THE PENDULUM

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‘Birds of a feather, destroy flock together’: Burlington community discusses concerns over Flock cameras

Residents question where community input was on Flock camera implementation, worry for diverse residents of Burlington

Abigail Haapapuro
Elon News Network

When Roger Moore learned about how many Flock cameras were around Burlington, his first concern was not the technology itself, but who might be affected by it.

“I do worry about Black and brown people of color,” said Moore, a Burlington resident. “I worry that there are more cameras on one side of town than the other.”

Moore, a member of the Burlington community, joined fellow residents Nov. 12 to discuss their concerns around Flock cameras in their neighborhoods.

Automated License Plate Readers are 24/7 camera systems designed to capture images of every vehicle that passes it. The cameras then automatically log data such as the license plate number, time, date and location of the vehicle. According to the Burlington Police Department, their APLR cameras captures still images of the back of vehicles of the back and compare license plates against the state’s National Crime Information Center’s database for cars involved in crime, missing or endangered people and wanted offenders. Data is only stored for 30 days.

According to the Burlington Police Department, there are 30 solar-powered cameras and one battery-powered camera. APLRs have been used in Burlington for over a decade, but Flock cameras were implemented in the summer of 2025.

Flock Safety is one of the largest providers of ALPR technology in the United States. Cameras are typically mounted on poles along roadways and are strategically placed to monitor traffic. Flock Safety stated that this technology is intended to help law enforcement officers investigate crimes by allowing for this data to be searchable across agencies for vehicle data.

The Burlington Police Department told Elon News Network that APLR technology has been effective in improving response time and helps reduce “victimization” in the community.

During the meeting hosted by local grassroots organizations Surveillance Free Alamance and Indivisible Alamance, attendees discussed whether the cameras were really improving public safety. Several residents at the meeting said that they were unaware of what Flock cameras or ALPRs were, and what technology was in place.

“I came tonight because I wanted to get more informed on the Flock camera situation, so I can let other members in the community know,” Moore said in an interview with Elon News Network. “I wanted to know myself what these were, how many we had, and I definitely got all that information tonight.”

An overwhelming majority of attendees of the meeting all agreed that they were not aware of the presence of Flock cameras or how to identify them. DeFlock, an organization dedicated to getting rid of Flock cameras, had a representative, Ed Vogel, give a presentation to the community members.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR

A Flock Safety camera located along S. Church St., pointing toward the intersection of S. Church St. and O’Neal St. in Burlington. Flock cameras. capture images of vehicles that pass them, and log data such as the license plate number.

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Alamance County swings for Democratic Party in midterm elections

Alamance County Democrats win in 12 races as voter dissatisfaction, turnout reflect a statewide shift

Marisa Tang
Elon News Network

Voters in Alamance County shifted towards Democratic candidates during the midterm elections for the first time in several years, raising questions about what this change could mean for North Carolina and Alamance County politics.

Democrats notably flipped North Carolina’s 9th Congressional District, with Richard Ojeda defeating Republican incumbent Richard Hudson with 51.15% of the vote. Democrats also flipped NC House seats in District 63 and 64, Ian Baltutis defeated Republican Ryan Moffitt with 50.44% of the vote for District 63. LeVon Barnes defeated Republican incumbent Dennis Riddell with 52.83% of the vote, Barnes previously lost this race to Riddell in the 2024 election. Both Barnes and Baltutis’ main policy during their campaigns was affordability for residents and supporting funding public education, including raising teacher pay in North Carolina.

Alamance County Democratic Party chair Ron Osborne said the biggest factor in the shift was voters’ dissatisfaction with the state of the current government, not only at the federal level, but at state and local levels.

Osborne said the party tries to continuously improve over the course of each election cycle.

“I don’t know that we did a tremendous amount differently than we did in 2024, we stayed the course,” Osborne said. The party believes in electing good government for all and holding Democratic candidates to the same standard Republican candidates are being held to. “I tell our candidates and elected officials; you need to be willing to lose the next election to do the right thing” he said.

Osborne said the results show Alamance County residents that their vote matters. He said that most voters voted the opposite of what they voted in 2024 because they felt as if they were lied to. In 2024, Republican candidates led almost all races in Alamance County and North Carolina by around 10 points in most races. Compared to 2026, where Democrats won in every countywide race but one.

“We worked hard to organize, to build community with folks, regardless of what your background is, so that when the opportunity presented itself we were in the position to take advantage of it,” Osborne said.

Osborne said the party hopes to continue to build community within the county and earn trust from voters across the county.

“We want to work for the benefit of everybody,” Osborne said.

Jason Husser, director of the Elon University Poll, said that the Alamance County shift replicates the statewide shift that happened, including Democrats flipping control of the North Carolina House of Representatives.

“We saw Democratic candidates outperforming norms throughout North Carolina,” Husser said. “We certainly were not immune to what happened across all 100 counties in North Carolina.”

He said Democratic voters were more motivated to go vote this midterm cycle across the country, which he said can be a factor in the results. In the final poll on October 20th, 2026, Democrat Roy Cooper led against Republican opponent, Michael Whatley, by just 13%.

“In many ways, I see the Alamance County results both as a story of campaigns and candidates, but also a story of a national mood that impacted our elections,” Husser said.

Husser said that these results tell voters that they are seeing a transition in who is controlling the North Carolina General Assembly.

“That tells us we are likely to see significantly different policy outcomes coming out of Raleigh,” Husser said.

NC Democrats aim to address affordability, healthcare with new control over state House

Democrats control House for first time in 16 years

Miles Hayford
Managing Editor of The Pendulum

For the first time in 16 years, North Carolina Democrats have control of the State House of Representatives, setting the stage for two years of Democratic priorities in the General Assembly.

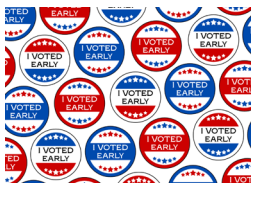
After more than a decade of unified Republican control over both chambers of the General Assembly, the Democrats will now have a chance to advance their agenda.

“We’ve got two years to correct what we feel are 15 years of missteps,” said Robert Reives, the unofficial House Speaker-elect, during a press conference on Nov. 10.

According to Eric Heberlig, a political science professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, the flip of the State House will allow Gov. Josh Stein to pursue his agenda rather than just vetoing legislation. Stein has vetoed 18 bills in his two years as governor.

