

DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA



Strategy Lanes, Milestones, and the Path to 2031

A companion to the Strategic Framework to Make Homelessness Rare and Brief.

City of Durham | Durham County | 2026–2031

Prepared by the Durham Community Safety Department

INTRODUCTION

How to Read This Companion

Purpose

This companion document explains how Durham’s five-year strategy is organized — the five strategy lanes that move the work forward, the secondary strategy lanes within each one, and the year-by-year milestones that mark progress toward making homelessness rare and brief by June 2031.

It is meant to be read alongside the Strategic Framework to Make Homelessness Rare and Brief. Where the Framework describes the North Star, the implementation architecture, and the six operational functions that move households into housing, this companion describes the broader system aims that surround those functions — the data foundations, the ways of working, the enabling conditions, the reduction strategies, and the backbone operations that together produce the conditions for rare and brief homelessness.

A Note on Terminology

Durham’s strategic planning process and the Built for Zero methodology use the term “drivers” to describe the high-level strategies that change a system, and “secondary drivers” to describe the specific components within each. This companion uses different language — strategy lanes and secondary strategy lanes — for the same concepts.

The change is one of language, not substance. A strategy lane is the same thing as a primary driver: a coordinated band of work that, together with the others, produces the system condition we are aiming for. The choice reflects how the work is talked about across partner tables in Durham, where “lanes” communicates parallel, sustained work that moves in the same direction at the same time.

The Five Strategy Lanes

The framework rests on five strategy lanes. Each describes a band of work whose success is necessary, and none of which is sufficient alone, for Durham to make homelessness rare and brief by 2031:

- ◆ **Strategy Lane 1** — Set Foundations for an Effective, Resilient Homeless Response System.
- ◆ **Strategy Lane 2** — Establish and Maintain Effective Ways of Working.
- ◆ **Strategy Lane 3** — Influence Enabling Conditions in the Broader Ecosystem.
- ◆ **Strategy Lane 4** — Homelessness Reduction Strategies.
- ◆ **Strategy Lane 5** — Backbone Operations.

The pages that follow describe each lane, the secondary strategy lanes within it, the milestones that mark progress year over year, and how the lane connects to the operational functions and implementation architecture laid out in the Strategic Framework.

PART ONE

The Shared Aim

In February 2026, a winter storm left ten Durham families in hotel rooms with nowhere to go next — the county’s only family shelter was full. One month later, fifteen families had moved into homes of their own. This companion describes the system being built to make that outcome the routine, not the exception.

The North Star

In partnership with a broad coalition including providers, educators, healthcare professionals, business and faith leaders, residents, and individuals with lived experience of homelessness, the City of Durham and Durham County aim to build an effective and resilient system that prevents homelessness and makes it rare and brief.

By June 2031, Durham will make homelessness rare and brief — and living on the street will no longer be a forced way of life for anyone.

To get there, Durham will invest in essential foundations and effective ways of working across the entire system. The framework uses data-driven strategies to improve housing outcomes — and it also strengthens the broader conditions that make change possible: policy, public narrative, resources, and cross-sector partnerships.

Defining Rare and Brief

Homelessness is rare and brief when the number of people experiencing homelessness is consistently fewer than the number the system can house each month. The technical name for this condition is functional zero. It is not zero on any given night; it is a system condition in which homelessness is the exception rather than a way of life.

Functional zero is defined slightly differently across populations. For families, youth, veterans, and single adults, it is reached when the number of people experiencing homelessness at any time does not exceed Durham’s proven record of housing at least that many people in a month. For unsheltered homelessness, the standard includes not only placements into permanent housing but also placements into safe interim housing.

Annual Reduction Targets by Population

The five-year arc is built on concrete annual reductions by population. These targets are tracked monthly from the by-name list and reported publicly through the system dashboard.

