



Alicia Keys' autobiographical "Hell's Kitchen" brings Tony-winning energy to Blumenthal Performing Arts

THE VOICE OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY SINCE 1906

The Charlotte Post

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 10, 2026

VOLUME 52 NUMBER 49

WWW.THECHARLOTTEPOST.COM

\$1.50



CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG SCHOOLS

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Superintendent Crystal Hill praised the district's year-over-year improvement in student proficiency and academic achievement.

CMS student proficiency 'shows what is possible'

School district posts gains over 2025-26; graduation rates increase as well

By Herbert L. White
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools made wide-ranging academic improvements for the second straight year, according to state data.

The district delivered across-the-board leaps in proficiency and performance for the 2025-26 academic year, according to North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's annual school accountability reporting released Sept. 2. The percentage of students testing at grade level in end-of-grade exams increased across every category, with major gains in grades 3-8 literacy and high school

math.

"This progress belongs to our students, teachers, school leaders, staff and families," Superintendent Crystal Hill said in a statement. "These results show what is possible when we remain focused on strong instruction, high expectations and providing every student with the support they need to succeed. We are proud of the progress our students are making, and we remain committed to building on this momentum."

CMS improved overall grade-level proficiency in every area of tested content in 2025-26.

Some of the district's year-over-year

subject proficiency gains:

- Reading, grades 3-8 56.7% (up 4 percentage points)
 - Math, grades 3-8 62.7% (up 3.5 points)
 - Science, grades 5 and 8: 69.3% (up 7.6 points)
 - English II 66.0% (up 6.8 points)
 - High school Math 1 42.0%, up 13.0 points
 - High school Math 3 69.4% (up 2.8 points)
 - Biology 58.4% (up 9.8 points)
- Other takeaways from the report:
- The district's biggest gains were in

Please see **SCHOOL** | 2A

Toll foes to NCDOT: Show the receipts

By Herbert L. White
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

Opponents of toll lanes on I-77 South are demanding transparency in how state money was spent and proposed neighborhood benefits.

Sustain Charlotte confirmed it plans to file a public records request with North Carolina Department of Transportation for work the agency says totals \$69.6 million. The request will also demand records showing studies, surveys, engineering work, and other products are still useful for future improvements to I-77 and which expenditures NCDOT considers lost because the project was tabled. Most of the money – nearly \$60 million – was spent on consultants to design the project from uptown to the South Carolina border.

RS&H, a Jacksonville, Florida-based planning firm, was paid nearly \$29 million.

"Nearly \$70 million is an extraordinary amount of public money," Sustain Charlotte founder and executive director Shannon Binns said in a statement. "Taxpayers deserve more than a one-page spreadsheet containing vendor names and dollar amounts. If NCDOT expects local governments to pay this bill, it needs to show us the receipts — what work was performed, who performed it, what rates were charged, how many hours were billed, what was produced, and what taxpayers actually have to show for it."

Republican lawmakers passed a state budget that was signed into law in July by Gov. Josh Stein after Charlotte City Council voted to



Binns

Please see **TOLL** | 2A

More absentee ballots in danger of being tossed

By Lynn Bonner

NC NEWSLINE

A new directive to North Carolina county boards of election puts more ballots in jeopardy of being discarded, though voters will have the chance to fill out another.

Absentee ballots that arrive in the wrong envelope, or that arrive unsealed in the correct envelope, will no longer automatically count but will be rejected and new ballots issued, the state Board of Elections decided in a Sept. 4 party-line vote.

The absentee ballot package comes with two envelopes — an inner envelope for the ballot and an outer envelope to mail it back in.

Mailed ballots that are not sealed in the inner envelope will be discarded and the ballots reissued, according to the new guidelines. Ballots will also be discarded if

Please see **MORE** | 3A

McFadden: Reopening Jail North is just the start

By Herbert L. White
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

Reopening a once-shuttered Mecklenburg County jail isn't the same as being ready, according to Sheriff Garry McFadden.

County commissioners unanimously approved \$3.2 million in new funding on Sept. 1 for the first phase of reopening Detention Center North, which will expand incarceration capacity and relieve crowding at Jail Central, but McFadden contends the Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office will need additional investment for personnel and operations.

The investment will come from state and federal sources as well as MCSO's special revenue fund.

"Reopening Detention Center North and adding approximately 200 beds is progress, and it will provide some immediate relief, but relief is not the full res-

Please see **MCFADDEN** | 3A



McFadden

North Carolina lawmakers look to reconcile cannabis regulation bill

By Clayton Henkel

NC NEWSLINE

When members of the North Carolina House and Senate reconvene in November, they will be faced with having to decide how to regulate intoxicating hemp products.

The two chambers were at odds in July over House Bill 328, which would ban hemp with more than 0.4 milligrams of THC and prohibit the sale of any hemp consumables, including CBD, to anyone under 21.

House members opted to wait until after November's midterm elections, not wanting to upset a \$4 billion industry that employs 16,000 people in North Carolina.

In Washington, the hemp industry received a one-month reprieve this

week from a national ban on intoxicating hemp products as part of a short-term funding bill. The U.S. House delayed the ban from taking effect until Dec. 11, as the White House pushes to delay or somehow fix the national ban. At the same time, the Trump administration has called on the U.S. Department of Justice to reclassify marijuana as a Schedule III drug, the same class as Tylenol.

While the outlook is hazy, the end of the year could bring big changes for both the hemp and cannabis industries.

Hemp consumables are largely unrestricted in our state, but North Carolina is in the unique minority of

Please see **NORTH** | 2A

POST BEST GALA 2026

BLACK TIE / FORMAL ATTIRE
RECEPTION & DINNER: 6-10 PM

Saturday, October 3, 2026
Hilton Charlotte Uptown

Malcomb Coley
Luminary

Mary Towe
Educator of the Year

Maya McClain
Top Senior

Jade Mungal
Top Senior Runner Up

thepostfoundation.org/2026PBBE
SPONSORSHIPS • SOUVENIR ADS • QUESTIONS: 704.376.0498

STAY IN TOUCH

Snapchat: thecharpost
X: @thecharpost
Facebook: The Charlotte Post
Instagram: @thecharlottepost



#PaperThursday

INSIDE
Sports 5A
Life 1B
A&E 5B
Classified 4B

Digital edition:
www.thecharlottepostnewspaper.com

To subscribe: (704) 376-0496 or online
http://tcppc.com/Subscribe

Please
Recycle



School district extends student proficiency gains

Continued from page 1A

literacy, where 76.9% of third graders tested proficiency according to the state's Read to Achieve assessment. Third grade proficiency increased from 46.3% to 57.3%.