“He doesn’t just have to react to what the legislature is sending him,” Heberlig said. “It’s likely that he’ll get much of what he wants through the House, and then that sets up negotiation between him and the Senate, so it doesn’t guarantee that he’ll get all or much of what he wants, but it’s certainly a stronger position for him than what he’s had the past two years.”

See HOUSE FLIP **| pg. 4**



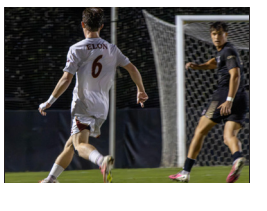
Midterms see increase in voter turnout than in 2022

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Elon senior self-publishes dark fantasy novel

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Elon soccer seasons end in heartbreak

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New public safety facilities coming next year

Alamance County prepares to open new Emergency Services Center, EMS base

Alexander Siegel
Photo Editor



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR
Alamance County's Central Communications department is currently housed in the basement of the county office building, as pictured on Nov. 16.

Alamance County will soon have two new public safety facilities – an emergency services center and an Emergency Medical Services base.

The new Emergency Services Center will be located in Burlington at 780 Plantation Drive.

The center will be home to several county agencies, including Central Communications and Emergency Management, according to Brian Baker, assistant county manager for Alamance County. Baker said that the current 911 call center is located in the basement of the county office building in Graham and is outdated.

The city of Burlington currently has its own call center, and they plan to move into the new facility in the long run. Baker said the center will also provide more space.

"It's going to have 911 and emergency management and the fire marshal in one location so that when there's an emergency, there will be better coordination between those agencies," Baker said.

The new building is currently undergoing renovations that will provide the structure with more stability, resulting in a higher resilience to natural disasters, such as hurricanes.

In addition to the new building, Central Communications will be transitioning to new dispatching software systems, which will be active in the new building.

Baker said the 911 center is funded primarily through grants, using little local tax funding.

"One of which Sen. Galey helped us secure from the state, and the other is 911 funds that are also state administered," Baker said.

Baker said that the construction of the Alamance County Emergency Services Center is scheduled to be completed in March. A ribbon cutting ceremony will be held in the first half of 2027.

According to Baker, the transition to the new building and software should not affect 911 callers.

"It should be completely seamless, and this new system should be an upgrade for us," Baker said. "If you're calling 911, you should not know the difference."

Baker said that the new center was created to keep up with county growth and to ensure that emergency services can respond to the demands of the public.

Although it is still in its initial stages, Mebane will soon have a new EMS base.

According to EMS Director Josh Kylander, the choice was made because of the call volume in Mebane.

"The concentration of calls that we have in the Mebane area that we respond to from Graham and from our medic unit that's based at the Mebane Fire Department led us to that decision," Kylander said.

Kylander said there has been a significant increase in the call volume as Alamance County has grown.

Kylander said that this new station will allow for two additional ambulances within the county, which will be staffed 24 hours a day. The new station is projected to be opened between the end of 2027 and Jan. 1, 2028, allowing for a significant improvement and reduction to the response time by positioning transport ambulances in Mebane, according to Kylander.

"Currently, we have a paramedic and what we call a medic unit at the Mebane Fire Department at their main station and a transport ambulance would come from Graham or the Alamance County substation on Rudd Street in Burlington," Kylander said. "So this will decrease the time for that transport ambulance to arrive."

Kylander said the agency will be requesting funding to hire more full-time employees. The county's general fund is funding the project.

Baker said that the contractor for this project has been selected, but design and construction have not yet started.

Community meets to discuss Flock cameras

FLOCK | from cover

In Vogel's presentation, he discussed the dangers of the cameras recording 24/7 and their ability to track and store data in a country-wide network, and used the phrase "mass data collection and mass data sharing."

Vogel shared numerous statistics provided by DeFlock to highlight the dangers and significance of these cameras around the city.

Many community members in the meeting said they felt misinformed and like their privacy was being withdrawn from them. They raised a lot of concerns about feeling like they were being watched all the time.

"I feel like we're being surveilled without permission," said Bill Shaw, a founding leader of Indivisible Alamance when asked about his views of Flock cameras.

Shaw said his concerns stem beyond just being surveilled. He worried that constantly being surveilled imposes privacy risks, and severely outweighs the benefits that these cameras and ALPRs might have.

There are currently more than 7,000 police departments and organizations across the country using Flock Safety ALPRs, according to the New York Times, including Burlington, Elon and Graham.

Motorola Solutions, another company that manufactures ALPRs, currently holds a contract with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. For many citizens of Alamance County, this raised a huge concern.

"I feel like there's not enough due process and the ability for other parties to abuse the technology, and it's clearly happening, isn't easily contained, and it probably outweighs the benefits that we may be getting," Shaw said.

For Berkeley Bryant, an organizer of the event with Surveillance Free Alamance, her concern is for Black and Hispanic communities in Alamance County being unfairly accused of crimes.

"As a privileged white person who would probably say I have nothing to hide, I am deeply concerned about the impact that this type of technology has on my Black and Brown and Hispanic neighbors and friends and neighbors and loved ones," Bryant said.

Moore said he is worried about the community members not having a say in the issue.

Community members said during the meeting that they felt they were giving up their freedom to have a say, and were worried by the lack of information provided to them about these cameras. Many attendees highlighted the lack of trust they now feel having these Flock cameras and ALPRs.

"If we can't stop them, then we at least should have the vote to where they can go, and it needs to be a community effort," said Moore to Elon News Network.

Burlington Mayor Beth Kennett attended the meeting as a participant, and engaged with the citizens when they broke into small groups to discuss.

"This is a conversation I've had with our chief of police and with other council members, as well as many of the people here this evening," Kennett said to Elon News Network .

Kennett urged community members to talk to the Burlington Police Department about any questions or concerns they may have.

"I believe that they also wrestle with some of what I'm wrestling with and you're wrestling with," Kennett said.

Shaw said he is looking for more than just questions answered.

"I tried to actually request my own personal information that they've captured through their Flock system, and because of state law, they are not allowed to tell me what they have about me, which I found interesting because they referred me to a statute," Shaw said.

At the meeting, flyers detailing how to dismember Flock cameras around the town were available, but it is unclear if they came from any one organization or person. The back of the flyers included the quote, "birds of a feather, destroy flock together," and encouraged anyone seeking to dismember Flock cameras to use extreme caution when "hunting" them. The flyer also included information detailing what Flock cameras are, how to identify them and financial observations on the costs and timing of replacing Flock cameras. The Burlington Police Department said that it is illegal to dismember Flock cameras, and that anyone who witnesses that activity should report it to 911.