Population (approx. HHs)	Year 1 — 6/30/27	Year 2 — 6/30/28	Year 3 — 6/30/29	Year 4 — 6/30/30	Year 5 — 6/30/31
Families (~200)	10%	25%	50%	75%	FZ*
Youth & Young Adults (~30)	50%	FZ*	Sustain	Sustain	Sustain
All Singles (~700)	20%	40%	60%	85%	FZ*
Seniors	25%	50%	75%	FZ*	Sustain
Unsheltered (~650)	30%	60%	FZ**	Sustain	Sustain
Veterans (~140)	30%	50%	FZ*	Sustain	Sustain

*Functional Zero (FZ). **For unsheltered, FZ includes placements into permanent housing and into safe interim housing.

Connecting to the Strategic Framework

The Strategic Framework's Year 1 targets — 30% reduction in unsheltered homelessness, 30% in veteran homelessness, and 50% in youth and young adult homelessness — are the FY 2027 column of the table above. The framework's populations of focus correspond to the rows. As the system reaches functional zero for one population, the work continues to sustain that condition while broadening focus to the next: youth and young adults first, then unsheltered and veterans, then seniors, then families and single adults.

PART TWO

Five-Year System Aims, by Strategy Lane

The North Star is reached through five strategy lanes that move in parallel. Each lane has an end-state aim — the system condition Durham is working to achieve by June 2031 — and a set of secondary strategy lanes that describe how the work gets done within that lane.

The table below summarizes the five-year system aims by strategy lane.

Strategy Lane	Achieved by 6/30/2031
Foundations	Sustained, integrated quality data driving decisions and strategy.
Effective Ways of Working	Effective backbone catalyzing credible results across the system.
Enabling System Conditions	Narratives about local progress on homelessness build momentum and alignment, helping to sustain public will to solve homelessness. Sustained adequate supply of interim and affordable housing (stock, services, programs). Strong cross-sector partnerships and alignment with key influencers. Local and state policies supporting person-centered solutions to homelessness.
Improved Housing Outcomes	Unsheltered homelessness is rare and brief — and the public sees it too. Inflow is consistently less than outflow across the system. Length of time to permanent housing is 30 days on average. 90% of people housed remain stably housed.
Backbone Operations	Backbone sustainably functioning and primed to move upstream.

How the Strategy Lanes Fit Together

The five lanes are not stand-alone projects. They are interlocking conditions: foundations make ways of working possible; ways of working produce housing outcomes; housing outcomes are sustained by enabling conditions; backbone operations make the whole effort possible to coordinate, evaluate, and improve year over year.

The Strategic Framework's six operational functions — Street Outreach and Coordinated Entry, Case Conferencing, the Flexible Housing Assistance Fund, Landlord Engagement, Housing Stabilization Case Management, and Housing Sprints — sit primarily inside Improved Housing Outcomes, depend on Foundations, are governed by Effective Ways of Working, are accelerated by Enabling System Conditions, and are coordinated by Backbone Operations.

PART THREE

The Strategy Lanes in Detail

Each strategy lane is described below: its end-state aim, the secondary strategy lanes within it, and how it fits within the Strategic Framework.

Strategy Lane 1 – Set Foundations for an Effective, Resilient Homeless Response System

End-state aim: Sustained, integrated quality data driving decisions and strategy across the homelessness response system.

Secondary Strategy Lanes

- ◆ Shared goals for the whole system embedded across the work.
- ◆ Backbone established with staffing and partnerships to support system-level functions.
- ◆ Quality real-time data across the whole system — collected, shared, and used to drive strategy and transparency.
- ◆ Committee, governance, and implementation structure aligned with goals.
- ◆ Inventory of available system resources — funding, partners, policies, and housing.

How It Fits in the Strategic Framework

This lane is the data and structural backbone that makes the Strategic Framework’s operational system possible. The by-name list, the Coordinated Entry process, and the implementation architecture described in Parts Three and Four of the Strategic Framework all live here. The Community Safety Department’s role as CoC Lead Agency and backbone — and the proposed Continuum of Care Governing Board that succeeds HSAC — are the structural pieces that operationalize this lane.

