



To: Senior Leadership Team
From: Dr. Douglas J. Hewett, ICMA-CM, City Manager
Date: May 28, 2026
Re: Standardizing Peer City Benchmarking List

This memo constitutes a directive to all members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to operationalize the City's standard peer city benchmarking list within your respective departments, effective immediately. This action is taken in response to a Council Member request from April 6, 2026, and reflects a commitment to evidence-based, consistent, and credible analysis across all City functions.

Please review the guidance below, share it with your direct reports and relevant staff, and ensure that all future benchmarking and comparative analyses conform to this framework.

BACKGROUND

Peer city benchmarking is a recognized best practice in local government management, supporting evidence-based decision-making, competitive positioning, and accountability to residents and elected officials. Previously, peer city comparisons were conducted on an ad hoc basis, resulting in inconsistent reference groups across departments and limiting the reliability and comparability of analytical work.

To address this, the City Manager's Office has established a standard peer city list to be applied uniformly across all departments. Consistency in our reference group strengthens the credibility of our analyses, whether presented to Council, used in budget deliberations, or applied in grant applications.

PEER CITY LIST

The standard peer city list consists of the ten (10) largest municipalities in North Carolina by population, including the City of Fayetteville. This population-based criterion provides an objective, data-driven, and publicly verifiable basis for peer group composition:

Rank	City	Approx. Population
1	Charlotte	~925,000
2	Raleigh	~482,000
3	Greensboro	~302,000
4	Durham	~299,000
5	Winston-Salem	~251,000
6	Fayetteville	~210,000
7	Cary	~185,000
8	Wilmington	~125,000

Rank	City	Approx. Population
9	High Point	~120,000
10	Concord	~110,000

Population figures are approximate and based on the most recent U.S. Census Bureau estimates. The composition of this list will be reviewed periodically and updated as warranted by significant changes in population rankings.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Each member of the SLT is expected to take the following steps to operationalize this framework within their department:

- Communicate this directive to all relevant staff who conduct or contribute to comparative research;
- Ensure the standard ten-city list is incorporated as the baseline reference group in all future analyses, reports, and presentations involving peer city comparisons; and
- Document all benchmarking analyses to show that the standard peer list was consulted, even when supplemental cities are also included.

FLEXIBILITY AND SUPPLEMENTAL PEERS

Incorporating Additional Peer Cities

The City recognizes that certain analyses may benefit from a broader or more tailored peer group. Staff may incorporate additional peer cities on a research-specific basis when any of the following conditions apply:

- The analysis involves a specialized service, function, or sector where relevant comparators are better identified by operational characteristics than by geography or population size alone;
- A funding agency, accrediting body, or professional association prescribes a specific peer group as part of a grant, certification, or compliance requirement;
- A department director or the City Manager determines that demographic, geographic, economic, or service-delivery characteristics make another municipality a meaningful comparator; or
- A research request originating from Council identifies programs, services, or operations of interest in cities not included in the standard ten.

When supplemental cities are used, staff reports must identify those comparators and provide a brief rationale for their inclusion. The standard ten-city list should always be reported alongside any expanded peer group.

Incorporating National Best Practices

Benchmarking will not be limited to comparative peer data. Where applicable, staff should supplement local peer comparisons with national best practice research to ensure Fayetteville's policies and programs are evaluated against the highest standards in municipal government. Examples of recognized sources include, but are not limited to the following:

- International City/County Management Association (ICMA) research, standards, and performance benchmarking programs;

- National League of Cities (NLC), Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA), American Public Works Association (APWA), and other relevant professional associations;
- Academic and policy research institutions specializing in local government, urban management, and public administration; and
- Nationally recognized high-performing municipalities identified through awards programs, peer networks, or industry publications as leaders in a given service area or functional domain.

Staff reports incorporating national best practices must clearly distinguish between local peer comparisons and national benchmark references.

QUESTIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT

If your department has questions about applying this framework, or encounters a situation not clearly addressed by this guidance, please reach out to your respective Assistant City Manager or the City Manager directly. We will work with you to ensure consistent application across all departments.