Numerous other flyers were available at the event, all expressing concern about Flock cameras in Burlington. Quotes such as, "What the Flock Burlington NC?" were given out in advance of the meeting to encourage community members to come.

During the meeting, attendees were given the option to write their real name or an alias on their name tags. Elon News Network was denied the ability to film, photograph or record the meeting and discussion.

The meeting was open to all community members.

These concerns are also being raised outside of the town of Burlington. Students from the Elon University club Civil Liberties Forum came together the same night to sign a petition for Elon University to cancel its own contract with Flock Safety and to remove all Flock and ALPRS.

"There is not an easy answer," Kennett said when asked about what she would look to implement from this meeting. "Probably the easiest answer is just don't have them."

Moore said he wants more answers as to how and what the Flock and ALPR data is being used for.

"There needs to be just more awareness on these cameras, what they are, what data they're getting," Moore said.



VENUS SOTO CASTANEDA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Attendees use noisemakers and glow sticks during Diwali on Nov. 10 in McKinnon Hall. The event included student speakers, a performance by Elon's Bollywood dance team Surtal, an honorary Lakshmi Puja, traditional Indian food and shared traditions. Director of Multifaith Programming and Engagement Hilary Zaken said the event has grown over the years. "It's fun, it's a lot of light and it's really a celebration of our community," Zaken said.



JORDAN PONCHER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Medal of Honor recipient Kyle Carpenter spoke to Elon University students, staff and the local community on Veteran's Day in McCrary Theatre about his service and the lessons he learned during and after his recovery from injuries sustained after surviving a grenade blast. "Our bodies are strong and resilient, but somehow, at the same time, still very fragile," Carpenter said during his speech. "And our journeys are uncertain, so live your lives, accordingly."



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR

Elon sophomore quarterback Brady Stober attempts to evade Campbell University senior Jack DaVonyae Pettis with the ball Nov. 14 at Rhodes Stadium. After returning from halftime down 17-0, the Phoenix scored four touchdowns in the second half, beating the Camels 28-24.



MEGAN COFFEY | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Elon University students in the Art Administration Senior Seminar class present to Alamance Arts to develop a new public art guide and map Nov. 10 at Gray Pavilion



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR

Elon junior forward LaNae' Corbett goes for a layup during her game against Wake Forest University on Nov. 15 at the Lawrence Joel Veterans Memorial Coliseum. Corbett is Elon's leading scorer through four games. Elon won 67-58, which their first win against an Atlantic Coast Conference opponent.

North Carolina Democrats gain legislative leverage ahead of 2027 session

HOUSE FLIP | from cover

With the Senate still under Republican control, Democrats will need to find ways to negotiate across the aisle, according to Steven Greene, a political science professor at North Carolina State University.

"The agenda for Democrats is to try and figure out where they can make deals with a Republican Senate where they can actually pass an agenda by some good old-fashioned political bargaining," Greene said.

Greene said the General Assembly being divided finally gives Democrats some leverage and the ability to negotiate, which they haven't had for many years.

During the Nov. 10 press conference, Reives laid out some of the priorities House Democrats plan to focus on in the next two years. Reives said that his top priority is addressing affordability and offering "relief in pocketbooks."

Reives also said they aim to address healthcare costs and access to healthcare in rural areas.

"We have an obligation as a state to fight the terrible health policy you've seen at the federal level, and every gap we can fill we should do," Reives said.

Additionally, House Democrats will look at prioritizing public education and examine rolling back opportunity scholarships. The private school voucher program serves over 100,000 students in the state, costing about $587 million dollars, drawing criticism from Stein and other Democrats as they look to fund NC public schools that rank dead last in school funding, according to the Education Law Center. Reives also said that he was interested in exploring decriminalizing marijuana to help veterans who could benefit from medicinal marijuana.

Reives admitted, though, that the government has limited revenue because of what he claims to be cuts of revenue sources by Republicans.

Heberlig said that the constitutional amendment, which was passed in the 2026 midterm election, will limit income taxes to 3.5% could create fiscal challenges for Democrats looking to get things done.

"They can't just raise taxes to pay for any increase in spending that the Democrats want to do," Heberlig said. "They'll have to cut other things in the budget, which is always going to create a big fight, always going to be controversial. So it's not going to be very easy for them to fulfill the agenda that they'd ideally like to advocate for."

Heberlig said the division between the two chambers could result in political gridlock, especially around issues like passing a state budget. The most recent state budget took over a year to finalize despite both chambers being controlled by Republicans. Reives advocated the need for bipartisanship in the upcoming legislative session — set to begin in January — and urged Republicans and Democrats to work together.

"It's about walking out of this building one day, and ten years from now, when nobody knows your name, knowing that because of you, those people you're talking to ten years from now, their lives are better," Reives said.

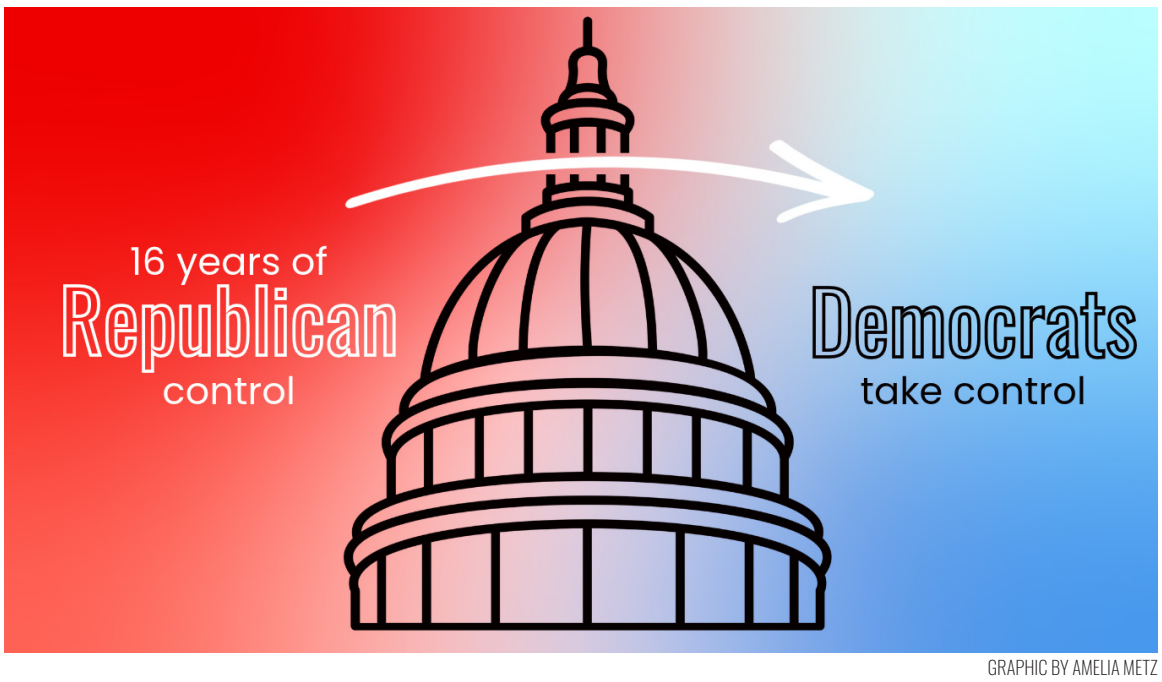
Democrats will need help from the Republican-controlled Senate to pass legislation, which could depend on who will be the next Senate Leader, Greene said. The current Senate Leader, Phil Berger, has been in power since 2011 paving the way for new leadership.