- CMS outperformed the statewide proficiency rate in grades 3-8 reading, with 56.7% of district students proficient compared with 52.5% statewide. CMS improved four percentage points from 2024-25, compared to 2.4 points among students statewide.
- Nearly 79% of district schools earned a performance grade of A, B or C, an improvement of 8 percentage points from 2024-25 and 26 percentage points ahead of 2021-22.
- The four-year graduation rate in-

creased to 87.9% in 2025-26, up 3.3 percentage points from the previous year.

- 83.8% of district schools met or exceeding benchmarks and 122 campuses improved their numerical performance grade score.
- The number of designated low-performing schools fell to 28, down from 31 the previous year and 50 in 2021-22.

"These results represent thousands of individual stories of students learning, growing and reaching important milestones," Hill said. "Our responsibility now is to continue accelerating that progress so that every student, in every school and every community, has access to an excellent education."

Toll foes to NCDOT: Show what \$69 million buys

Continued from page 1A

withdraw support for toll lanes that requires opponents to compensate NCDOT.

Another opponent of the project, Charlotte-based Action NC, urged caution in considering NCDOT's proposed community benefits agreement through a private toll operator. The advocacy group cited examples in Virginia, Maryland, Texas and Colorado where agreements were canceled when operators ran into financial challenges while the tolls remained.



Dawkins

"On paper, a CBA sounds like a win for residents," Action NC political director Robert Dawkins said, but in reality, the toll lane operator has to voluntarily agree to it and national evidence shows these companies almost never take on extra community obligations when their finances are strained."

In addition to design fees, NCDOT listed additional charges, including meals, attorneys' fees, office supplies and hotel rooms going back to 2018 — six years before the Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization backed a public-private partnership for the project. CRTPO's board, which voted in May to rescind support, is scheduled to vote again on Sept. 23. If the board votes to support the project, repayment is moot. If not, local governments that oppose the toll lanes would be billed a proportionate share of the invoice. The city of Charlotte controls 41% of CRTPO's vote.

"Our greatest concern is the extraordinary decision by the General Assembly to punish local taxpayers for a lawful decision made by their elected representatives," Binns said.

Binns challenged NCDOT's stewardship of tax money as the new law targeting municipalities opposed to state projects.

"In our view, that fundamentally undermines representative democracy and the rule of law," he said. "Local elected officials were asked to exercise their judgment on behalf of their constituents. They did so. Changing the consequences after the vote and threatening their taxpayers unless they vote differently next time is undemocratic and un-American."

A community benefits pact only works if the toll operator agrees to it, Dawkins contends, but they're far from guaranteed because companies don't take on obligations that reduce revenue unless required.

"That matters for Charlotte," he said. "A company already stretched thin is not



FILE PHOTO

Opponents of the proposed I-77 toll road project want the North Carolina Department of Transportation to provide records of \$69.6 million in billing for consulting and design work.

going to volunteer for a strong CBA. Financially stressed operators cut obligations — they don't add them."

Binns said NCDOT's spreadsheet showed approximately \$59 million went to professional consultants, including nearly \$29 million listed under two RS&H entries, while almost \$4.9 million is identified for legal services. When work stopped, NCDOT said the project was in the early design phase and the first draft request for proposals had not been issued.

The transportation agency maps showing where the toll lanes would be built and the impacts they could have on surrounding communities were not publicly presented until last November, after CRTPO's 2024 vote of support.

"When our regional elected officials voted in 2024, they had not yet been shown what this project would actually look like on the ground," Binns said. "The public and local officials didn't see where the lanes would go and what the impacts could be until more than a year later, in November 2025."

"When elected officials reconsidered the project based on that information, the state's response was essentially, 'Too late. You already approved it. And we're going to change the law now so that we can punish you if you don't change your mind and support it.'"



AMANDA WATFORD | STATELINE

North Carolina lawmakers are trying to navigate how to best protect minors from hemp-derived cannabinoids, while also preparing for a future that could include some form of legal cannabis.

North Carolina lawmakers look ahead to reconcile pot regulation

Continued from page 1A

states in which marijuana is fully illegal for both recreational and medicinal purposes.

State lawmakers are trying to navigate how to best protect minors from hemp-derived cannabinoids, while also preparing for a future that could include some form of legal cannabis.

39 states, 39 approaches

The North Carolina Advisory Council on Cannabis, appointed in June 2025 by Gov. Josh Stein, has been meeting for months to develop a comprehensive approach to regulate cannabis sales and create a safe, legal market for adults that protects kids.

Nearly 40 states have already enacted cannabis regulations, but no two are the same.

Yasha Kahn, co-founder of MCR Labs, has been involved in cannabis testing for more than a decade. Kahn was invited to offer his expertise to the advisory council last week, as that group explores a framework for legalization.

North Carolina policymakers will have to decide on an endless number of variables in regulating cannabis, including who should handle testing and at what point in the process the product should be tested.

Kahn said each state has unique testing requirements with no real consensus. And each state may have its own approach to testing batch sizes, packaging, total THC definitions, and regulatory audits.

"Instead of looking at this as a huge mess, it really is 39 individual experiments on policy with much of the data available that we can analyze," said Kahn. "We can see which policies have worked, which ones haven't."

Kahn said cannabis has the potential to be a multi-billion-dollar industry for North Carolina.

Balancing testing and oversight

The advisory committee will also have to decide whether to use private labs or state labs to test the purity and potency of cannabis if it should become legal. Either way, Kahn recommended the state should require all lab results be made public and shared with state agencies.

"How long would it take to have a testing lab to be up and running and producing results?" asked council member Pat Oglesby.

Kahn said there are hemp labs that would likely be willing to take on the testing for a slice of a booming industry, but establishing an accredited lab from scratch would take time.

"A lot of instruments have months of

delays just to be delivered. You have to have capital and good talent," said Kahn. "I've heard of labs opening within maybe nine months. In my experience, it's closer to a year and a half."

Privatizing testing, however, comes with risk, Kahn said, as consumer fraud has been documented in multiple states.

A store owner, for example, may find a low THC product is not selling well and urge the cultivator to produce a stronger product. The cultivator may then call the lab and suggest they provide higher THC results, or they will find a new lab to deliver those results.

"This happens in every market that has more than one lab," Kahn cautioned.

Kahn said this deception becomes easier to trace when the labs are required to share data with the state and those results are made public.

