oct. 19 that they are working with the New Bern to expand the VOLT Center complex that the city leases to the college to include the city's Department of Development Services so the college can provide education for entry level Health Sciences jobs at CarolinaEast Health System. President Staats said they are pursuing the purchase of the Development Services building from the city and are currently seeking to lease the building for $1.2 million in four annual installments that would be funded by the bequest from Dr. Tim and Linda Hinkin. He said they are negotiating "a build to suit type operation" (with the city) with an $800,000 budget for initial renovations. He said they would ask the city to manage third party construction for the college. CarolinaEast Medical Education Center will be the naming partner who will fund the project for four fiscal years. He noted that operations and management pro-forma was estimated at $204,000. He said they currently have carpentry classes as funding becomes available.

The initial Choice Neighborhood Plan called for a city market with outdoor vending areas, a market, a commercial commissary kitchen, an inventor's space, and other things but that plan eventually changed to offering soft skills and classes like bartending, food service, forklift operator, and deisel mechanic. Dr. Staats told the commissioners they were planning on teaching entry level positions for surgical technology, EKG technician, pharmacy technician, phlebotomy, nurse aide, hospital environmental services (custodial and cooking), veterinary technician, and medication aide.

The aldermen will consider executing an agreement to buy 3200 Wellons Boulevard on Nov. 10 to consolidate departments. It's yet to be determined whether Development Services is one of them.

Construction continues on US 70 (Future I-42) in James City



2026 Statewide Election

Unofficial results as of Nov. 8, 2026

The majority of voters approved the following Constitutional Amendments that:
- Require all voters, not just those presenting to vote in person, to present photo identification before voting.
- Keep the State income tax rate from being raised higher than three and one-half percent (3.5%).
- Require limits on property tax increases by local governments.

US Senate

Roy Cooper (D)	2,467,962	58.72%
Michael Whatley (R)	1,643,094	39.09%
Shannon W. Bray (L)	55,712	1.33%
Michael Dublin (G)	36,400	0.87%

US House of Representatives

Don Davis (D)	156,572	50.06%
Laurie Buckhout (R)	146,287	46.78%
Tom Bailey (L)	9,881	3.16%

NC Supreme Court, Associate Justice Seat 1

Anita Earls (D)	2,456,847	58.86%
Sarah Stevens (R)	1,717,043	41.14%

NC Court of Appeals Judge, Seat 1

John S. Arrowood (D)	2,362,158	56.77%
Michael C. Bryne (R)	1,798,824	43.23%

NC Court of Appeals Judge, Seat 2

Tobias (Toby) Hampson (D)	2,360,499	56.79%
George Cooper Bell	1,796,401	43.21%

NC Court of Appeals Judge, Seat 3

Christine Marie Walczyk (D)	2,372,412	57.12%
Craig Collins (R)	1,780,900	42.88%

NC State Senate

Bob Brinson (R)	44,365	55.01%
Charles Dudley (D)	36,279	44.99%

NC House of Representatives, District 3

Steve Tyson (R)	20,885	55.96%
Diannia Bright (D)	15,547	41.66%
Angela Humphrise (L)	888	2.38%