"The Senate was Phil Berger's dominion for so long," Greene said. "We don't even know who the next Republican Senate leader will be, or what their style will be and how they will lead, and so I think so much of what's going to happen and how the Senate and the House are going to interact is going to depend on what direction Republicans go with their leadership."

Sen. Michael Lee was a top contender for Berger's replacement, but lost his bid for reelection. Sen. Todd Johnson, who is one of the majority whips, is one of the top Senators vying for the job. Sen. Ralph Hise, the second highest ranking Senator and a Berger ally, is also in the mix alongside Sen. Brent Jackson.

Heberlig said that he expects the Democrats to move quickly with their priorities.

"They have pent up demand. They'll want to show that they were listening to voters and following through on the promises they made," Heberlig said.



GRAPHIC BY AMELIA METZ

BY THE NUMBERS

16 years

since Democrats have had made up the majority of a chamber in the North Carolina General Assembly.

17 seats

were flipped by in the State House by North Carolina Democrats. More could be flipped after recounts.

Early voting pushed Alamance County's blue wave to shore

Registered Democrats outgain Republicans in early voting

Charlotte Pfabe
Executive Director of Elon News Network

Before polls opened on Election Day, Democrat Roy Cooper had already secured enough votes to win North Carolina's U.S. Senate seat. Early voting gave the former North Carolina governor a more than 780,000 vote lead over Republican candidate Michael Whatley.

Across the state, more North Carolinians cast their ballots during the early voting period this cycle than in the 2022 midterm elections. In 2026, 2.8 million voters made their way to the polls early, compared to around 2.1 million in 2022 — an increase of about 639,000 votes. These numbers include civilian, military and overseas voting.

For Cooper, early voting accounted for 1.7 million of the 2.4 million ballots cast in his favor, around 70% of his total votes.

Democrats made up the largest portion of early voters, making up 38% of the early votes, which Steven Greene, a political science professor at North Carolina State University, said is typical.

"Democrats have figured this out to a substantial degree and put a lot of effort into getting their supporters to vote early," Greene said. "I think it is on some level just grassroots person-to-person, but it definitely also is being encouraged by the Democratic Party."

When zeroing in on Election Day votes, Whatley secured 20,000 more day-of votes than Cooper.

"I think, almost even on some level, there's an idea of if you're a good Democrat, you vote early," Greene said.

This is true for other races, too.

In Alamance County, Democratic candidate for NC Senate District 25 Southey Blanton led in early voting numbers by more than 3,000 votes compared to Republican incumbent Amy Galey. But Galey secured 6,000 more votes day-of to win her state senate seat for another term.

Democrat Richard Ojeda led by more than 20,000 votes ahead of incumbent Republican Richard Hudson during early voting for North Carolina's ninth Congressional District, but on Election Day, Hudson accumulated around 17,000 more day-of votes than Ojeda. Ojeda ultimately defeated Hudson, but day-of voting thinned the margins.

In a race decided by fewer than 300 votes, Republican candidate for NC House District 63 Ryan Moffitt secured 2,000 more day-of votes than his Democratic opponent Ian Baltutis. But, Baltutis ultimately claimed the seat from a lead in early voting combined with absentee by-mail ballots.

In North Carolina, voter turnout numbers were higher in this year's midterms than in 2022. Voter turnout was up 2%, an increase of around 450,000 voters.

Alamance County saw a slightly larger increase in voter turnout than at the state level, with 56% of eligible voters casting their ballots in 2026 compared to 53% in 2022. There are 122,324 registered voters in Alamance County, according to the NC State Board of Elections, but only 121,637 are considered eligible. Voters can be registered to vote but their eligibility can be changed based on state regulations. This includes temporary removal of eligibility for voters convicted of felonies.

In Alamance County, 44,402 voters visited the polls to cast their ballots early, and 1,647 voters cast their ballots by mail.

Voter turnout is typically lower in non-presidential election years, like the midterms. While voter turnout was up in this year's midterm elections, around 74% of North Carolina voters made their ways to the polls in 2024.

Greene said more focus and emphasis is often placed on presidential elections over other elections, meaning voters are more aware of their choices.

"The thing about a presidential election is it's just in the air. It is unavoidable, and that's just not true of a midterm election," Greene said.

The NC State Board of Elections is set to meet at 11 a.m. on Nov. 24 to certify the midterm election, meaning NCSBE officials will sign off on the finalization of results.



GRAPHIC BY CHARLOTTE PFABE

North Carolina Democrats led in early voting for 2026 midterm elections

About 639,000 more voters cast their ballots early compared to the 2022 midterm election



Data from the North Carolina Board of Elections

DATA VISUALIZATION BY CHARLOTTE PFABE

Libraries without walls: How Alamance County is tackling book deserts

Saxapahaw, Snow Camp lack direct access to a public library

Lilly Molina
Elon News Network



LILLY MOLINA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Saxapahaw resident Shawn NeSmith holds out one of the books she has in her little library for children Oct. 25.

The nearest public library for Saxapahaw or Snow Camp residents is a 20-minute drive.

The distance creates a bigger barrier than just being unable to borrow books, especially for those without a car.

"A public library in a rural community plays many roles and changing roles, but vitally important ones," said Noah Lenstra, professor of library sciences and information at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro.