In Colorado, THC potency inflation and the failure to identify mold and other contaminants has legislators considering shifting their cannabis testing to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. Lawmakers there are also considering having state regulators collect the samples to be tested from dispensaries, rather than samples being provided by the producer or cultivators.

Will the industry bloom in North Carolina?

Dr. Larry Greenblatt, state health director and co-chair of the advisory council, said while it may appear that North Carolina is marching toward some form of cannabis legalization, it's by no means a foregone conclusion.

"We are not in any way convinced that we are definitely moving to be a marijuana-legal state," said Greenblatt. "It could happen, but it may not."

The advisory group's final recommendations, including a detailed look at lab testing, will be included in a report to the governor at the end of this year. It would then be up to the legislature to decide if they want to use the information as the foundation or guidance for a cannabis market in North Carolina.

Stein has said he supports legalization for adults, but Republican lawmakers are divided. Recent attempts to legalize medical marijuana have died in the state House, despite the backing of Senate leaders. And neither chamber has ever voted to legalize the drug for recreational use.

Meantime, other states are moving ahead. In neighboring Virginia, regulators will begin accepting applications for regulated recreational cannabis dispensaries in February, with a retail launch set for July 1, 2027.

News You Can Use

The Charlotte Post Newsletter

— The Lead —
And It Is Free

Get it in your inbox every Friday



Subscribe

<https://kaywa.me/j0tlQ>

The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community

WWW.THECHARLOTTEPOST.COM

Follow The Post on social media



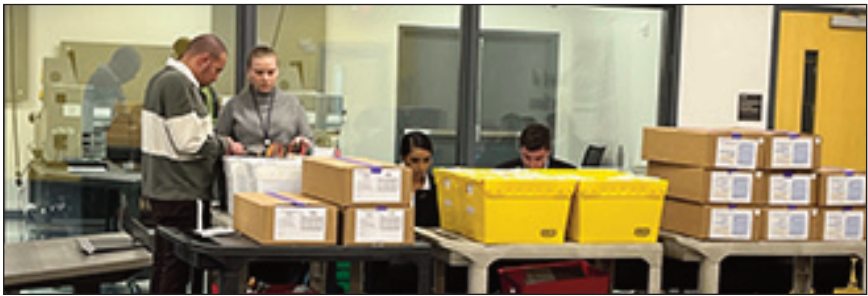
@thecharpost



The Charlotte Post



thecharpost



Bins full of absentee ballots await Wake County Board of Elections review in November 2024.

More absentee ballots in danger of being tossed

Continued from page 1A

their inner envelopes have been opened and resealed.

It's unclear how many voters have made these mistakes in past elections.

The board adopted this new directive for counties on Friday morning, when the first absentee ballots are being mailed to voters who requested them.

Board Secretary Stacy "Four" Eggers IV said the guidance "will not change what voters experience."

But board member Siobhan Millen, a Democrat, disagreed.

"This does affect the voter," she said. "It may not affect you as you're filling it out, but it affects whether your ballot counts. That's huge."

She noted that details on changes the board considered were made public less than two hours before the meeting.

Board member Angela Hawkins, a Republican, said the guidance aligns with state law specifying how absentee ballots should be returned.

The change was initiated by a lawsuit brought by Republicans who objected to current directives that allowed ballots to count if they arrived in an unsealed inner envelope or not in an inner envelope at all, as long as the outer envelope was sealed.

The legal settlement required the board to reconsider those directions to county elections boards.

The state board had proposed a new rule to address handling ballots in the wrong envelopes that was intended to go into effect for the midterms. The Rules Review Commission unanimously approved the rule last month, but received enough opposition letters to block it until the legislature

can review it during its next regular session.

The board's majority decided to send the revised directions to counties while the rule is delayed.

The board also revised a directive on in-person delivery of absentee ballots. If a county board has specific, first-hand information that a ballot was hand-delivered by an unauthorized person, the ballot will be discarded and a new ballot issued.

Gov. Josh Stein, a Democrat, criticized the board's vote.

"Today the State Board of Elections approved new ways for mail-in ballots to be rejected on technicalities, including changes that had been put on hold by state law after I joined a number of other North Carolinians in objecting to them," Stein said in a statement. "The State Board's decision is a slap in the face to voters who stood up to these changes and a blatant circumvention of the law. North Carolina voters deserve transparency in their elections, not last-minute workarounds that could keep their vote from counting."

Sailor Jones, Common Cause North Carolina state director, also denounced the changes.

"The State Board of Elections just unilaterally chose along party lines to instruct counties to toss ballots that have previously counted in North Carolina," he said in a statement.

"This brazen action by Republican members of the State Board, taken in spite of voters' objections to block this rule, and as absentee voting begins is a violation of public trust and will result in eligible ballots being spoiled during a high-interest midterm election," Jones said.

McFadden: Reopening Jail North doesn't end issues

Continued from page 1A

olution," he said last week in a statement. "Moving 200 residents from Central to North does not eliminate our overcrowding problem. We could still have more than 200 individuals at the Central Detention Center sleeping on stack-a-bunks, to include the 80 or more residents that have been sentenced to the Department of Adult Correction, but cannot be transferred because of the state's bedding capacity, while our detention staff continue working under significant staffing and operational pressures."

According to the Sheriff's Office, the county manager's office flagged a budget issue on Aug. 19. North Carolina law bars spending of public funds unless it's authorized under the appropriate budget, which started on July 1 and is applicable until June 30, 2027.

Before commissioners approved the amendment, the sheriff's office was prohibited from spending the funds for reopening the North jail.

"We cannot report that 200 beds have opened at the North Detention Center and allow that number to suggest that the problem at Central Detention Center has been solved," McFadden said. "Let me be clear, it has not. We have essentially robbed Peter to pay Paul, moving part of the population and pressure from one facility to another without addressing the full scope of the problem."

Among McFadden's concerns is the state of living conditions for incarcerated people at both facilities as well as adequate staffing to supervise inmates. Accord-

ing to MCSO, Detention Center Central has a capacity of 1,791, but its average daily population was 2,222 as of Aug. 31 - more than 400 residents above capacity. As a result, some residents are forced to sleep on temporary beds in common areas.

Detention Center North has four housing units with 56 beds in each.

"The headlines may say that Detention Center North is reopening, but the story cannot end there," McFadden said. "You should ask: What are the conditions remaining at Central? How many people are still sleeping on stack-a-bunks? Ask whether we have enough detention officers to safely staff both facilities as the population continues to increase weekly. Those answers are just as important as the reopening of Detention Center North itself."

