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## Cabarrus leaders make predictions for 2009

By [Eric Deines](#) | Independent Tribune  
and [Ben McNeely](#) | Independent Tribune

CABARRUS — Whether it's school construction or water infrastructure work, a worldwide economic recession will permeate all issues and projects facing local governments in the coming year.

But local leaders were mostly optimistic on Tuesday as they were asked to look ahead, into 2009.

### **Jay White, chairman, Cabarrus County Board of Commissioners**

As it has been for the past several years, new school construction will be the biggest issue facing Cabarrus County in the coming year, said White.

In the first quarter of 2009, the county has plans to issue another \$136 million in debt for school construction.

"This board is going to be looking at building schools again — for Cabarrus County and a science wing at A.L. Brown," White said, adding that the slumping economy may not affect the school construction plans.

White said the county's long-range planning for school construction and other similar projects should keep things on course despite an economic downturn.

White said one of his biggest concerns going into the next year is the change that may lay in store for the state's road construction responsibilities.

"It may be regulating more (road construction responsibility) to counties without any funding," White said.

### **Eddie Smith, deputy city manager, Kannapolis**

It's all about watching the economic outlook and watching the bottom line while maintaining city services and pushing forward with new projects in Kannapolis, said Deputy City Manager Eddie Smith.

"You don't want your projects to stall out because the longer you wait, the more expensive it can get," Smith said.

Still, though, city leaders have already frozen some infrastructure projects, like adding new sidewalks and a storage and workshop building for the Parks and Rec department, to make sure city revenues were there for more critical services, Smith said.

Selling the \$168.4 million self-financing bond package for the North Carolina Research Campus, Smith said, is a big priority for the city.

"The silver lining in waiting to sell the bonds is the tax revenue coming in prior to selling the bonds we can use for general fund" Smith said. "The money is not obligated to the debt."

The city already has projects it needs to complete â like replacing the culvert on Dakota Street washed out by floodwaters from the remnants of Tropical Storm Fay. That project is likely to cost about \$900,000.

The city is also opening a new customer service center on Dale Earnhardt Boulevard, to replace the current water/sewer billing center. Smith said refitting that building, staffing and marketing the location will be a priority.

Moving into the budget season and the new fiscal year in July, Smith said he thinks the tax rate will remain the same, freezing open positions and "not even discussing new projects." But it all depends on the economy.

"We'll be very fortunate if we don't have to cut our budget by 5 percent," Smith said.

### **Scott Padgett, mayor, Concord**

Like Smith, Padgett said spring's budget session could prove very difficult.

"It's going to be a year of challenge as far as budget â like we've ever seen," Padgett said. "I'm confident the city council and manager will make good decisions."

He said each planned project must be carefully examined, though a downtown connector greenway and some airport will be in good shape thanks to outside grant funding.

He said an important balance of funds will come with possible infrastructure improvement projects.

He said while it may be easy to sit them to the side, they could prove costly if cities wait on such projects.

"We've got to ensure for when the economy turns around that we're ready...to take advantage of an upturn in the economy," Padgett said.

One of the biggest potential issues for the city, Padgett said, will be the future of the Philip Morris USA property on U.S. 29.

The company has hired a team to market the 2,100 acres it plans to vacate by the close of 2009.

Local leaders hope to use the valuable property for economic development to help balance the tax loss that will come when Philip Morris consolidates to Richmond, Va.

"I would like to certainly see a mix of high-tech...something clean, green. I would also like to see some manufacturing, anything that's sustainable," Padgett said.