Lenstra, who grew up in a small rural town of about 3,500 people, said that for him, a public library served as an entry point to a bigger world.

"As a child, you could simply be without expectations," Lenstra said. "Given freedom and autonomy in a way that you often aren't in school."

Lenstra had a local library close to him, but for residents in rural towns like Saxapahaw and Snow Camp, they live in book deserts.

Why are libraries so important?

"A book desert is a geographical area where access to reading materials is limited or challenging," Araba Maze said while talking to Elon University students on Oct. 6.

The self-proclaimed "radical street librarian" made it her mission to close the gap in book deserts around the Baltimore area.

In total, 32.4 million children in the U.S. don't have access to books, according to Maze.

Jennifer Mock, dean of adult and community education at Alamance Community College, raised her three daughters in Saxapahaw. Now, one of them is a children's librarian in Alamance County, and Mock said she has always supported libraries.

She said she believes that literacy starts at an early age.

"Having access to books and not just books, but all kinds of materials — I think sometimes we forget that libraries are these huge centers that people can go in and get all kinds of information," Mock said.

Now she is focused on getting the adults that walk into ACC's doors access to resources and improve their literacy skills.

Lenstra said libraries help get people online. He said it is a place where people know they will have a solid WiFi connection, but it's also important to establish a social connection.

"It's a place where older adults can connect and stay connected, addressing the kind of issues of isolation and loneliness that can often occur among the older population," Lenstra said.

Lenstra also said libraries are a connection to the wider world.

"The library is often a vital kind of supplement to what's available in rural school systems in terms of access to information, learning and new perspectives," Lenstra said.

Director of Alamance County Libraries Susana Goldman said libraries are a place where people don't know what they are going to find. She said people can view the world through someone else's eyes.

While libraries offer new perspectives for patrons, not everyone has equal access to them.

Maze said one of the reasons is transportation.

Libraries on wheels

Goldman said opening a new library is formidable.

"There are so many costs associated with it," Goldman said. "Whether it is building your own space and you have all the construction costs and then you have to hire staff and furnish it."

Goldman said Alamance County can't afford to build new libraries.

The Alamance County mobile library service runs on a regular basis and stops monthly within Snow Camp and Saxapahaw. It is a bus full of books and other materials that people can check out.

"Almost everything you can do in the physical space of a library, you can do in the mobile library," Goldman said. "The only difference is the space is much, much smaller."

Mobile library services are not a new phenomenon, in fact, it's where libraries get their roots from.

> THE LIBRARY IS OFTEN A VITAL KIND OF SUPPLEMENT TO WHAT'S AVAILABLE IN RURAL SCHOOL SYSTEMS.
>
> **NOAH LENSTRA**
> UNCG LIBRARY SCIENCES AND INFORMATION PROFESSOR

"Even though this is a phrase I coined, being a 'street librarian' is nothing new," Maze said. "I draw strength from librarians who came before me, long before there was a book desert during the Great Depression. These are the pack horse librarians who packed books into pillowcases and delivered them by horse or mule or foot, high to the mountains of Kentucky."

The women in Kentucky are just a small example of what was happening across the country during the Great Depression. According to Lenstra, mobile library services were the first point of contact for millions of people.

Maze said these women would cover up to 20 miles per day and during their time met the needs of 1.5 million people.

Now the Alamance County mobile library is trying to meet the needs of residents in books deserts. Residents can not only browse the shelves of the mobile library, but they can request books and pick them up the next time the bus stops by.

Goldman said a lot of the library's growth has been within the rural areas like Southern Alamance County.

Eden Gustavsen, reentry wellness director at Benevolence Farm near Snow Camp, said the mobile library stops by once a month. Benevolence Farms is a nonprofit focused on supporting formerly incarcerated women and gender-nonconforming people.

For some, they do not have the means to visit or are not allowed to visit a public library.

"When you're in prison, books are a huge, huge piece of your everyday life, and it's kind of like an escape," Gustavsen said.

She said the people at the farm are typically coming straight out of incarceration with nothing. They often don't have driver licenses, so transportation becomes a barrier. Also, some of the people formerly incarcerated are on the sex offender registry and are not allowed to physically go to a library.

She said they asked the mobile library to stop by Benevolence because some of these people would have never thought about getting a library card or checking out resources like laptops when they don't have the money to buy their own.

She said now the librarians curate books based on what people at Benevolence Farms have checked out in the past. The radical street librarian, Maze, echoes this, saying that she picks books based on the diverse community needs she sees in Baltimore.

"I curate the books, but one big lesson I learned is that the community customizes the collection," Maze said.

Libraries in lockers

While the mobile library is accessible with people without cars like students or the elderly, Goldman understands that not everyone can.

She said she is aware that some people work at odd hours.

"We know that a lot of people in this county and surrounding counties work in distribution centers and warehouses," Goldman said. "They have second, third and fourth shifts, so they get off, they're sleeping during the day when your library is open."

Alamance County is testing a locker system that is open 24/7 at the Graham Library. People can search on the library's catalog and request for books to be on hold. Librarians will place them into lockers. Then with a library card and pin anyone within Alamance County can pick up a book of their choosing, according to Goldman.

"Having another opportunity where someone can go to that locker at two in the morning because that's when they got off work and that's when they're on the way home," she said. "It doesn't really matter."

From July 2025 to June 2026, the Graham lockers were used over 7,400 times with 7,786 items checked out, according to Goldman.

Placing a book on hold for locker pick-up is one of the many services on the Alamance County Libraries' website. On the library's website people can download books.

Despite a website full of resources, Mock said Saxapahaw is lacking a physical and tangible space.

However, a mobile library that visits Saxapahaw Hawbridge school only once a month may not be enough to meet the community's broader needs.

Little libraries in little communities

Saxapahaw resident Shawn NeSmith was shopping at a local thrift store when she came across a book about how to build one's own little free library.

She said establishing a little library has always been on her bucket list. Her dad helped build it using wooden scrap pieces and she has had her little library propped up at the end of her neighborhood's cul-de-sac for the past three years.

NeSmith said she didn't realize the lack of access to a public library in Saxapahaw, but knew that living in rural North Carolina called for longer drives for basic necessities. NeSmith said neighbors frequent the little library, taking books but also leaving some for the next visitor. She said she knows how funding for libraries has been difficult to obtain, which motivates her more to take care of her little library.

"Any opportunity that I can have to provide even just you know real basic access to books and early literacy, I think is important for the community," she said.