"Reopening North is very needed and very important, and I appreciate the County's support in making it possible. But this cannot become an opportunity to declare victory and move on without addressing the rising needs and concerns. We must continue addressing staffing, capacity, additional funding, and the long-term needs of our detention centers."

"As we heard from some commissioners, housing juveniles in the same detention center is still a hot-button issue that brings a great deal of emotion and passion, which is understandable. But our staff should feel that same commitment and passion to assist them while serving the needs of the people currently entrusted to our custody."



Build it. Fix it. Love it!

Your dream home doesn't have to stay a dream. Whether you're buying your first home, renovating a fixer-upper, or starting fresh with new construction, SouthState is here to help. Our Construction & Renovation Loans make it easier to turn "just a house" into your home.

- Finance new build or renovations
- Options for primary or secondary homes
- Flexible payment solutions while you build

Ready to get started? Give us a call!

SouthState

866.229.5628
Mortgage@SouthStateBank.com
SouthStateBank.com/CharlottePost

All loans are subject to credit approval and program guidelines. SouthState Bank N.A. NMLS ID # 403455. Member FDIC. Equal Housing Lender.

The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community

Gerald O. Johnson | CEO/PUBLISHER

gerald.johnson@thecharlottepost.com

André P. Johnson | CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

andre.johnson@thecharlottepost.com

Herbert L. White | EDITOR IN CHIEF

herb.white@thecharlottepost.com

Published weekly by The Charlotte Post Publishing Company Inc., 5118 Princess Street, Charlotte, NC 28269 (USPS #965500). Subscription is \$65 per year. Periodicals postage paid at Charlotte, NC. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Charlotte Post, PO Box 30144, Charlotte, NC 28230

Double standard on postpartum mental health

By Edmond Davis

FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Three children must remain at the center of the Lindsay Clancy case: Cora Clancy, 5; Dawson Clancy, 3; and Callan Clancy, 8 months old.

They were killed in their Duxbury, Massachusetts, home on Jan. 24, 2023. Their mother, Lindsay Clancy, admitted killing them. Her defense argued that severe mental illness, including postpartum psychosis, rendered her not criminally responsible.

Prosecutors argued that she deliberately killed the children and understood that her actions were wrong. After seven days of deliberations, Plymouth County Superior Court Judge William F. Sullivan declared a mistrial on September 4, 2026, because the jury could not unanimously resolve whether Clancy was criminally responsible.

Compassion for serious mental illness is not the problem. Unequal compassion is. That distinction becomes impossible to ignore when Clancy's case is placed beside that of Latarsha Sanders, a Black mother from Brockton, Massachusetts.

In February 2018, Sanders killed her sons, Edson "Marlon" Brito, 8, and LaSon Brito, 5. She raised a lack-of-criminal-responsibility defense. A jury convicted her in 2022 of two counts of first-degree murder, resulting in two sentences of life without parole.

Then Massachusetts' highest court intervened. On Aug. 6, 2026, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ordered Sanders a new trial. The court concluded that relevant evidence concerning Sanders's mental deterioration while awaiting trial should have been admitted and that excluding it was prejudicial.

And who tried Sanders? Judge William F. Sullivan—the same judge who presided over Lindsay Clancy's trial. Reuters subsequently highlighted that connection precisely, reporting that Sullivan had presided over both cases and that Massachusetts' highest court overturned Sanders's convictions after concluding that critical mental-health evidence had been improperly excluded.

The Boston Globe has gone even further editorially, arguing that the two cases are "inextricably linked" and raising questions about equitable treatment of the two mothers.

This is no longer merely a story about two mothers. It is a story about two mothers, five dead children, one courthouse, one judge, mental illness — and two dramatically different journeys through American justice.

Same judge, different courtroom realities

The final days of the Clancy trial produced another remarkable development.

After concerns arose about a juror and the panel remained deadlocked, Sullivan called the jurors individually to sidebar. CBS Boston reported that Sullivan briefly questioned each juror before again instructing the entire jury on reasonable doubt. The defense wanted a juror removed; prosecutors argued Sullivan's individual questioning and subsequent instruction were appropriate. Sullivan declined to remove the juror.

CBS's legal analyst described the situation as "very rare" and warned that a judge in such circumstances must avoid appearing to coerce a verdict.

It would therefore be inaccurate to declare individual juror questioning itself unprecedented. Courts can investigate possible juror misconduct or inability to follow instructions. But this was unquestionably extraordinary enough to generate an emergency appeal to Massachusetts' highest court before the mistrial was finalized.

Now consider the contrast.

Clancy's jury heard weeks of testimony about psychiatric treatment, medications, postpartum illness, and competing expert interpretations of her mental state.

Sanders's convictions, meanwhile, were overturned because her jury did not receive mental-health evidence the Supreme Judicial Court determined was relevant to evaluating criminal responsibility. Same judge. Same courthouse. Two mothers who killed their children. Mental illness is central to both defenses. But markedly different procedural histories.

America's presumption of humanity

Postpartum Psychosis is not a political talking point. It is a serious psychiatric condition. The National Institute of Mental Health says postpartum psychosis can involve delusions, hallucinations, mania, paranoia, and confusion and describes it as a psychiatric emergency requiring immediate hospitalization.

That deserves compassion, treatment, and serious consideration in a courtroom. But mental illness does not automatically establish legal insanity. The legal question is whether a particular defendant's mental condition satisfied Massachusetts' standard for lack of criminal responsibility at the time of the killings.

The uncomfortable question is whether American institutions hear these defenses differently depending upon who is asking to be heard.

Mercy can't have double standards
Edmond W. Davis is HBCU Black Wall Street executive director.

If you drive through beautiful, rural Stokes County, you will see golden leaf tobacco yellowing in the fields.

You'll also see tidy rows of corn and soy, old tobacco barns, and modest farmhouses, the kind built in the 1930s

and maintained by facetious MawMaws and PawPaws over the years. You'll see sweet gums and tupelo trees.

And you'll see anti data center signs. Lots and lots of these.

It was late 2025 when the Stokes County "Project Delta" was first proposed; a 1,848-acre hyperscale data center project that would go in along the Dan River and would use enormous methane gas generators for power as it waited to be tied into the Duke Energy grid.

Immediately, local residents raised concerns about the data centers noise and water usage, air pollution, and the impact on energy prices—prices that are already rising at a breakneck speed due to

the data center boom. The Stokes County planning board agreed with local residents and recommended against the rezoning necessary for the center to be built.

