

THE BOND BUYER

North Carolina commission approves bonds for Wilmington building buy

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The North Carolina Local Government Commission gave approval Tuesday for Wilmington officials to sell \$70 million of bonds to buy a 12-story downtown building as it consolidates city agencies into one place.

Most bond sales in the state must be approved by the commission, which is chaired by State Treasurer Dale Folwell and reviews if the amount of money that municipalities want to borrow is reasonable for the projects proposed and whether they can pay it back.

City officials said the purchase of the Thermo Fisher Scientific building on 12.5 acres in the downtown area of the New Hanover County seat was needed to move its agencies out of old buildings and consolidate them while providing the public with 1,500 parking spaces.



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Some residents opposed the move because they said the city is competing with the private sector for commercial space downtown. Folwell had earlier voiced some concerns about the cost of the project.

The city asked the commission for the OK to issue the limited obligation bonds for the project, which are also known as certificates of participation. They will be secured by the city's contractual pledge to pay principal and interest, subject to annual appropriation.

The LGC also approved Onslow County's request to issue \$68 million of limited tax bonds to build Northeast Elementary School in the Swansboro area, where Tabernacle Elementary School was once located. Elementary schools in that part of the county are experiencing overcrowding, district officials said.

The new school will accommodate up to 840 students to reduce strain on the other schools. School officials say district schools have seen the student body

increase by almost 1,600 students since the COVID pandemic and 700 additional students are expected to be enrolled for the 2023-2024 school year.

New Hanover County received approval for \$25 million in limited tax bonds to purchase vehicles and equipment for various county departments, and acquire environmental management fund equipment. The LGC gave the green light to Orange County's request to issue \$14.5 million in limited obligation bonds, most of which is for school projects.

Separately, Folwell endorsed [H750](#), a bill in the General Assembly that would restrict the authority of current and future treasurers to make investment decisions, limiting their ability to consider environmental and social factors to "pecuniary factors" that "present economic risks or opportunities that qualified investment 20 professionals would treat as material economic considerations under generally accepted investment theories."

Additionally, the legislation prohibits the use of ESG criteria when hiring, firing or evaluating state employees.

"I enthusiastically support this bill," Folwell said. "As keeper of the public purse, my duty is to manage our investments to ensure that the best interests of those that teach, protect and serve, as well as of our retirees, is always our focus."

Folwell has been state treasurer since 2017. He is running for the Republican nomination for governor in 2024 to replace Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper, who is term-limited out.

CORRECTION

Corrects to show the structure in Wilmington is now called the Thermo Fisher Scientific building.

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