NeSmith has children's books, magazines and chapter books for people of all different reading types. She said her little library has been a way for her to get to know her neighbors better.

She said a little library might have a pricey start-up cost, but she finds this hobby to be low commitment with little upkeep.

"They don't have access to those resources, so putting physical books in the community is something anybody can do," NeSmith said. "You don't even have to have a fancy little free library like this. You can just have a box, and you see people giving away stuff all the time on Facebook Marketplace. There's definitely a need, and it's fun."

Sometimes it doesn't require a library building or even a large collection of books to minimize book deserts. Sometimes one step in the direction involves a bus filled with adventure that visits once a month, lockers where a parent can pick up a book after work to read to their children later or a wooden box at the end of a cul-de-sac.

Community refrigerators provide fresh food access across Alamance County

SAFE partners with local organizations to stock community refrigerators, offers fresh produce, extra baby formula for families in need

Elissa Leka
Elon News Network

To enter the Gibsonville Public Library you have to pass through two doors. Only one of them is ever shut. Amy Groat, the library services specialist, said the library keeps its door shut so people can take food from the fridge in the entryway without feeling watched or judged, but they are always welcome to open that door for access to books.

The fridge was gifted to them by the United Methodist Church across the street. Groat said Southern Alamance Family Empowerment, a nonprofit, partnered with the library over the summer to keep it freshly stocked.

"It's something that unfortunately is very needed," Groat said. "And we're just happy that we can supply the space."

According to Feeding America, about one in six people face food insecurity in North Carolina.. This is more than the national statistic from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which states in 2024 13.7% of households were food-insecure. In Alamance County alone, Feeding America reported just over 22,000 people are food-insecure.



ELISSA LEKA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
SAFE at Burlington Pediatrics provides extra baby formula for families in need.

Michelle Rash, the director of communications at SAFE, manages some of the organization's outreach programs. Rash said SAFE serves as a community hub and resource center for people in need, but they are best known for their food pantries. Currently, they have three in Alamance County, but they provide more food resources through their five community refrigerators.

The Trailhead Church in Graham hosts a community fridge as part of its outreach ministry called The Bridge. Even if there isn't someone available in the office, callers can press an extension on the church's phone menu to hear an automated information message about the hours and location of the fridge and food pantry.

"We have volunteers that go around once a week and put produce in the refrigerators and clean out anything that looks like it's gone bad," Rash said.

She said community members are welcome to take from the fridges as needed or add to them.

"Especially in the summer when people's gardens were being harvested and they had too much produce, we would see a lot of them donate things to our refrigerators," Rash said.

Rash said SAFE does not track how many people use the fridges, or how much they take, but knows there is a demand for them.

"I do know that they don't stay full for long," Rash said.

SAFE has a hotline number where community members can phone in to let the organization know the fridges are empty. There are times when just a day after filling them, Rash said SAFE gets a refill request.

Community member Danielle Guzman said she goes to a food pantry at least once a week, but she has visited the fridges twice now since finding out about SAFE through Facebook.

"It's hard to find fresh, good produce that's not an arm and a leg," Guzman said.

In one fridge, Guzman found fresh cucumbers. But as the months get colder, fresh produce decreases. This is something that both Groat and Guzman said is a struggle during the winter months. Guzman said it made it more vital that there are donations and fridges in the Alamance community.

"We can have fresh fruits and vegetables, almost like a community garden," Guzman said. "Especially now that it's getting cold, it's hard to have resources like that."

Rash said that despite support from Alamance County, she is often surprised by how many people don't know that SAFE is a resource for them.

Beyond that, she said she is surprised by how many people don't know they can help SAFE by providing their extra resources and time, and encourages them to get involved.

"I know some families make sandwiches once or twice a week and drop them off at the refrigerators for people who might need them," Rash said.

She said she has also seen people leave baby formula and baby food at SAFE's Burlington Pediatric's location.

While Guzman said this program is highly beneficial, she hopes to see more like it in the near future.

"The community, especially this community, would benefit from having a whole bunch of them," Guzman said.



ELISSA LEKA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
SAFE at the Gibsonville Public Library provides resources from food to personal care products.



ELISSA LEKA | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
A SAFE community fridge at Burlington Pediatrics location, Nov. 12.

> IT'S HARD TO FIND FRESH, GOOD PRODUCE THAT'S NOT AN ARM AND A LEG.
>
> **DANIELLE GUZMAN**
> COMMUNITY MEMBER

Refrigerator locations

SAFE on NC 87
5950 Hwy 87 S., Graham, NC

SAFE at The Bridge
615 W. Harden St., Graham, NC

Gibsonville Public Library
506 Church St., Gibsonville, NC

Alamance Dream Center
1423 N. Church St., Burlington, NC

Burlington Pediatrics
530 W. Webb Avenue, Burlington, NC

Elon senior self-publishes debut novel

Senior Jackson McCall released his book "Warlock: Engulfed in Flames"

Karsyn Vann
Elon News Network



PHOTO COURTESY OF JACKSON MCCALL

Elon senior Jackson McCall signs a copy of his book, "Warlock: Engulfed in Flames," in Moseley Center on Oct. 30.

Elon University senior Jackson McCall started writing his debut novel in 2019, when he was just 14 years old.

He came up with the idea for his dark fantasy novel, "Warlock: Engulfed in Flames," after reading "The Odyssey" in his ninth grade English class. Seven years later, he is now a self published author. But McCall said the road to publication wasn't easy, and he nearly gave up on the story numerous times.

"I wrote it, and then I hated it, and I put it away. And then I came back to it like a year later, and I put it away again," McCall said. "This just happened over and over and over again."

According to McCall, it wasn't until he got to Elon and had his study-away experience in China that he decided to buckle down and finish his novel. McCall said that the novel follows Resin, a boy exiled from home and thrown out into the world, which mirrored his own experience while studying abroad.

"As a homebody who goes to college an hour away from home, I couldn't have gone farther from home when I went to Shanghai," McCall said. "And going abroad gave me all these new ideas, so much so that the stuff that I came up with and added to the story now makes the original drafts unrecognizable."

When he returned from China, McCall said he immediately told his roommate and friend, Omar Castaneda, about his plan to finish his book. McCall told Castaneda that he wanted to rewrite his book for the last time, and Castenda said he wanted to get abs. McCall said they made a contract that night: he would write six pages a day, roughly 3,600 words, and Castaneda would do keto. The first one to fail had to pay the other two tanks of gas.

McCall finished the book.