But in January, the Stokes County Board of Commissioners approved the rezoning anyway, along with an amendment opening the door for similar data center projects county-wide. Local residents, who had been showing up in unprecedented numbers in this small rural community to voice their opposition, were outraged that they had been ignored.

A month and a half later, local primaries were held. To a last one, the incumbent County Commissioners who had voted to approve Project Delta were resoundingly defeated. One of the incumbents who had voted in favor of the project came in dead last in an 8-way race.

Then, a month later, the Stokes County Board of Commissioners formally voided their prior rezoning decision, and it has been scheduled for a new hearing in front of county commissioners on September 14.

Data centers are poised to be a hot issue on ballots

across North Carolina this fall. From Richmond County to Statesville and Greensboro, residents have been turning out to oppose new data center construction. The citizen opposition is working: in places like Rural Hall, a rezoning request was not approved, and in Edgecombe County the company behind a major data center proposal gave up and pulled out.

Defeating these data centers is one thing; keeping score on the decision-makers is another.

North Carolinians want to know where candidates stand on data centers. Many people are finding themselves unwittingly in the crosshairs of these developments, knowing that their land, water, and even electric bills are going to be negatively affected and, as a result, are forced to get involved. Other residents who have been dutiful partisan voters are now reconsidering the rubber-stamping of their party and digging deep into individual candidates' positions on a variety of issues, data centers and development notwithstanding.

Local residents have been getting a crash course in democracy through

these fights — and they care.

It's a mistake to think this agitation stops at data centers or NIMBYism. From my conversations with residents in Stokes County, the data center is representative of a larger, more existential concern: Who do our elected leaders actually represent? Do they work for us, or for big corporations?

Local politics and politicians typically have been able to hum along unnoticed to much of the citizenry, voted in by low turnout and determined by a given towns' prevailing partisanship. But data centers have blown up all that.

Local citizens are engaged, eager, organizing and imagining new futures — and they are looking outside traditional partisan structures for answers. Candidates will be facing an activated and engaged electorate this fall and would be wise to choose their positions carefully.

Gwen Frisbie-Fulton is a North Carolina storyteller and organizer who writes about race, class, gender and politics in the South. Follow her work on Substack at Working Class Storytelling.

Leverage rail for city's economic growth

Charlotte already knows that rail can do much more than move people.

It can reshape where our city grows — and create enormous economic value in the process.

The numbers are remarkable.



SHANNON BINNS

As of March 2025, the Charlotte Area Transit System identified more than \$10.1 billion in estimated project value along the original Blue Line and Blue Line Extension corridors, encompassing nearly 40,000 housing units and 8.7 million square feet of nonresidential development.

South End provides perhaps the most visible example. What was once largely an industrial district has become one of Charlotte's most intensely developed neighborhoods. The City of Charlotte now places the assessed property value of the South End municipal service district alone at approximately \$6.3 billion.

And the phenomenon didn't stop south of Uptown. Along the Blue Line Extension toward UNC Charlotte, CATS identifies another \$3.28 billion in completed or under-construction projects and nearly 16,900 housing units as of March 2025.

This is an extraordinary success story. It also raises an important question as Charlotte prepares to make its next generation of rail investments:

When billions of dollars in public investment help create billions more in private land value, shouldn't some of that new value help pay for the public investment that helped create it — and for other public benefits our growing community needs?

Other cities already do this

The idea has a name: value capture.

The basic concept is straightforward. Public investment in rail and other transportation infrastructure often makes nearby land more accessible and substantially more valuable. Rather than allowing all of that newly created value to accrue privately, communities can use various mechanisms to return a portion of it to public purposes.

This isn't a novel idea. The Federal Transit Administration and Federal Highway Administration identify tax increment financing, special assessments and joint development among the tools communities can use to capture some of the value associated with

transportation investments. And several major U.S. projects demonstrate how significant these mechanisms can be.

Atlanta offers a particularly relevant comparison for Charlotte. The Atlanta BeltLine established a Tax Allocation District — Georgia's form of tax increment financing — that uses growth in property-tax revenue within the district to support parks, trails, transit, affordable housing and other public investments.

The district was originally projected to generate \$3 billion toward a \$4.4 billion program, or roughly two-thirds of its anticipated cost. Those projections were later reduced substantially after the Great Recession, but the BeltLine continues to use the district as a major funding source and has since added another special taxing district.

Northern Virginia used a different approach to help finance the Washington Metro Silver Line through Tysons and to Dulles International Airport.

Commercial landowners understood that rail access would increase the value and development potential of their properties, and major landowners helped organize support for special tax districts to help fund the line.

Value-capture sources ultimately financed approximately one-fifth of the \$5.7 billion project. Fairfax County's special tax districts were expected to provide about \$730 million across the two phases, with Loudoun County employing a similar mechanism.

San Francisco demonstrates another approach at an even larger scale. The Federal Highway Administration describes the \$4.2 billion Transbay Transit Center project as combining a major transit hub and rail extension with redevelopment of surrounding land.

Sales of publicly owned land generated approximately \$516 million, while new property-tax revenues generated by surrounding redevelopment were pledged to repay a \$171 million federal transportation loan.

The redevelopment also created opportunities for thousands of homes, parks and commercial development.

The mechanisms differ, but the principle is the same: when public investment creates substantial private economic value, communities can capture a portion of that value to help pay for the infrastructure and public benefits that made it possible.

NC already gives us some tools

Charlotte does not have unlimited authority to create its own taxes or financing mechanisms. North Carolina municipalities operate within powers granted by the state, so any serious value-capture strategy has to begin with what state law allows.

Fortunately, we are not starting from zero.

North Carolina already authorizes project development financing, the state's version of what is commonly called tax increment financing, or TIF.

Under this approach, a local government can establish a development financing district with a baseline property valuation. As development occurs and assessed values increase, the additional property-tax revenue generated by that growth can be used to repay debt issued for qualifying public improvements.

North Carolina law expressly allows project development financing for public transportation facilities, including railways.

That distinction is important. TIF does not necessarily mean increasing the general property-tax rate. Instead, it can dedicate some of the new tax revenue generated by growth in property values and development to public investments that support or helped make that growth possible.

There are safeguards and limitations. Development financing districts must follow state statutory requirements. Mecklenburg County has the opportunity to review and disapprove a proposed district and project development financing requires approval from the North Carolina Local Government Commission.

So, Charlotte can explore this tool under existing state law, but it requires coordination among city, county and state partners.