NC House of Representatives, District 013

Celeste Cairns (R)	25,511	65.24%
Jason Moore (D	13,595	34.76%

District Attorney, District 4

Matt Wareham (R)	27,888	100%

Parties: Democrat (D), Green (G), Libertarian (L), and Republican (R) **Craven**

Craven County Board of Commissioners, District 1

Joshua D. Whitford (R)	4,247	78.71%
Jeffrey O'Neil (G)	1,149	21.29%

Craven County Board of Commissioners, District 2

Jason R. Jones (R)	3,720	58.84%
Gregory Holmes (D)	2,602	41.16%

Craven County Board of Commissioners, District 3

Beatrice (Bea) Smith (D)	3,806	100%

Craven County Board of Commissioners, District 4

Guy D. Smith (R)	5,176	100%

Craven County Board of Commissioners, District 5

Theron McCabe (D)	2,018	51.23%
Shevel "Sherry" Hunt (R)	1,921	48.77%

Craven County Board of Commissioners, District 6

Chadwick Howard (R)	3,589	100%

Craven County Board of Commissioners, District 7

Denny Bucher (R)	5,690	100%

County Board of Education, District 2

Lee Kirkman (R)	4,593	100%

Craven County Board of Education, District 4

Cleopatra Hargett-Lawton (D)	3,263	50.87%
Jennifer Dacey (R)	3,152	49.13%

Craven County Board of Education, District 6

Tracy Jacques Derby	3,425	100%

Craven County Clerk of Superior Court

Lexanne Huffman (R)	28,149	100%

Craven County Sheriff

Chip Hughes (R)	24,284	58.38%
Mickey Tillman (D)	17,310	41.62%

Craven County Soil and Water Conservation, District Supervisor

William C. (Will) Farmer	25,684	56.48%
O'Neal Simmons	19,130	42.06%

First Craven Sanitary District Board Member

Ray Gaskins, Jr.	1,095	40.39%
Greg Holt	835	30.80%
Tommy Dunn	764	28.18%
Write-In (Miscellaneous)	17	0.63%

AI RACE FOR 'GLOBAL DOMINANCE'?

Continued from page 1)

President Trump released an AI (artificial intelligence) plan in July 2025 that says the U.S. "is in a race to achieve global dominance" in AI..." which will enable "new innovations in the physical world: autonomous drones, self-driving cars, robotics, and other inventions for which terminology does not yet exist..."

Seven months later, the U.S. -Iran War began triggered another oil embargo and triggered a major oil supply disruption and oil embargo.

In July 2026, the administration announced a ban on new foreign-made humanoid and four-legged robots as well as power inverters. Two months later, Trump announced plans for "AI Force."

Town of Bridgeton Mayor

Robert Toler	107	63.69%
Bill Slack	61	36.31%

Town of Bridgeton Commissioner

John Helms	112	23.78%
Randy Alexander	102	21.66%
Paul Marc Tremblay	98	20.81%
Keith Lee Tyndall	70	14.86%
Cynthia A. Williams	70	14.86%
Write-In (Miscellaneous)	19	4.03%

Town of Dover Mayor

Randy Mitchell	74	40.22%
John Percy Wetherington	59	32.07%
Theodore Bright	51	27.72%

Town of Dover Board of Commissioners

Michael Bryant	120	20.10%
Danny Moore	114	19.10%
James Gibson	98	16.42%
Michael Schauer	93	14.57%
Seth "Bert" Staten	87	14.57%
Gerald Baldwin	85	14.24%

City of Havelock Mayor

Mark Larkin	1,925	53.70%
Tyrone Cantey	1,638	45.69%
Write-In (Miscellaneous)	22	0.61%

City of Havelock Commissioner

Clinton Jones	1,105	19.19%
Karen Lewis	1,099	19.08%
Timothy Thierry	919	15.96%
Prudencio "Ira" Irizarry	911	15.82%
Diane Menger	844	14.66%
Bear McGillem	454	7.88%
Carly Rios	390	6.77%
Write-In (Miscellaneous)	37	0.64%

Town of River Bend Council Member

Write-In (Miscellaneous)	1,247	31.55%
Lisa Benton	840	21.26%
Victoria Stuppy	691	17.48%
Jeffrey Weaver	593	15.01%
Buddy Sheffield	581	14.70%

Town of Trent Woods Mayor

Dan Murphy	2,165	96.95%
Write-In (Miscellaneous)	68	3.05%

Town of Trent Woods Commissioner

Gene Foster	1,642	28.87%
Shane Turney	1,561	27.44%
Billy Joiner	1,450	25.49%
Jeff Cullipher	989	17.39%
Write-In (Miscellaneous)	46	0.81%

Behavior Health apps

Katrina McKinnon of Trillium Health Resources told the Craven County Commissioners last week that they have partnered with North Carolina Department of Human Services to provide a free app to their behavior health providers and their patients to support individuals who are in recovery to help them stay engaged in between their visits. She also said they have "Tula, a Trillium Ultimate Living Assistant" which is a "technology-based program" that notifies people who want to live independently to lock doors and take medicine and other things.