



FY2017-2019 STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN Medical Examiner's Office

Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

Updated 7/31/17





Medical Examiner's Office

OUR VISION

To provide national best practice Medical Examiner services for the citizens of Mecklenburg County and regional counties. The Mecklenburg County Medical Examiner's Office will function as a premier urban Forensic Pathology center.



OUR MISSION

The Office of the Medical Examiner's mission is to provide morgue and Medical Examiner/Forensic Pathology services to the citizens of Mecklenburg County, and consultation and Forensic Pathology services to five regional counties.

On Collaboration...

"We could learn a lot from crayons: some are sharp, some are pretty, some are dull, while others are bright, some have weird names, but we have to learn to live in the same box." –

Anonymous





STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN: MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE

OUR ENVIRONMENT

INTRODUCTION TO THE OFFICE

The Mecklenburg County Medical Examiner's Office (MEO) is charged with the responsibility to investigate all suspicious, unnatural, and unexpected deaths that fall under the jurisdiction of the North Carolina Medical Examiner System (NCMES) based on the NC General Statutes. The office performs investigations into the deaths along with the examinations and Forensic Autopsy services for Mecklenburg County as well as five regional counties under contract with the State. This office also serves as the Mecklenburg County Morgue for unclaimed bodies, as well as persons who die outside of a hospital and the bodies require storage until a funeral home is designated by the proper next of kin. At present, the office is not accredited by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME).

Currently, there are 17 full time employees including 3 Forensic Pathologists/Medical Examiners (one of whom serves as the Department Director), a Business Manager, a Lead Investigator, 6 Death Investigators, 3 Autopsy Assistants, an Administrative Coordinator, an Administrative Assistant/Transcriptionist, and a Morgue Assistant/Maintenance Assistant. The Lead Investigator, one of the 6 Investigators, and one of the Autopsy Assistants were all added in FY 16. Also on staff are the following limited part time staff: 1 Forensic Pathologist, 2 Autopsy Assistants, and 4 Investigators. The FY 16 operating budget is \$2,087,915.

ECONOMIC AND FISCAL TRENDS

For FY16, the State legislature passed an increase in the fee-for-service reimbursement for Medical Examiner services effective October 1, 2015. This resulted in an anticipated annual revenue increase of approximately \$530,000 per year for the Mecklenburg County MEO.

DEMAND FOR SERVICES

The demand for Medical Examiner services fluctuate with the death rate, number of homicides and other unnatural events,

changes in population size and make-up, and the number of unclaimed bodies. While some projections can be made in general based on the average number of cases in the previous years, the exact number and types of deaths cannot be predicted with certainty. The office is positioned to adjust to the fluctuations in the workload. The one area in which the entire State ME system including Mecklenburg County has an opportunity for improvement is in the areas of scene visitation and independent investigation of the deaths under ME jurisdiction.

DEMOGRAPHIC & SOCIAL CHANGES

The Mecklenburg MEO serves an increasing population for the County and the regional area that now totals approximately 1.8 million. Along with that, there are several large referral hospitals and level 1 trauma centers that receive patients from an even more expansive area including the state of South Carolina. As the population continues to increase, so will the growth of cases falling under the ME jurisdiction. Current trends include increases in the homicide rate and excessive numbers of deaths related to drug overdoses. In keeping with national best practices, the State of NC also has plans to have all ME cases completed at a regional center by Forensic Pathologists. This could involve the needed expansion of the regional coverage area for the Mecklenburg MEO in the near future.

IMPACT OF NEW LEGISLATION

Along with increased reimbursement for ME services, the legislature also added requirements for training of medical examiners and ongoing continuing education. While still not specified in the new statutes as an absolute requirement at this time, the expectation is that Medical Examiners will be going to the scenes of death. Visiting the scene of death and conducting an independent investigation into the death is in keeping with national best practices and is a specified requirement by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME), which is the national organization that oversees and provides accreditation to ME offices.



STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN: MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE

OUR GOALS

The goals of the Medical Examiner's Office are 1) to build a national best in class operation, 2) to build collaborative partnerships with other agencies involved in the death investigation and medicolegal system and 3) maintain environmental sustainability of operations.

Goal one involves providing the highest level of Forensic Pathology service, supplying trained death scene investigators to visit the scene of death to perform an independent investigation and provide valuable assistance and information gathering to aid in determining an accurate cause and manner of death, providing full time 24/7 coverage of the office and availability for scene visits, obtaining office accreditation by the National Association of Medical Examiners, and expansion of the morgue cooler area to accommodate the storage requirement of the Mecklenburg County Morgue. Successful achievement of these goals will establish community trust in the office by demonstrating efficient and accurate completion of each case to facilitate examination and timely release of the decedents to a funeral home while providing accurate and essential feedback to law enforcement, families, the court system, and the community.

Goal two seeks to achieve the highest level of service to the community through training and support between the MEO, law enforcement, the court system, and other emergency operations. This also includes ensuring proper training and support of the Medical Examiners within the catchment area in the office's role as a State regional forensic center. By successfully achieving this goal, the community will recognize a well-trained ME staff that works hand-in-hand with equally well-trained collaborative partners resulting in an efficient and effective Medical Examiner system.

Goal three affirms the commitment of the MEO to adhere to the standards set forth in the guidelines established by Mecklenburg County regarding environmentally preferable purchasing and giving staff the opportunity to learn about and engage in environmental-friendly practices.

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

For the first time in many years, the revenue for the ME Office is no longer static. With the increase in fee-for-service reimbursement for the cases effective October 1, 2015, the ME Office will increase annual revenue by approximately \$530,000. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the County Manager, the Executive Team, and the Board of County Commissioners for the recent past support of the ME Office in our quest to become a true professional urban Forensic Pathology facility and provide the best service to the citizens of Mecklenburg County and the regional community that we serve. Significant successful changes have already taken place over the past few years with the dedication of our business manager Peggy McCoy and the entire staff in the Mecklenburg County Medical Examiner's Office who eagerly embrace their roles to advance the office to be a recognized model for operations in the State as well as the nation.

With the increase in fee-for-service reimbursement effective October 1, 2015, the ME Office will increase annual revenue by approximately \$530,000. This revenue will allow the office to fund all positions and costs of facility expansion to achieve the goals outlined in this plan.



STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN:
MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE

GOAL 1: Build a National Best in Class Operation

Objective 1: Provide the highest level of forensic pathology service

Strategy	Hire only Board Certified Forensic Pathologists or with the requirement to become Board Certified within 2 years of the date of hire.	
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Change educational requirements on future Forensic Pathologist postings to require Forensic Board certification upon hire or within 2 years of date of hire. ◇ Require each Forensic Pathologist to become a member of the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) to ensure a method of keeping current with best practices. 	
	<p>Total associated costs: FY 2017 – FY 2019</p> <p>Annual medical license renewal and NAME association dues total \$700.00 per pathologist. This represents an annual total cost of \$2,800 per year and \$8400 for the 3-year span.</p>	\$2,800 per year
Performance Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Forensic Board Certification Verification: As a part of the hiring process, in addition to verifying medical license, Human Resources will verify Forensic Board Certification of the final candidate. ◇ Forensic Board Certification Rate: Successful candidate will maintain Forensic Board Certification and successful renewal of Medical License throughout employment with Mecklenburg County and maintain annual NAME membership. 	
Comment	<p>All examinations will be performed by board certified Forensic Pathologists in accordance with national best practice standards. This will ensure performance of the most appropriate and complete examination along with the most accurate and consistent determination of cause and manner of death. The information gathered from the examination will allow for efficient processing of matters related to criminal proceedings, epidemiology related to disease/trauma/death, and items such as estate settlement and insurance payments to families.</p>	



STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN:
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GOAL 1: Build a National Best in Class Operation (cont'd)

Objective 2: Provide competent, trained death scene investigators to assist the Forensic Pathologists in determining an accurate cause and manner of death

Strategy	Each Medical Examiner Investigator will be trained and certified through the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI) within 24 months of employment.	
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ ME Lead Investigator will ensure that new hires are registered for ABMDI training upon the successful completion of the 3 months of in-house training. ◇ Department Director, in conjunction with Lead Investigator will ensure the completion of ABMDI training for existing ME Investigators, as well as new hires. 	
	<p>Total associated costs: FY 2017 – FY 2019</p> <p>The cost for ABMDI certification is \$1,000 per ME Investigator and an annual renewal fee of \$50.00 per year per employee. During the 3-year plan, 6 Investigators will obtain certification for a cost of \$6,000 and renewal fees will run an average of \$500 per year.</p>	<p>FY17 - \$3,200</p> <p>FY18 - \$3,350</p> <p>FY19 - \$500</p>
Performance Measure(s)	◇ ABMDI Certification Rate: Each ME Investigator will successfully complete ABMDI certification and subsequent annual certification requirements while employees of Mecklenburg County Medical Examiner's Office.	
Comment	Existing Medical Examiner Investigators will be trained by the end of FY17. The entire staff of Investigators will be trained and certified by ABMDI by the end of FY 2018. The community will recognize a well-trained ME staff that interacts in a collaborative and efficient manner with the other agencies involved in the death investigation and certification processes.	



STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN:
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GOAL 1: Build a National Best in Class Operation (cont'd)

Objective 3: Staff office with full time ME Investigators in-house 24/7

Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Maintain a staff of nine full time ME Investigators and one full time Lead ME Investigator to provide 24/7 coverage. ◇ Investigators will provide 100% scene visits to homicides scenes and suspicious deaths. ◇ ME Investigators will receive and release bodies 24/7. 		
Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Use redirected revenue funds to create positions to adequately staff a 24/7 operation. 		
	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td> <p>Total associated costs: FY 2017 – FY 2019</p> <p>Training for 3 full time investigators hired in FY16 will be completed by the close of FY17.</p> </td> <td style="text-align: center; vertical-align: top;"> <p>\$0</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p>Total associated costs: FY 2017 – FY 2019</p> <p>Training for 3 full time investigators hired in FY16 will be completed by the close of FY17.</p>	<p>\$0</p>
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Performance Measure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Homicide/Suspicious Deaths Scene Visits: Number of scene visits to ensure compliance with the goal objective. 		
Comment	<p>The department will have hired three additional full time investigators by end of FY 16. This will bring the total number of full time investigators to 9 with the addition of a Lead Investigator who also serves in a supervisory role for these positions. With these positions filled, the office will be staffed 24/7 by in-house full time investigators, who will be able to respond to all homicide and suspicious death scenes to conduct an investigation and assist law enforcement. The office will also be able to extend the hours of operation during which bodies can be released to funeral homes or to tissue/organ procurement agencies. No other investigator positions are expected to be needed during the current 3 year plan.</p>		



STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN:
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GOAL 1: Build a National Best in Class Operation (cont'd)

Objective 4: Expand the facility's County morgue/cooler to accommodate increased body storage capacity.