Another option worth evaluating is a transit-oriented municipal service district. North Carolina law specifically authorizes cities to establish municipal service districts for transit-oriented development and levy an additional property tax within them for enhanced services and facilities that benefit the district.

The precise applicability and timing of this authority for financing future rail lines deserves careful legal analysis. But northern Virginia's experience illustrates the broader idea: property owners who receive particularly large financial benefits from a transportation investment can help pay for that investment.

Charlotte and our regional transit authority should also aggressively explore strategic public land acquisition and joint development.

Acquiring key parcels near future stations before rail investment significantly increases their value can allow the public to participate directly in future appreciation. Publicly owned land can later generate revenue through ground leases, development agreements or sales while also creating opportunities for affordable housing, parks, public spaces and other community needs.

Once land prices have dramatically increased, that opportunity becomes much more expensive — or disappears altogether.

Lawmakers pointed the direction

Perhaps the strongest reason to begin this work now is that the North Carolina General Assembly has already told our region to evaluate many of these ideas.

The 2025 legislation establishing Mecklenburg County's new transit funding structure and Metropolitan Public Transportation Authority requires a value-engineering study of the Silver Line East.

That study must examine potential additional revenue sources including municipal service districts, tax increment financing, public-private partnerships, station rents and station air rights, among other possibilities.

So exploring value capture would not be an attempt to work around Raleigh.

State lawmakers themselves have put these tools on the table.

Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, our regional transit authority and state leaders should now work together to determine which combination makes the most sense for each corridor — and whether additional authority from the General Assembly could give our region even better tools.

Capture value — and return it

There is an important purpose here beyond simply paying for rail.

Transit investment can bring tremendous opportunity, but rapidly increasing land values can also raise rents, increase redevelopment pressure and contribute to displacement of existing residents and locally owned businesses.

That means value capture should not simply be a financing strategy. It should also be a community-benefit strategy.

Shannon Binns is founder of Sustain Charlotte.



ZOE FARSON | PRO FOOTBALL HALL OF FAME

Johnson C. Smith quarterback Damien Mazil (11) celebrates Fabian Dunca's (1) 2-yard touchdown run in the Golden Bulls' 27-7 win against Albany State in the Black College Football Hall of Fame Classic Sept. 6, 2026, at Tom Benson Hall of Fame Stadium in Canton, Ohio. JCSU improved to 1-1 while the Golden Rams fell to 0-2.

JCSU 'just got back to basics'

Golden Bulls, who open CIAA schedule at WSSU, focused on fundamentals to beat Albany State

By Herbert L. White
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

Johnson C. Smith needed a reminder of what winning football looks like. The Golden Bulls' 27-7 win against Albany State Sept. 6 at the Black College Football Hall of Fame Classic in Canton, Ohio, was nothing like their season-opening loss at Benedict in which they were inconsistent and error-prone. This time out, they leaned into the identity that made them a preseason top 25 team in Division II. "That wasn't the Johnson C. Smith team that we were used to seeing" the week before," coach Maurice Flowers

said. "Sixty new football players, 10 new starters on defense, and then offensively ... good quarterback play is going to determine how the offense goes, really, and how the team goes. "We just got back to basics." Cleaning up the fundamentals was enough for the Golden Bulls (1-1) to dominate Albany State (0-2), which opened its season with a 20-7 loss at FCS Florida A&M. Offensively, the ground attack paced by Fabian Duncan's 141 yards and



Duncan



Mazil

three touchdowns on 21 carriers was complemented by Damien Mazil's 12-of-18 passing for 184 yards in his first JCSU start. Smith's defense limited the Rams to 227 yards, including 79 on the ground. Even special teams, whose mistakes saddled the Golden Bulls with poor field position a week earlier, were drama-free. "We looked at film, and it wasn't necessarily the Benedict game," Flowers said. "It was, but it wasn't. We looked at Johnson C. Smith

playing good football from the last three years, and then we looked at some of the Benedict game. Those two teams did not look alike, so it was just get back to the standard and just playing how we play, and that was really it. "We didn't look at a whole bunch of film on Albany State. We really had the mindset of fix us, and we're preparing for Albany State." Defensively, Smith forced four turnovers (three interceptions) and a pair of sacks while holding Albany State scoreless before a 23-yard pass from Vinson Berry to Jaquan Graham Please see **JCSU** | 6A

Road ahead won't get easier for Charlotte football



MATT LACZKO | THE CHARLOTTE POST

Charlotte 49ers receiver Derrick Eley catches a pass for a 43-yard touchdown as The Citadel's Khaleb Bridges defends in the Bulldogs' 43-41 triple overtime win at Jerry Richardson Stadium.

By Cameron Williams
cameron.williams@thecharlottepost.com

Charlotte's 2026 season opener was one to forget. The 49ers (0-1) opened the season as 20.5-point favorites against FCS The Citadel. Crucial mistakes kept the Bulldogs within striking distance late and they capitalized with a 43-41 triple overtime win. The last time Charlotte lost to an FCS opponent was in 2022 against William & Mary. "My heart hurts for the staff and the fan base," Charlotte coach Tim Albin said. "I've got to do a better job as a head coach getting our guys ready to go. ... I'm disappointed, not disappointed with their efforts. We're going to have to get some things cleaned up. 24 hours, we're going to correct the mistakes. The season's not over. You get 12 opportunities, and we had chances to win the game, but didn't get it done." Charlotte gave up 268 yards on the ground -140 to Bulldogs running back Gavin Garcia, who also had three touchdowns. His most important run arguably came in overtime when he went 25 yards Please see **49ERS** | 6A

Coach Rod Broadway epitome of legendary

The last time I interviewed coach Rod Broadway was right before his induction into the North Carolina Sports Hall of Fame. That was in January 2019. Broadway had been retired from coaching for over a year, although some of us kept waiting to hear those two words Michael Jordan made so famous: "I'm back!" But after hearing his voice on the phone, I knew he wasn't returning. He sounded more laid back than ever - and happy.



BONITA
BEST

Broadway, an Oakboro native, coached for almost 40 years, the last 15 as a head coach at North Carolina Central in the CIAA, Grambling State in the SWAC and North Carolina A&T in the MEAC. He compiled a 125-45 record in those 15 seasons and is the only coach to win a Black college national championship at three different institutions. He has five national titles: one at Grambling State and two each at NCCU and A&T. His coaching tree has limbs all over the HBCU sports world: Trei Oliver, Adrian Jones, Shawn Gibbs, Sam Washington, etc. "You know, it's never about what you do, but the people you surround yourself with," Broadway said at the time. "I've been blessed. I had a lot of good people and a lot of good players, and they made my job easier."

