

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

Affordable Housing Strategy

Jackson County, North Carolina

Introduction and Background

Jackson County, North Carolina, is soliciting proposals from qualified consulting firms to assist in the development of a comprehensive **Affordable Housing Strategy**. Jackson County is home to approximately 45,281 residents and encompasses 494 square miles in the mountains of southwestern North Carolina. The County's economy is supported by outdoor recreation and tourism, as well as anchor institutions including Western Carolina University (WCU), Southwestern Community College (SCC), the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI), and a diverse base of small businesses.

Like many communities across western North Carolina, Jackson County faces increasing housing challenges that threaten long-term economic vitality, workforce stability, and quality of life. Limited housing availability, rising costs, and gaps in housing options across income levels have created barriers for residents, employers, and community growth.

To better understand these challenges, the County commissioned a housing study in 2017 and participated in the 2017 Dogwood Health Foundation Regional Housing Needs Assessment. More recently, the County has partnered with Mountain Projects, a nonprofit housing provider, to support the development of five single-family homes for low- to moderate-income households in the Town of Sylva.

The County is also actively engaged in the **Webster Village Housing Development**, an approximately 200-unit mixed-income project that includes both multifamily and single-family housing. Partners on this initiative include Mountain Projects, Givens Estates, and WCU. The County's primary role has been to coordinate water and sewer infrastructure improvements in partnership with the Tuckasee Water and Sewer Authority (TWSA).

While these efforts represent meaningful progress, additional coordinated action is needed. Jackson County is currently participating in the UNC School of Government's **Carolina Across 100 – Our State, Our Home** program, which focuses on building local capacity to address affordable housing challenges. Through this process, the development of a countywide affordable housing strategy was identified as a critical next step.

Project Purpose

The purpose of this project is to develop a clear, actionable, and implementable Affordable Housing Strategy that will guide Jackson County's efforts over the next 15 years. The strategy should:

- Build upon existing studies, data, and initiatives
- Identify realistic, locally appropriate housing solutions

- Provide clear implementation steps and roles
- Support coordination among the County, municipalities, nonprofit partners, educational institutions, and the private sector

The strategy should be practical and outcome-oriented, with an emphasis on policies and programs that can be implemented within the County’s financial, regulatory, and staffing capacity.

Project Governance

Jackson County has an established stakeholder group formed through the Our State, Our Home program that will serve as the **Steering Committee** for this project. A core working group—including the Jackson County Planning Department, Economic Development Department, Southwestern Commission, and Mountain Projects—will provide ongoing guidance and coordination throughout the planning process.

Project Timeline

The anticipated project timeline is approximately nine (9) months, as outlined below:

- **February 2026:** Consultant selection and contract execution
 - **February 2026:** Project kickoff meeting with Steering Committee
 - **June-July 2026:** Presentation of draft housing strategy and recommendations
 - **October 2026:** Presentation to the Jackson County Board of Commissioners for consideration of adoption
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Scope of Services

The selected consultant will be expected to provide the following services:

1. Review and synthesize existing housing studies, data, and relevant local plans.
2. Assess current housing conditions, needs, and gaps across income levels, tenure types, and household types.
3. Facilitate a project kickoff meeting with the Steering Committee.
4. Design and implement a public and stakeholder engagement process, including coordination with key partners and community representatives.
5. Evaluate existing policies, programs, and development constraints affecting housing production and affordability. This may include a high-level review of land use and development regulations and the

identification of potential policy or ordinance changes for consideration by the County and municipalities.

6. Identify a range of housing strategies, tools, and partnerships appropriate for a rural mountain county context.
7. Develop an implementation-focused Affordable Housing Strategy that includes:
 - Short-, medium-, and long-term action steps
 - Responsible parties and potential partners
 - Estimated cost ranges and funding considerations
 - Priority projects or pilot opportunities
8. Attend up to five (5) Steering Committee meetings and up to two (2) Jackson County Board of Commissioners meetings. Meetings may be held virtually.

Deliverables

At a minimum, the consultant shall provide the following deliverables:

1. Project kickoff materials and meeting summary
2. Existing conditions and needs assessment summary
3. Draft Affordable Housing Strategy
4. Final Affordable Housing Strategy, incorporating feedback from County staff, the Steering Committee, and the Board of Commissioners

The final plan shall be provided in digital format, along with three (3) printed hard copies.

Submission Requirements

Interested firms shall submit **three (3) bound hard copies** and **one (1) digital copy** of their proposal. Proposals shall include the following components:

1. Letter of interest describing the firm's understanding of the project and ability to provide the requested services
2. Firm qualifications and relevant experience
3. Qualifications and roles of personnel assigned to the project
4. Experience with affordable housing planning in small towns and rural counties

5. Description of the proposed project approach, methodology, and public engagement strategy
 6. Proposed project timeline
 7. Proposed project budget, including a detailed breakdown of costs
 8. Three (3) references from comparable communities, including contact name, title, phone number, and a brief description of the working relationship
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Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be reviewed and scored by a Selection Committee based on, but not limited to, the following criteria:

1. Quality and clarity of the proposal
2. Qualifications and experience of assigned personnel
3. Relevant project management and housing planning experience
4. Proposed approach and methodology
5. Public engagement strategies
6. Proposed timeline
7. Proposed budget and value
8. References

The County may select up to three (3) finalists to participate in an interview process.

Submission Deadline and Contact Information

All proposals must be received no later than **January 31, 2026**. Incomplete submissions will not be considered.

Questions regarding this RFP should be directed to:

Michael Poston, Planning Director

Jackson County Planning Department

Email: michaelposton@jacksonnc.org

Phone: (828) 631-2255

Proposals should be submitted to:

Michael Poston

Jackson County Planning Department

Disclosures and Conditions

Confidentiality

All responses to this RFP are public records subject to disclosure under North Carolina law. Confidential or proprietary information must be clearly identified and submitted in accordance with N.C.G.S. §132-1.2.

Equal Employment Opportunity

Jackson County does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, religion, age, national origin, or disability in its programs or activities. The selected consultant must comply with all applicable equal employment opportunity requirements.

Contracting

Any contract resulting from this RFP shall be governed by the laws of the State of North Carolina. Venue for any legal action shall be Jackson County, North Carolina.

Conditions and Limitations

Jackson County reserves the right to reject any or all proposals, waive informalities, request additional information, or select the proposal deemed to be in the best interest of the County. Submission of a proposal does not obligate the County to award a contract or pay any costs incurred in proposal preparation.