Strategy Lane 2 – Establish and Maintain Effective Ways of Working

End-state aim: An effective backbone catalyzing credible results across the system.

Secondary Strategy Lanes

- ◆ Effective cross-sector case conferencing aligned with goals.
- ◆ Consistent practices to engage lived expertise in system design and decision-making.
- ◆ Regular feedback loops to assess learning, make improvements, and improve community confidence and trust.
- ◆ Implementation structure that supports intentional engagement with private, public, and community partners.

- ◆ Capability building for partners on evidence-informed practices and continuous improvement skills.

How It Fits in the Strategic Framework

This lane describes how Durham’s system operates day to day — and it corresponds most directly to the Case Conferencing function and the Improvement Teams, Case Conferencing Tables, and Communities of Practice described in Parts Three and Four. The Lived Experience Table and the Executive Table also sit here, as do the public reporting cadence and feedback loops described under Storytelling and Communications in Part Five.

Strategy Lane 3 – Influence Enabling Conditions in the Broader Ecosystem

End-state aim: A broader ecosystem in which narratives, partnerships, housing supply, and policy actively support the work of ending homelessness.

Secondary Strategy Lanes

- ◆ Aligned enabling policies across local and state government.
- ◆ Shared strategy for narrative change to drive public and political will.
- ◆ Resource mobilization — including optimization of existing resources and strategies (e.g., the Durham Housing Task Force) — to create a continuum of housing from shelter and interim through permanent.
- ◆ Cross-sector partners activated to catalyze shared goals, with focus on health systems, criminal justice, behavioral and substance use treatment, mental health systems, and schools.

How It Fits in the Strategic Framework

This lane is the work outside the homelessness response system that the system depends on. It maps to the Champions Table (the cross-sector body chartered to clear barriers and align resources), to the Storytelling and Communications discipline in Part Five, and to the upstream prevention work described under Durham County’s role as Implementation Partner. The \$5 million private community investment campaign described under Year 1 Investment is also a Lane 3 commitment.

Strategy Lane 4 – Homelessness Reduction Strategies

End-state aim: Unsheltered homelessness rare and brief, inflow consistently below outflow, 30-day average time to permanent housing, and 90% of people housed remaining stably housed.

Secondary Strategy Lanes

- ◆ Process improvements to shorten length of time homeless and increase housing exits — including continuous improvement of Coordinated Entry processes and system flows.
- ◆ Aligned strategy and resources for inflow reduction — working upstream and on housing retention.
- ◆ Cross-sector strategy to reduce unsheltered homelessness and amplify impact.
- ◆ Partner with health and behavioral health systems on interventions for individuals with complex care needs.
- ◆ Partner with schools and economic mobility efforts to support households.

How It Fits in the Strategic Framework

This is the lane the Strategic Framework's six operational functions most directly serve. Street Outreach and Coordinated Entry, Case Conferencing, the Flexible Housing Assistance Fund, Landlord Engagement, Housing Stabilization Case Management, and Housing Sprints together do the work of reducing homelessness for the populations of focus. The February 2026 family sprint that housed fifteen families (against a goal of ten) plus three more into non-congregate shelter is a proof point of how these functions can work together inside this lane.

Strategy Lane 5 – Backbone Operations

End-state aim: A backbone organization sustainably functioning and primed to move upstream.

Secondary Strategy Lanes

- ◆ Talent recruitment, retention, and development for the backbone.
- ◆ Standard project management across the community.
- ◆ Effective and efficient internal and external meeting structures.
- ◆ Regular feedback loops and evaluation mechanisms for backbone performance.
- ◆ Diversified revenue streams for program, system, and backbone operations — including multi-year partnerships and scenario planning.
- ◆ Ongoing relationship and strategic partner management.
- ◆ Performance-based procurement and effective monitoring processes aligned with goals.