Broadway left NCCU, then a CIAA member, with three straight conference championships, two consecutive Black college national titles and an undefeated regular season in his final year. He left for Grambling just as the Eagles were reclassifying to Division I. Broadway knew what was coming. Winston-Salem State had reclassified a couple Please see **ROD** | 6A

Charlotte FC focuses on moving up MLS table

By Herbert L. White
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

It's a good week for Charlotte FC to move up the MLS Eastern Conference table. The Crown, which is on a five-match unbeaten streak that includes three wins, is on the road for three straight matches: CF Montreal (5-12-6, 21 points) on Wednesday at Stade Saputo, followed by FC Cincinnati (8-7-7,

31 points) on Saturday. Charlotte, fifth in the East at 36 points (10-7-6), is 4-1-3 in league play since the World Cup break and 6-2-3 in all competitions. They're a point behind New England (11-8-4) for fourth and two behind Chicago (11-6-5). "Preparation, focus, mentality" are necessary to secure points this week, Charlotte coach Dean Smith said. "I think they're the

key to it. We're in a good moment. Continue that good moment. That's three places we won on the road last season, so we go there with no fear, but total respect of all the teams. Just because of the position that teams are in before you



Smith

go there doesn't mean nothing. It's all about performance levels on the day of the game." The extended stretch away from Bank of America Stadium won't require a different approach, Smith said. Outside of travel from Charlotte to Montreal back home before flying to Cincinnati, preparation multiple games in a week presents similar Please see **CHARLOTTE** | 6A

Hough delivers a statement win to continue county superiority

By Herbert L. White
herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

Three games into the season and Hough High has the Magnificent Seven ranking in a head-lock. The Huskies, who were the preseason No. 1 team, are still there after a convincing win against Providence Day, North Carolina's best private school program. Behind Hough was movement with Mallard Creek's loss to Buford (Ga.) dropping the Mavericks from second to fourth while elevating unbeaten Chambers and Palisades to second and third, respectively.

This week's Magnificent Seven, overall record and previous week's ranking. 1. **Hough** (3-0, No. 1 last week). If there were any doubt as to Mecklenburg's best team, they evaporated with a 30-3 demolition of Providence Day. The Huskies' offense is rounding into form, which is going to be scary for the rest of North Carolina. Next up: at Mooresville. 2. **Chambers** (3-0, No. 3 last week). The Cougars pummeled Corvian Community 54-14 to signal they're ready for a showdown against unbeaten Palisades on the road in a clash of Magnif-

icent Seven heavyweights. 3. **Palisades** (3-0, No. 4 last week). Palisades is off to a strong start with an interim coach. The Pumas' 18-10 win against Clover is a fine setup against No. 2 Chambers at home. Something's got to give in the county's most compelling game this week. 4. **Mallard Creek** (2-1, No. 2 last week). Buford gave the Mavericks a taste of adversity in a 41-7 romp. Now they'll get a chance to respond at Myers Park. 5. **West Charlotte** (2-1, No. 7 last week). The young Lions are on a two-game win streak after dropping the season opener,

with a 20-19 decision against Summerville (S.C.). The annual westside rivalry against West Mecklenburg awaits. 6. **Butler** (2-1, No. 5 last week). The Bulldogs were pulled down to earth by a 49-28 loss to Indian Land. Butler's chance at redemption comes against a Providence Day squad that was ravaged by Hough last week. 7. **Ardrey Kell** (2-1, No. 6 last week). Another team aiming to recover from its first loss of the season. Marvin Ridge rolled past the Knights 42-21, but South Mecklenburg presents a manageable task.

JCSU returns to basics, discovers winning form

Continued from page 5A

with 2:05 left. All-CIAA linebacker Vincent Hill paced the Golden Bulls with nine tackles and a forced fumble while defensive end DeAndre Martin, a Charlotte transfer, tallied six tackles (1.5 for loss) and a pair of quarterback hurries.

"We know that in '23 [JCSU's defense was] No. 1 in D2, '24 No. 6 in D2, and last year a top 10 defense and we were far from that in our first ball game,"

Flowers said. "We don't make excuses in our program - it's either you get it done or you don't get it done and that's what happened in game one. We didn't get it done and really it was just all fundamentals."

Duncan, a North Mecklenburg High graduate who transferred from Allen after earning SIAC offensive player of the year in 2025, backed up his 148 rushing yards against Benedict with a similar effort against Albany State. The highlight was a season-long 40-yard gallop off left tackle to push JCSU's lead to 27-0 barely two minutes into the second half.

"He's a workaholic," Flowers said. "He brings it every day to practice. He brings it every day in the weight room. He brings it in meetings. He just comes to bring maximum effort at everything that he does on and off the field. That's why he's fit our culture so well. He brings it, and the thing I like is that right now he's not carrying the ball a lot."

With Duncan (292 yards and four touchdowns on 43 carries in two games) paired with Kamarro Edmonds (145 yards on 31 tries), the Golden Bulls have enough productive depth at run-

ning back to hold out All-CIAA Bobby Smith (shoulder).

Mazil's promotion to starting quarterback was unexpected, but successful. The Wagner transfer was efficient - Mazil connected on seven straight passes after opening 1-for-3 - while hitting five different receivers. Flowers said Mazil and Parker McQuarrie, who was limited by a calf injury in practice and played sparingly late against Albany State, will continue to share playing time.

"You've heard me say we didn't have one starter; we have two starters," Flowers said. "[Albany State] was just proof of it. Damian Mazil was a guy that started games at Wagner. ... He played against Army. He played against Navy. That's a pretty big stage when you play those schools right there and so he just stepped in and really led the offense very efficiently."

Next up for Smith is another road game - this time at Winston-Salem State in the CIAA opener for both teams. The Golden Bulls are looking to extend their three-game win streak against the Rams - JCSU's best run against WSSU since a nine-game roll from 1962-70. After breaking even against nonconference opponents, Saturday's test kicks off the race for CIAA title game berths.

"There's been some folks up in Winston that say this isn't a rivalry," Flowers said. "Well, OK, it's not a rivalry for you, but it's dang sure one for us. Glad to say that we won three in a row and ... we're going for four - there's no secret about that."

"We want to beat Winston-Salem State, and more important than that, we start conference play. It's not about being the defending champs or anything like that, but we know how important conference play is."

Rod Broadway the epitome of legendary college football coach

Continued from page 5A

of years earlier and things weren't going well. You see where the Rams are now, don't you?