"I wasn't worried about paying the tanks of gas," McCall said. "I was worried about not being the guy that I say I am. It's very much an identity thing to me, like if I don't do this, then I'm not a writer."

McCall said writing the book consumed his thoughts and that he would decline hanging out with his friends to focus on the work. And ironically, McCall said "Warlock" is about Resin losing himself in the noise of the world.

"I couldn't take my own warning, and I had friends say, 'When you publish the book, are we finally gonna see you again?'" McCall said. "But that sacrifice was worth it because I got the work done."

McCall said the workload was extreme because he chose to self-publish the book. According to research he had done, self-publishing works better when the novel fits into a niche subgenre, like dark fantasy. As an entrepreneurship major, McCall said he knew he could launch the book on his own. To promote the book, he posted on Instagram for 65 days straight. He also found his own line editor, cover artist and beta readers. McCall said he wanted to take everything into his own hands so he could have full control of his work.

"I was like, 'I can figure this out myself and I don't need traditional publishers to do it for me,'" McCall said. "I wanted to do it myself because I like going to bed having earned that sunset."

McCall said balancing writing with all of his other responsibilities as a student was difficult. He said there were times he missed his friends, but that no one was going to tell him to write his book but himself.

"Sometimes the book was killing me," McCall said. "But I signed up for this, and what an honor it is to suffer for something I wanted to do. It was hard, but I loved it and don't regret anything."

Senior marketing major Omar Castaneda, who witnessed McCall write, promote and publish the novel, said that he was impressed and extremely proud of his friend.

"I don't know that I've ever committed to something as much as I've seen him commit to this," Castaneda said.

> "IT'S VERY MUCH AN IDENTITY THING TO ME, LIKE IF I DON'T DO THIS, THEN I'M NOT A WRITER.
>
> **JACKSON MCCALL**
> ELON SENIOR

Castaneda read a beta copy of the novel and he said he was struck by how much he resonated with the protagonist, especially as someone who doesn't typically enjoy reading fantasy novels.

"Resin is harrowingly relatable," Castaneda said. "While reading, I distinctly remember thinking, 'Why am I so similar to him?' and it really concerned me for a second about how I live my life."

According to Castaneda, his friend is not going to slow down any time soon, although he said he wished McCall took some time to relish his accomplishment.

"He just wants to do the work, and I respect it," Castaneda said. "But I'm like, 'Hey man, look around,' and there's more to life than just the book. But I'm not trying to knock the work; he just needs to find a balance."

According to McCall, he is always looking for ways to improve his writing, and the only way to do that is to write more. McCall said he has more plans for the "Warlock Chronicles" and is currently working on a story that covers three pivotal characters from the original book. He said he is working on story ideas outside of that world as well, including a novella and a literary fiction novel.

"I'm not done. I'm not sitting back and drinking martinis or whatever," McCall said. "I'm not done finding my own voice."

IF YOU BUY

"Warlock Engulfed in Flames" is available for purchase on Amazon for $18.99

Book Description

Resin has never believed in destiny. Cast out at 16 from a nameless town buried in the Endless Desert, he wants only to survive long enough to find somewhere he belongs. But the world he enters teaches him to survive in ways that may cost him the very thing he hoped to find.

Hunted before he understands why, Resin learns that power can mean safety, that violence can be come survival, and that the line between protecting yourself and destroying yourself is thinner than he ever imagined.

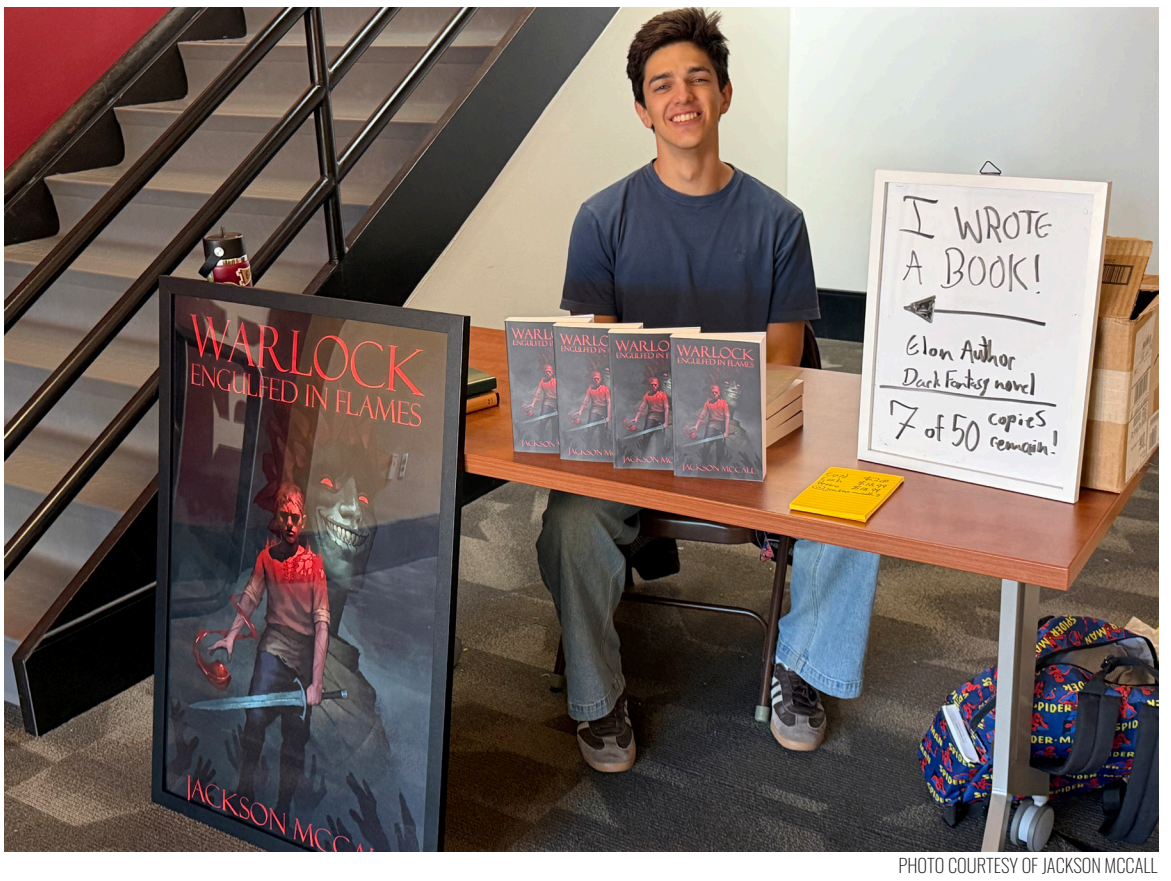


PHOTO COURTESY OF JACKSON MCCALL

Elon senior Jackson McCall at a pop-up to promote his debut novel in Moseley Center on Oct. 30.

