

# 1. Introduction to the Williams Corner Development

Williams Corner was initially conceived to accommodate the growing needs of a number of businesses close to the subject property. North Chatham Investments, Inc., the developer of Williams Corner, was formed to find and develop a suitable location for these business clients. Since a critical mass of current and interested businesses already existed, any proposed location would have enough participants to make the project immediately viable. In addition, given Williams Corner's proximity to US 15-501, a roadway with significant improvements near completion, new and additional interest would be forthcoming.

The development team is headed by M. Travis Blake, a local builder, developer, and environmental engineer. Mr. Blake, a longtime resident of Chatham County, lives within a mile of the project; he also has family roots that tie him to the property and the long family histories of the Herndons, the Durhams, and the Bennetts. Recognizing that the property will be developed at some point, he intends to develop the property in a manner consistent with the concerns expressed by some of the remaining family members in the area, other residents of this part of Chatham County, and local community interest groups.

Because of its proximity to the University North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Duke University, and Research Triangle Park, and its desirable rural character, northern Chatham County will continue to be developed. In order to alleviate the concerns of area residents, the developer has invited the participation of members of the surrounding community in the design process in an effort to maintain the character and desirability of the project. The developer believes that Williams Corner will host desirable businesses, services, and housing, while at the same time retaining some of the rural flavor of the area.

We ask that the reviewers of the Williams Corner project note that Section 10 includes documentation of an effort by the developer to gather public and adjacent property owners' input into the project before it goes to the Public Hearing phase of the rezoning application. The consequent input from individuals and community groups has not only been very positive, but it has also been very helpful -- we believe these concerns and suggestions have been incorporated into the Williams Corner development.

**The Name “Williams Corner”**

The project started with the working name “501 Centre.” We had a number of questions about the name, a descriptor that was adequate for the site, but rather utilitarian. The name “501 Centre” did not seem to complement the residential area and pedestrian-friendly layout of the project. The developer asked for suggestions from individuals and community groups and offered a reward to the person who submitted the name that would ultimately end up on project signs. The name “Williams” was suggested by a number of people; the developer added “Corner,” thereby arriving at the project’s present name. The development draws its name from Williams Township, which was named in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century after George Jackson Williams, then Chatham County Sheriff. Although we lack evidence at the moment, we have heard that Mr. Williams may have lived on or near the site that will hold Williams Corner. This aspect of the development’s name will be further researched to insure historical accuracy.

**The K. M. Mathiesen Medical Building**

In keeping with the developer’s commitment to the history of this part of Chatham County, one of the buildings in Williams Corner will be named after a former physician who cared for residents of the county. The following observations, taken from an article appearing in *The Chatham News & Record* (“Early Pittsboro Medicine Studied,” 6 May 2004, Pg. 13-A) support this decision:

Dr. K. M. Mathiesen arrived in Pittsboro in 1938. By 1940, he had opened an office on Main Street; 8 years later, he built a small clinic and hospital – featuring 20 beds and 5 basinetts -- in the center of town.

As local historian Fred Vatter noted, however,

*Mathiesen’s hands were severely burned over time by radiation from handling his portable X-ray machine. “At one point Mathiesen was told by Duke Hospital that he would not live much longer than a year because of radiation burns ... He lived to be 87 years old.”*

It appears that while Dr. Mathiesen had a thriving practice in terms of the number of patients he saw, his office suffered because of the economic straits many of his patients were experiencing after the war. In lieu of cash, he frequently accepted payments of chickens and eggs. Significantly, however, no patient unable to pay for treatment was ever denied medical service.

As Helen M. Gibbs of Bear Creek explained,

*[Dr. Mathiesen] was a wonderful man and I thought better than any doctor in Raleigh at that time ... He kept a patient with dementia in one of his office rooms where he could watch her, instead of sending her to a rest home. He did things like that free, out of the goodness of his heart. He knew a lot of his patients couldn't pay but that never mattered to him.*

Sadly, for Chatham County residents, in the late 1960s Dr. Mathiesen was forced to close his practice.

M. Travis Blake, President of North Chatham Investments, met Dr. Mathiesen briefly in the early 1970s:

*During my second year at UNC I was asked to stay with my grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. John Herndon, while my grandmother recovered from an illness. They lived about five miles south of Chapel Hill in Chatham County and I did not have a car, a fact that necessitated "catching" a ride to campus each day of the week, very early on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and a little later on Tuesday and Thursday.*

*Finding a ride at the same time each day turned out to be quite easy. My grandparents lived above an old country store and there were many people stopping by in the early morning on the way to Chapel Hill. I regularly rode in with a neighbor on Tuesday and Thursday and, for one week, on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday with a fellow everyone called "Doc."*

*It was hard to miss Doc's disfigured hands and, not being a shy person, I asked him how he had come to be burned. He explained he had suffered from overexposure associated with an early x-ray machine. I assumed his trips to UNC were for medical treatment, but did not find out much more about him until recently.*

*In honor of Dr. Mathiesen's contributions to Chatham County, as detailed in the Chatham News & Record piece, I have contacted members of his family and informed them of our intentions to name one of the proposed medical buildings in Williams Corner in his honor.*