What successful coach wants to sully his career record playing a brutal five-year independent schedule while waiting to get clearance to join a conference?

Broadway's four-year stint at Grambling had enough drama to be made into a Netflix movie. Yes, he gave the G-men a Black college national championship in 2008, but it got ugly at the end. I think some folks would rather sell their first-born child than

lose in the Bayou Classic. Broadway left after four seasons.

A&T had finished 1-9 when he arrived in 2011. The program was riddled with NCAA violations to the point that the Aggies couldn't even hold a spring game.

But with the right staff around him recruiting the best talent with A&T's limited resources, those rags returned to riches under former Aggies coach William "Bill" Hayes.

Broadway retired in 2017 after leading A&T to a 12-0 record, Celebration Bowl victory and Black college national title. While some of us were waiting for his comeback announcement, he moved to Hilton Head, South Carolina, where he "don't do anything except walk on the beach when it's warm."

After this weekend, there's the MEAC Hall of Fame induction ceremony next March. Both NCCU and the MEAC inductions are long overdue. But at least he's above ground and can smell his flowers.

"You can have it (coaching)," he said in 2019. "There are some things that I miss but, overall, I'm done. I enjoyed it while it lasted for 40 years."

Bonitta Best is sports editor at The Triangle Tribune in Durham.

49ers embark on difficult road

Continued from page 5A

to the end zone on what appeared to be a broken play.

Albin said there were a lot of things to clean up in the run defense.

"We had some things dialed up pressure-wise, and we missed tackles," Albin said. "[Garcia], that kid, we couldn't get him on the ground. He broke numerous tackles."

The Citadel swapped quarterbacks at halftime from Quentin Hayes to Nick Billops, who was 7-for-11 passing for 91 yards but did most of his damage on the ground with a pair of scores and 47 rushing yards.

"There were a couple formations that we hadn't seen before with [Billops]," Albin said. "I think that was in the game. Just the

straight sprint-out look but was a designed quarterback run. We hadn't seen it. We didn't get lined up to it the first time in the third quarter on their second touchdown I think maybe fourth... but the kid did a nice job. ... There was a time we had them third and long, and they hit the big, long pass down our sideline. You know that was a huge play in the game. That wasn't the only play, but that was a big play in the game."

Charlotte quarterback Cole Gonzales went 28-for-41 with 322 yards and three touchdowns. He started shaky with two interceptions in the first quarter but bounced back.

"You saw the toughness in him," Albin said. "I'm probably most proud of him. He had two picks in the first quarter, and I liked his body language. He's a leader. He's under the fire, and he didn't

get rattled. He was disappointed but made a few adjustments. ... There's some things to build on there for sure from his performance."

Albin applauded the 49ers' effort, but at some point, the execution has to catch up.

"As the head coach, I'm like, 'did we tackle enough in preseason?'" he said. "You have to ask yourself that. How much do you go live and risk injuries? I know we certainly work on it but just getting them on the ground. I'll have a better answer probably just after I see the tape. But it just was with the turnovers and the field position thing, we just didn't have enough gas in the tank to get the game put away. It was a game, and our guys had shown a lot of character to come back, and they did it. We just couldn't get it done."



CHARLOTTE FC

Charlotte FC, which is unbeaten in five straight MLS matches with three wins, will look to continue that streak with road games at Montreal and FC Cincinnati.

Charlotte FC focuses on moving up MLS table

Continued from page 5A

challenges.

"We had the road trip to Toronto (a 3-3 draw on Aug. 19), and it was a quick turnaround for the Saturday game (a 3-1 win against DC United on Aug. 22) as well," Smith said. "We'll do exactly the same again. The only difference is the weekend game will be away again, so it'll be you know get back from Montreal, catch up on your sleep and your recovery, and then travel again the next day to Cincinnati. The players are used to it now, so it's not much of a hindrance."

The Crown will have to carry on without a couple of important pieces of its lineup. Midfielder Ashley Westwood was ruled out for Wednesday after he was ejected from the Sept. 5 match against Houston for a pair of yellow cards. The Crown is also without forward Harry Toffolo, who in the process of working his way back from injury.

"Best I can see is that Ashley Westwood will be out, and Harry Toffolo is on the

comeback trail now," Smith said. "He's [training] on the grass, and hopefully we'll have him back. But this week will be too quick for him."

The Crown has secured back-to-back clean sheets in league matches and four of the last eight in all competitions. Perhaps the most impressive was last week's 0-0 draw against Houston when they played most of the second half without Westwood. Defensively, the Crown denied the Dynamo a serious scoring opportunity.

"I thought the first 20 minutes of the second half we stepped on it," Smith said. "We went and engaged a little bit higher, won the ball back a number of times in their half. Probably had our best chances in the first half, if I'm honest, but always looked a threat. What was really good defensively, I didn't think they had a good look at our goal at all, and that's credit to the players how we're defending. What we could have done better is I felt we could have gotten pressure on the ball in our half a lot quicker."

All US-based MLS clubs to play in 2027 US Open Cup

By Herbert L. White

herb.l.white@thecharlottepost.com

Major League Soccer is all in for the Lamar Hunt U.S. Open Cup.

All 27 MLS clubs in the United States will play in the nation's oldest soccer tournament starting with next year's showcase. Following the first round, MLS teams will join the round of 64 in July as host for their opening match.

The timing of MLS clubs' entry into the U.S. Open Cup aligns with the start of the 2027-28 MLS regular season as part of its transition to a summer-to-spring season calendar. MLS clubs have been a part of the U.S. Open Cup since its inaugural season in 1996, and an MLS side has won every tournament since 2000.

"The Lamar Hunt U.S. Open Cup connects all leagues, clubs and fans in a unique way," Nelson Rodriguez, MLS execu-

tive vice president of sporting and matchday said in a statement. "For MLS clubs, it's a chance to write a special chapter in the tournament's history and earn qualification to the Concacaf Champions Cup."

The U.S. Open Cup doesn't place a numerical limit on the roster of eligible players for competition, so game day rosters will expand from 18 to 20 players in 2027 and MLS clubs can select anyone among first-team, MLS Next Pro, and academy players under contract. That flexibility will give younger players a chance to compete while allowing clubs a means to manage in-season competition.

After the round of 64, a draw will be held to reveal the matches and hosting scenarios for the next two rounds, starting with the round of 32 on Sept. 14-15, 2027, followed by the quarterfinals on Nov. 23-24, semifinals (Dec. 1) and the final (Dec. 15).

