



## Haywood County Tourism Development Authority Budget Narrative | FY 2026–2027

### REVENUE OVERVIEW

The proposed FY 2026–2027 budget is fully balanced, with projected revenues and expenditures totaling \$4,972,151. The majority of funding continues to come from Haywood County occupancy tax collections, supplemented by strategic use of fund balance and previously approved rollover funding tied to multi-year projects and initiatives.

The FY 2026–2027 budget reflects a significant implementation year for the Haywood County Tourism Development Authority (HCTDA), with several one-time strategic investments aligned with the Haywood County Destination Master Plan and long-term tourism development priorities. Increased expenditures in this fiscal year are primarily driven by previously authorized rollover funds, implementation-focused planning initiatives, and major destination development projects rather than recurring operational expansion.

### Revenue Sources

- **Occupancy Tax Revenue: \$3,250,000**  
This estimate reflects continued stability in Haywood County’s tourism economy and remains conservative in its forecasting assumptions.
- **Fund Balance & Rollover Funding: \$1,340,101**  
The proposed budget includes a combination of previously approved rollover funding and new one-time fund balance appropriations supporting strategic implementation of priority projects and initiatives. Of this amount:
  - \$819,026 represents rollover funding from FY 2025–2026 for previously approved projects and initiatives that continue into the upcoming fiscal year. Major rollover projects include the Society of American Travel Writers (SATW) Convention, development of the new Visit Haywood website, a multi-month advertising partnership with Southern Living, and previously approved grants including the Raccoon Creek Bike Park and the Waynesville Parks & Recreation Master Plan.
  - The remaining \$521,075 represents new fund balance appropriations, including \$238,800 for the Haywood County Collaborative Project Development Initiative and \$282,275 in restricted 1% funds designated to support promotion and tourism-related grant applications aligned with the Haywood County Destination Master Plan.

## STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS

FY 2026–2027 represents a significant implementation year for Visit Haywood and the Haywood County Tourism Development Authority (HCTDA), with several strategic one-time investments designed to strengthen Haywood County’s long-term tourism economy, enhance destination infrastructure, and advance priorities identified in the Haywood County Destination Master Plan.

These investments focus on destination positioning, implementation readiness, stewardship, and the development of tourism-related assets that benefit both residents and visitors.

- **Society of American Travel Writers (SATW) Convention**

HCTDA will host the Society of American Travel Writers (SATW) Convention in fall 2026, bringing travel journalists, storytellers, photographers, and content creators from across the United States and international markets to Haywood County. This one-time investment is intended to elevate awareness of Haywood County as a premier Western North Carolina destination while generating long-term earned media exposure and destination storytelling opportunities.

Budgeted funding supports convention transportation, venues, hospitality, familiarization tours, event production, and related destination marketing efforts associated with hosting the convention.

- **Haywood County Collaborative Project Development Initiative**

The FY 2026–2027 budget includes funding for the Haywood County Collaborative Project Development Initiative, a countywide planning effort focused on advancing tourism-related infrastructure and recreation projects from concept to implementation readiness.

Led in partnership with Haywood County, local municipalities, and community organizations this effort supports implementation of the Haywood County Destination Master Plan with an emphasis on resiliency, stewardship, and evaluating opportunities associated with publicly owned and flood-impacted properties throughout the county. The initiative will develop grant-ready concepts and preliminary plans for selected sites.

- **Research & Destination Insights**

The FY 2026–2027 budget also expands HCTDA’s investment in tourism research and destination analytics, including updated visitor and stakeholder perception studies, market segmentation research, customer journey analysis, and development of a brand health dashboard.

These efforts build upon the launch of the Visit Haywood destination brand and support more data-informed marketing and destination development decisions.

- **Capital Grant Program**

FY 2026–2027 includes the first funding cycle of HCTDA’s updated tourism-related capital grant program supporting projects aligned with priorities identified in the Haywood County Destination Master Plan.

Recommended projects for funding include greenway connections, riverfront improvements, recreation infrastructure, accessibility enhancements, and community gathering spaces across Haywood County. These investments are intended to support quality of life improvements for residents while enhancing visitor experience and strengthening outdoor recreation, sustainability, and placemaking assets throughout the county.

## OPERATIONAL CATEGORIES

- **Restricted Town 1% Funds**

Restricted Town 1% Funds continue to support tourism-related marketing initiatives, local event promotion, capital grant projects, and community-based tourism development efforts across Haywood County's five towns. FY 2026–2027 includes funding for both annual marketing grants and the continued implementation of HCTDA's updated capital grant program supporting projects aligned with priorities identified in the Haywood County Destination Master Plan.

- **Wages & Benefits**

This category supports compensation and benefits for HCTDA staff, including administration, destination marketing, visitor services, and operation of the Haywood County Welcome Center. The FY 2026–2027 budget does not include additional staffing positions.

- **Administration & Operations**

Administration & Operations includes essential organizational expenses such as office operations, insurance, accounting and audit services, legal support, and information technology necessary to support daily operations and organizational stability.

- **Marketing & Communications**

Marketing & Communications supports Visit Haywood's ongoing year-round destination marketing efforts across digital, print, public relations, social media, website, and other visitor platforms. Core investments include advertising and campaign execution, media relations, influencer hosting, seasonal content development, website maintenance and technology, visitor guide production and fulfillment, co-op advertising opportunities, and stewardship-focused visitor messaging.

These efforts are guided by the FY 2026–2027 Marketing & Communications Plan and continue to focus on strengthening brand awareness, supporting year-round visitation, enhancing visitor engagement, and promoting Haywood County as a welcoming mountain destination.

## **MASTER PLAN ALIGNMENT**

The FY 2026–2027 budget continues implementation of the Haywood County Destination Master Plan (2026–2035) through strategic investments in destination marketing, tourism-related infrastructure, outdoor recreation, stewardship, community collaboration, and visitor experience.

Key initiatives outlined throughout this budget narrative, including the Society of American Travel Writers (SATW) Convention, the Haywood County Collaborative Project Development Initiative, expanded tourism research efforts, ongoing destination marketing and communications programs, and implementation of the updated capital grant program, directly support long-term priorities identified in the Destination Master Plan.

The budget also reflects continued collaboration between HCTDA, local municipalities, tourism partners, and community organizations to advance projects and initiatives that enhance quality of life for residents while supporting the long-term competitiveness and resiliency of Haywood County’s tourism economy.

## **CONCLUSION**

The FY 2026–2027 budget reflects HCTDA’s continued commitment to responsibly managing tourism revenues while advancing priorities identified in the Haywood County Destination Master Plan. Through strategic investments in destination marketing, tourism infrastructure, project development, and community partnerships, this budget supports long-term economic vitality, visitor experience, stewardship, and quality of life throughout Haywood County.