Strategy	Adequately construct a facility that will accommodate increased body storage capacity	
Action	<p>◇ FY2017 Department Director and Business Manager will work with Asset and Facility Management to develop and finalize a plan, as well as final costs for the County's morgue/cooler space.</p> <p>FY 2018 Request and secure capital improvement funds to accomplish the project.</p>	
	<p>Total associated costs: FY 2017 – FY 2019</p> <p>Projected costs for the project will range from \$600,000 to \$700,000 for expansion of the cooler space, accomplished during the current 3-year strategic plan.</p>	<p>FY17 - \$0</p> <p>FY18 - \$0</p> <p>FY19 - \$1,735,580</p>
Performance Measure	◇ Facility Completion	
Comments	<p>The storage capacity of the morgue cooler will be expanded to accommodate the current caseload and the anticipated increase in storage space with increases in number of cases and potential expansion of regional contract work in the near future. The recommendation in a medical examiner setting is for storage capacity under standard conditions (not accounting for any mass disaster event) of 1 body for every 15,000 persons in the population served. This equates to the need for 66 spaces just to cover the current population of Mecklenburg County. The morgue also stores some of the bodies from the regional catchment area when an autopsy is being performed. This adds the requirement of space for approximately 20 more bodies (40% of ME cases require autopsy), bringing the current recommended total storage capacity of the morgue to 86 bodies. Proposed expansion will increase the current cooler capacity of only 40 bodies to 90 bodies, thus providing adequate storage space for bodies under care of the ME system and/or Mecklenburg County Morgue operations. Additional storage could be further achieved with the use of new racking systems if needed beyond this current plan.</p>	



STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN:
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GOAL 1: Build a National Best in Class Operation (cont'd)

Objective 5: Obtain Office accreditation by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME)

Strategy	NAME is the only organization that oversees the operation of Forensic Pathology services and facilities and issues guidelines for best practices and accreditation of ME offices. NAME accreditation indicates that the office has met national best practice requirements.	
Actions	<p>◇ FY 2017</p> <p>MED will review the requirements for accreditation based on the checklist issued by NAME. All policies and procedures will be updated and brought into alignment with NAME standards.</p> <p>◇</p> <p>FY 2018</p> <p>The office will submit the application to NAME and undergo the inspection required to obtain accreditation by end of FY 18.</p>	
	<p>Total associated costs: FY 2017 – FY 2019</p> <p>Full NAME accreditation is for a 5 year term. Offices with some minor deficiencies may be issued a 12 month provisional accreditation. First year cost is \$3,500 for the inspection process. There may be some small amount of associated costs to ensure the office meets all of the requirements in the first year. This is expected to be \$1,500 or less. Each of the following 4 years cost \$1,000 for continued accreditation.</p>	<p>FY17 - \$0</p> <p>FY18 - \$5,000</p> <p>FY19 - \$1,000</p>
Performance Measure(s)	<p>◇ Mecklenburg MED will obtain full NAME accreditation by end of FY 18.</p> <p>◇ MED will maintain full NAME accreditation for the 5-year term.</p>	
Comment	<p>MED had originally planned to seek NAME accreditation following the NC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) having first gone through the process. The State has now indicated that although the office desires to be accredited by NAME, they are unable to do so at present or in the near future. Rather than continue to delay the process and wait on the State OCME, MED will once again take the lead in obtaining this accreditation to demonstrate that the office is committed to best practices.</p>	



STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN:
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GOAL 2: Build Collaborative Partnerships		
Objective 1: MED, law enforcement, and other emergency operations work in tandem with one another to achieve the highest level of service for the community		
Strategy	MED will provide training and guidance on an on-going basis to local law enforcement and other emergency services agencies such as fire and MEDIC.	
Action	♦ MED currently offers a local training curriculum on a regularly scheduled basis to a limited number of agencies. In FY17, the training will be expanded to other agencies such as MEDIC and local fire departments.	
	Total associated costs: FY2017 – FY2019 All associated costs will be absorbed within the MED existing budget	\$0
Performance Measures	♦ Calls for Service: Law enforcement, fire and MEDIC agencies that have received ME training will know when to contact the ME Office and request an Investigator to come to the scene. This will be reflected in the number of scene visits performed by Investigators at the Mecklenburg County ME Office.	
	♦ Training and Guidance Satisfaction: Regional Medical Examiners and Investigators that are supervised and trained by the Mecklenburg County MED will demonstrate investigative proficiency when called upon to attend a scene. This will be reflected in the number of scene visits performed by Medical Examiners and Investigators reporting to the Mecklenburg County ME Office.	
Comment	The goal is to better equip the law enforcement investigators/crime scene techs in gathering relevant information to assist the pathologist in determining the cause and manner of death, create more investigative efficiencies, while maintaining the integrity of evidence at the scene.	



STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN:
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GOAL 2: Build Collaborative Partnerships (cont'd)	
Objective 2: Acting as a State Regional Office, ensure Medical Examiners located in the counties of the catchment area are adequately trained to make decisions confidently and independent of Mecklenburg County	
Strategy	Provide training and guidance on an on-going basis to Medical Examiners from counties in the catchment area
Actions	<p>◇ FY 2017</p> <p>A new MED training module will be developed in FY17 that will incorporate the new State Legislative requirements for all State Medical Examiners and Investigators to receive training as developed by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in Raleigh, NC. The training module will address proper death scene investigations, as well as State Statutes and requirements with an emphasis on the policies and procedures specifically relating to the Mecklenburg County Office.</p> <p>◇ FY 2017 – FY 2019</p> <p>MED staff will work with State personnel to ensure consistent training for MEs across the State.</p>
	<p>Total associated costs: FY2017 – FY2019 \$0</p> <p>All associated costs will be absorbed within the MED existing budget</p>
Performance Measures	◇ Training and Guidance Satisfaction: Regional Medical Examiners and Investigators that are supervised and trained by the Mecklenburg County MED will demonstrate investigative proficiency when called upon to attend a scene. This will be reflected in the number of scene visits performed by Medical Examiners and Investigators reporting to the Mecklenburg County ME Office.



STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN:
MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE

GOAL 3: Maintain Environmental Sustainability of Operations

Objective 1: Adhere to environmentally preferable purchasing (EPP) guidelines

Strategy	Monitor department practices to ensure adherence to environmentally preferable purchasing (EPP) guidelines	
Actions	<p>◇ FY 2017</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify a department representative to work with the County's Sustainability Manager to track and meet the department's environmental goals <p>◇ FY 2017 – FY 2019</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educate department employees on the importance of adhering to the County's environmentally preferable purchasing (EPP) guidelines Enforce the department's adherence to the County's EPP guidelines by monitoring purchasing habits Embrace new and innovative opportunities for improving the environmental-friendliness of the department's purchasing habits When making purchasing decisions, consider the full cost of the products—environmental, social, <i>and</i> economic 	
	Total associated costs: FY 2017 – FY 2019	\$0
Performance Measures	◇ Dollars spent on recycled paper / Dollars spent on all paper purchases	
	◇ Dollars spent on environmentally preferable office supplies / Dollars spent on all office supplies	
	◇ Dollars spent on remanufactured printer cartridges / Dollars spent on all printer cartridges	
Comments		



STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN:
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GOAL 3: Maintain Environmental Sustainability of Operations (cont'd)

Objective 2: Provide employees with opportunities to learn about and practice environmentally-friendly activities (via the County's Work Green program)

Strategy	Support employee involvement in environmentally-friendly activities (via the County's Work Green program)	
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ FY 2017 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a department representative to work with the County's Sustainability Manager to track and meet the department's environmental goals ◇ FY 2017 – FY 2019 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate department employees on the <i>importance</i> of participating in the County's Work Green program • Educate department employees on <i>opportunities</i> to participate in the County's Work Green program—via educational opportunities (i.e. Lunch & Learns), volunteer opportunities, alternative commuting (i.e. carpooling, mass-transit, walking, or cycling), and other unique employee engagement campaigns • Enforce the department's participation to the County's Work Green program by consistently monitoring performance 	
	Total associated costs: FY 2017 – FY 2019	\$0
Performance Measure	◇ Total number of Work Green credits earned by the department's employees	
Comments		



STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN: MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE

Appendix

Performance Data Summary

Goal 1: Build a National Best in Class Operation

Objective 1: Provide the highest level of forensic pathology service.