How It Connects to the Strategic Framework

This lane describes the Community Safety Department's operational health as backbone. It maps to the staffing investment in the Year 1 budget (the \$950,000 backbone staffing line), the technical assistance investment (\$325,000 for technical assistance and capacity-building), and the procurement and contracting work behind Landlord Engagement, the Flexible Housing Assistance Fund administrator, and Housing Stabilization Case Management providers.

PART FOUR**Year-by-Year Milestones**

The five-year arc is paced by year-over-year milestones within each strategy lane. The tables below summarize what the system aims to achieve by the end of each fiscal year, beginning with FY 2027 (the period covered by the Strategic Framework's Year 1 targets) and ending with FY 2031 (the North Star).

Foundations and Effective Ways of Working (Strategy Lanes 1 and 2)

Year 1 — 6/30/27	Year 2 — 6/30/28	Year 3 — 6/30/29	Year 4 — 6/30/30	Year 5 — 6/30/31
Real-time data across all populations.	Data integration with at least 1 health system, positioned to scale to others.	Data integration with at least 1 key sector partner, positioned to scale to others.	Sustained, integrated quality data driving decisions and strategy.	Sustained, integrated quality data driving decisions and strategy.
Presence of 50% of indicators in the Backbone Entity Execution Measurement Assessment.	Presence of 75% of indicators, including all “must-haves.”	Presence of 95% of indicators.	Presence of 100% of indicators.	Effective backbone catalyzing credible results across the system.

Enabling System Conditions (Strategy Lane 3)

Year 1 — 6/30/27	Year 2 — 6/30/28	Year 3 — 6/30/29	Year 4 — 6/30/30	Year 5 — 6/30/31
Improved narrative.	Sustained improved narrative and increased public will.	Sustained improved narrative and increased public will.	System commitment to sustainability (investments, partnerships, monitoring, staffing).	Narratives about local progress build momentum; public will to solve homelessness is sustained.
Aligned enabling policies and advocacy agenda across City and County government.	Begin advocacy with cross-sector partners.	At least 1 additional supportive policy (local or state).	At least 1 additional supportive policy (local or state).	Local and state policies that support person-centered solutions to homelessness.
Expanded and diversified funding for the system and at least 1 population, with focus on interim and permanent housing.	Expanded and diversified funding for at least 2 populations, with focus on interim and permanent housing.	Expanded and diversified funding at a systems level.	Expanded and diversified funding at a systems level.	Sustained adequate supply of interim and affordable housing.
Engaged 2–3 high-impact cross-sector partners around shared goals, with focus on health and behavioral health partners.	Established cross-sector metrics and messaging with shared accountability for mutually beneficial outcomes.	New resources dedicated from at least 2 cross-sector partners.	Sustained partnerships, demonstrating progress against shared metrics and ROI.	Cross-sector partnerships and alignment with key influencers.

Cross-sector partners include but are not limited to: behavioral and mental health systems, universities, business, health systems, philanthropy, the faith community, the criminal legal system, and education.

Improved Housing Outcomes (Strategy Lane 4)

Year 1 — 6/30/27	Year 2 — 6/30/28	Year 3 — 6/30/29	Year 4 — 6/30/30	Year 5 — 6/30/31
Reduce unsheltered homelessness by 30%.	Reduce unsheltered homelessness by 60%.	Reach Functional Zero for unsheltered homelessness.	Sustained reduction in unsheltered homelessness.	Unsheltered homelessness is rare and brief — and the public sees it too.
Improved throughput from shelters and interim housing; improved housing placements for at least 1 population.	Improve housing placements for all populations.	Reduce length of time to housing placements for all populations.	Sustain process improvements.	Length of time to permanent housing is 30 days on average.
Complete qualitative and quantitative analysis of inflow trends, drivers, and leverage points.	Decreased inflow for 1 or more populations.	Continued reductions in inflow for all populations.	Sustain low inflow for all populations.	Inflow is consistently less than outflow across the system.
Improve housing retention for 1 population.	Improve housing retention for at least 2 populations.	Improve housing retention for all populations.	Sustain process improvements.	90% of people housed remain stably housed.

