

# Hickory ranks high with low taxes

By [Richard Gould](#) | Hickory Daily Record

It's costing people less to live in Hickory as far as taxes go.

Hickory has dropped to No. 13 out of the state's 31 largest cities on the John Locke Foundation's ranking of North Carolina's cities and counties based on taxes paid as a percentage of income.

Ranking high on this list, like Hickory has in years past — third highest in 2000 and second highest in 2001 — means high taxes for residents.

"Our goal is to get as low as we can," said Warren M. Wood, Hickory's assistant city manager. "Now we're No. 13 on the list so we're doing something right."

The report, called "By The Numbers: What Government Costs in North Carolina Cities and Counties FY 2007," was issued by the John Locke Foundation, a conservative North Carolina think tank in Raleigh.

It ranks cities and counties across the state on the basis of a per capita tax burden using local government tax data from the North Carolina State Treasurer's Office. The report is based on the FY 2006-07 fiscal year.

The only things the report considers are tax rates.

"While By The Numbers shows the cost of local government, it does not attempt to measure the quantity or quality of services provided in exchange for those dollars," wrote Michael Lowery in the report. "Nor does the report consider the additional out-of-pocket costs to individuals for services that their local government may not provide. In unincorporated areas, for example, homeowners may have to contract privately for garbage pickup, while those living in a town or city may well receive this service, paid for through their municipal property and other taxes.

"Municipalities may also use some of their tax dollars to provide a higher quality of fire protection, which may translate into lower homeowners insurance rates," wrote Lowery.

When reading the reports, city leaders are mindful that Hickory offers many amenities not found in other cities, such as a library system, airport and an extensive parks and recreation system.

"We want to provide high quality services while keeping taxes as low as we can," Wood said.

Hickory Mayor Rudy Wright was pleased with this year's report. He credits the city's continued improvement in the rankings to the employees and leadership who have worked to control spending.

"We've had to overcome many unfavorable external economic forecasts and have done well throughout the storm and have one of the best-managed municipalities in the state," Wright said.