Strategy: Hire only Board Certified Forensic Pathologists or with the requirement to become Board Certified within 2 years of the date of hire.

Performance Data Summary:

The State of North Carolina, Office of the Chief Medical Examiner now requires that all newly hired pathologists be Board Certified Forensic Pathologists or become Board Certified within two years of hire date.



STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN: MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE

Goal 1: Build a National Best in Class Operation

Objective 3: Staff office with full time ME Investigators in-house 24/7

Strategies: Maintain a staff of nine full time ME Investigators and one full time Lead ME Investigator to provide 24/7 coverage

Investigators will provide 100% scene visits to homicides scenes and suspicious deaths

Me Investigators will receive and release bodies 24/7

Performance Data Summary:

Location	Population covered year 2012 (catchment area year)	# Pathologist FT/PT	# Investigators FT/PT	Other	Investigators Schedule
Birmingham, AL	650,000	3/1	7/0	Also 1 fulltime lead investigator 1 PT pathologist covers some of chief's workload and fill-in as needed	100% 24/7 in-house coverage 3 inv. daytime, 2 evening, 2 night shift
Nashville, TN (private group)	2.5 million	7	9/0	Also 1 fulltime lead investigator	100% 24/7 in-house coverage 3 inv. daytime, 2 evening, 2 night shift
Denver, CO	635,000	4/2	7/0	Also 1 fulltime lead investigator 2 PT pathologist fill-in as needed	100% 24/7 in-house coverage 3 inv. daytime, 2 evening, 2 night shift
Seattle, WA	1.6 million	6	10/0	Also 1 fulltime lead investigator	100% 24/7 in-house coverage 5 inv. work Sun thru Wed and 5 other inv. cover Wed-Sat
Charlotte, NC	1.7 million (969,000 Mecklenburg) (725,000 regional counties)	3/1	7/4	1 lead investigator	Currently 60% of the week covered by 4 FTEs who are in-house daytime Mon-Fri 4 PTs covers 40% of the week and cover in-house 6am-4pm Sat. and out of office remainder of weekend. 3 new hire investigators are currently in training



STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN: MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE

Moving the Mecklenburg County Medical Examiner's Office to 24/7 in-house investigator coverage will improve service, decrease risks, improve security, as well as address deficiencies related to the security risks noted on the most recent internal audit.

This will allow the ME Office to employ trained investigators who are available to go to all scenes where homicide or suspicious deaths occur, access to the in-office information systems, assist in body intake and proper completion of paperwork, securing bodies, securing valuables, securing medications. The result will include better customer service with better continuity of information and direct access to the office resources which are necessary in order to assist customers after regular business hours (when many of them call). 24/7 in-house investigator coverage is far superior to on call part time investigators and will allow for better decision making, more complete documentation, and offer more assistance with calls about new cases.

Goal 1: Build a National Best in Class Operation

Objective 4: Expand the facility's County morgue/cooler to accommodate increased body storage capacity.

Strategy: Adequately construct a facility that will accommodate increased body storage capacity

Performance Data Summary:

The data for recommended storage capacity for morgues is derived from standards established by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME), which was referenced in a publication by the College of American Pathologists (CAP) entitled "Autopsy Performance and Reporting". In that article, NAME recommended storage capacity in a Medical Examiner setting under standard conditions (not accounting for any mass disaster event) as 1 body for every 15,000 persons in the population served. This equates to the need for 66 spaces just to cover the current population of Mecklenburg County. (Mecklenburg County currently has 40 spaces). The Mecklenburg County morgue also stores some of the bodies from the regional catchment area when an autopsy is being performed, adding the need for an additional 20 spaces (40% of ME cases require autopsy), bringing the current recommended total storage capacity of the morgue to 86 bodies. Based on recommended standards, Mecklenburg County needs to increase storage capacity by an additional 46 spaces.