2026 Elon soccer: One field, two seasons stopped short at Rudd



MATTHEW VAUGHN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Elon men's soccer junior midfielder Daire McCarthy gestures to the referrees in Elon's quarterfinal match against the College of Charleston on Nov. 5 The Phoenix were frustrated that night, regularly screaming at the referees while head coach Marc Reeves motioned for them to focus on the match.

Despite thrilling years, Phoenix's deeper issues grow large in conference quarterfinals

Kathan Gandhi
Sports Editor

Twelve yards. That's the distance between Elon redshirt sophomore midfielder Oscar Tonidandel and a potential scored penalty kick to keep the Phoenix alive.

It's a kick that had become routine for Tonidandel. He'd been named to All-CAA First Team earlier the same day — an award for his vision and touch with the ball.

"I just always want to pull through for my team," Tonidandel said on one of his two penalty kicks earlier in the season. "I just take that, put it into the kick, and then it does the rest."

But this kick was different — a strike with thirteen minutes left in Elon's quarterfinal playoff game to draw its deficit to one. It was the Phoenix's best chance to fight back into a match swinging in momentum.

As Tonidandel geared up for the kick, Elon's packed crowd, who'd been roaring and heckling all night, dropped to a startling shush.

Elon's top penalty scorer fired.

The ball curved, skidding in the air. For a moment, it looked like a goal.

Until it changed course and pinged off the crossbar — leaving an audible 'thud' that left Elon's fans at Rudd Field on Nov. 5 stunned and Tonidandel in a second of shock.

That was the theme at Rudd that day. Two Elon soccer seasons veering off-track, unexpectedly.

A familiar foundation

It'd been 742 days since women's soccer had lost at Rudd.

That's largely thanks to a defense led by senior Grace Gelhaus — who earned her second-straight CAA Defender of the Year this season. Gelhaus anchored a Phoenix defense that relied on four returning starters, including senior Megan Dwyer. She said the focus this season was staying fluid as a team regardless of who was on the field.

"We talk a lot in our film about who to mark," Dwyer said. "So no matter the defensive zone, we're watching for those numbers to mark."

Elon's defense, although still effective, took a step back compared to prior seasons. The Phoenix allowed 20 goals in 2026, four more than 2025, when they were best in the conference.

While most of Elon's backline stayed the same, redshirt sophomore goalkeeper Naomi Person emerged as one of the team's biggest developments.

Person unexpectedly stepped into the role of starting keeper after junior Katie Bisgrove was sidelined with injury.

Goalkeepers coach Clifton Bush said Person's development went beyond making flashy saves. Her biggest improvement came in communication, directing defenders on when to adjust, like pushing forward or playing more conservatively.

On the other end of the field, redshirt senior Isa Murdock helped drive the Phoenix offense. Murdock led the CAA in shots on goal during the regular season with 40, 66% higher than her previous career high.

Multiple players described Murdock as the central threat of Elon's offense. When Murdock had the ball, the plan was simple: get in the box, according to junior midfielder Gabby Tirado.

That strategy worked. Tirado scored five goals in her first year at Elon, joining the All-CAA Second Team alongside Murdock. Elon led the conference in shots on goal, scorching through the CAA.

Early on, it looked like Elon would pull through its conference quarterfinal matchup against the College of William & Mary on Nov. 5.

"We were excellent in the first 30 minutes of the game, and on reflection, we probably should've scored one or two goals," head coach Neil Payne said.

Murdock had some of Elon's best looks but could not convert. Soon, the early momentum faded.

William & Mary eventually broke through when Tribe freshman Ava Magnuson worked past four defenders, including Gelhaus, and fired a cross-body shot past Person to take a 1-0 lead.

Person finished with seven saves, keeping Elon within reach as the Phoenix searched for an equalizer. But the offense couldn't respond, and William & Mary held on to end Elon's season.

For a team that had built its season on defensive organization and consistent performances, the quarterfinal highlighted the importance of pairing those strengths with timely scoring, according to Payne.

"This one is going to sting a little, so I think that's going to give us motivation going into next season," Payne said, emphasizing that his returning players will now be hungrier heading into 2027.



ALEXANDER SIEGEL | PHOTO EDITOR

Elon University redshirt senior Isa Murdock attempts a goal on William & Mary sophomore goalkeeper Gwen Doughty on Nov. 5 at Rudd Field. Murdock scored seven goals in 2026, tied for the most in her career.

A new offense

Forty goals. That was the target head coach Marc Reeves set for Elon men's soccer at the beginning of the season. The Phoenix finished with 37, coming within three goals of the mark as the team developed into one of the CAA's most productive offenses.

Much of that production came from redshirt junior Dominik Renz. In his second season with Elon, Renz scored 10 goals and added four assists, earning CAA Player of the Year honors.

Renz's production helped define the Phoenix attack throughout the season, according to Reeves.

"I don't think people understand how pivotal he is to the way we play," Reeves said. "He holds the ball up well, he presses well, and he's a threat behind."

Elon finished the regular season leading the CAA in shots on goal by 25, reflecting the team's ability to create opportunities in front of the net. But the season also revealed how important Renz's scoring was to the team's success. Elon won just four of their 18 games where Renz didn't score, compared to five wins and three ties when he did.

That dependence became particularly apparent in the quarterfinals.

Later in the day on Nov. 5, against Charleston, Elon struggled to find Renz in dangerous positions. He finished the game without a shot on goal, while the Phoenix managed just two shots on target overall — a sharp departure from the offensive production they had shown during the regular season.

Despite tactical adjustments at halftime, Elon could not generate enough quality chances to overcome the deficit, losing 2-1.

"We just didn't play good football today," Reeves said, sparse with words when reflecting on the loss. "Pair that with a tough team like Charleston, and you don't move on."

Reeves described the quarterfinal result as "gut-wrenching," but the season offered reasons for optimism alongside the disappointment.

Renz's conference honors and the team's attacking production gave Elon pieces to build around heading into the offseason. Still, the quarterfinal exposed a difficult question for the Phoenix: how to maintain their offensive threat when their leading scorer could not find space, according to Reeves.