Backbone Operations (Strategy Lane 5)

By Year 1 (6/30/27), internal operating systems are clear and efficient, team cohesion is strong, and community confidence has improved. By Year 2 (6/30/28), staff retention and the backbone's net promoter score are high. By Year 3 (6/30/29), contract and procurement processes are aligned and enabling the strategic plan. By Year 4 (6/30/30), funding for backbone operations is sustainable. By Year 5 (6/30/31), the backbone is sustainably functioning and primed to move upstream.

PART FIVE

How the Strategy Lanes and Milestones Connect to the Strategic Framework

The Strategic Framework to Make Homelessness Rare and Brief describes what Durham will build, how the work is organized, who runs it, and what the Year 1 investment looks like. This companion describes the broader system arc that surrounds that operational work — the five-year aims, the strategy lanes that organize them, and the milestones by which progress will be measured.

The crosswalk below shows how the five strategy lanes map to specific sections of the Strategic Framework.

Strategy Lane to Framework Crosswalk

Strategy Lane	Where It Lives in the Strategic Framework
Lane 1 — Foundations	Part Two — The Built for Zero Approach (by-name list, population-specific reduction goals). Part Three — Implementation Architecture, the CoC Governing Board, and the Community Safety Department as backbone. Part Four — Street Outreach and Coordinated Entry.
Lane 2 — Effective Ways of Working	Part Three — Improvement Teams, Case Conferencing Tables, Communities of Practice, Executive Table, Lived Experience Table. Part Four — Case Conferencing. Part Five — Measuring What Matters, Storytelling and Communications.
Lane 3 — Enabling Conditions	Part Three — The Champions Table. Part Three — Durham County as Implementation Partner (upstream prevention). Part Five — Year 1 Investment (\$5M community investment campaign), Storytelling and Communications. Part Six — How to Engage.
Lane 4 — Reduction Strategies	Part Two — Populations of Focus and The Operational System. Part Four — Flexible Housing Assistance Fund, Landlord Engagement, Housing Stabilization Case Management, Housing Sprints and Interim Housing. Part One — The Proof Point: February 2026 (family sprint).
Lane 5 — Backbone Operations	Part Three — The Community Safety Department as Backbone. Part Five — Year 1 Investment (\$950K backbone staffing, \$325K technical assistance). Part Six — The Trajectory and The Year 1 Roadmap.

Reading the Two Documents Together

The Strategic Framework is the operating plan: it tells the reader what Durham will do in Year 1, who is doing it, how the work is organized, and what it will cost. This companion is the strategic arc: it tells the reader where Year 1 fits in the five-year picture, which conditions are being built alongside the operational work, and how progress will be measured year over year.

Both documents share the same North Star, the same populations of focus, the same operational architecture, and the same commitment to publishing what works and what doesn't. Together they describe a strategy that is specific enough to act on this year and durable enough to carry through to June 2031.

OUR 2031 VISION



By June 2031, Durham will make homelessness rare and brief. We don't say that lightly, and we can show our reasoning.

In February 2026, a winter storm displaced ten families into hotel rooms, and the county's only family shelter was full. One month later, fifteen families had moved into homes of their own and three more into non-congregate shelter — because flexible payments, unit options, housing-focused case management, and daily coordination arrived around the same households at the same time. That is what this companion describes at system scale: five strategy lanes doing for every population what one sprint did for those families.

The evidence is in — communities using the Built for Zero methodology have shown homelessness is a solvable system problem, not a permanent feature of urban life. Durham has proven it works here. And the partners are aligned: the City, the County, Duke, and the A.J. Fletcher Foundation, with a \$5 million community investment campaign anchoring roughly \$13 million in Year 1 investment.

The targets are ambitious; we hold them as commitments, not promises, and we will be honest about the pace. Year by year, we will report what worked, what didn't, what changed, and what comes next. The work is yours as much as anyone's.

2026 – 2031