

Planning board minority report to the Chatham County Board of Commissioners regarding 388 acres of the county that are currently unzoned.

Members of the planning board are charged with giving advice and recommendations to the commissioners regarding all issues of planning and land use in the county. It's a job every member takes seriously and we strive to give informed advice that is in the best interest of the public.

While not elected by the public, the planning board represents local government to many of our residents. As representatives of the government, the planning board has the duty to do everything within its power to maintain a bond of trust between the government and the general public. When trust is lost, collaboration and meaningful discussion become impossible and everyone in the county is worse off for it.

The manner in which this zoning issue has been handled over the past two years has created a crisis of trust and division, both of which could have been avoided. Trust has been lost! Large segments of our population are convinced that elected commissioners and planning board members are just not listening. Many feel personal agendas are driving this effort rather than concern for the county. This perception is corrosive to the fiber of our community. Our residents feel their voices no longer matter and they have been made to feel powerless. Trust can be restored and a better way forward is possible.

It's the balance of these two important duties that compels us to issue a minority report from the planning board in opposition to zoning 388 acres of Chatham County as residential R-1 and R-5.

Our opposition is not based on opposition to zoning in general, and most of the public speakers have confirmed that. We not only recognize the importance of zoning as a critical tool in protecting and managing growth, we voted in favor of its use in our October 15, 2015 recommendation to you.

The planning board recommendation from October 2015 was the result of many months of deliberation that included sub committees, countless hours of discussion and listening to residents during the public input portion of our meetings. We heard and agreed with you regarding the pressures of rapid growth in some portions of the county require more immediate action to protect the culture and nature of Chatham. The planning board's recommendation incorporated those concerns as well as concerns expressed by the public. The recommendation also acknowledged other portions of the county were not under the same pressures and a more

inclusive thoughtful approach could be employed. To refresh your memory, our recommendation was as follows:

Interim zoning east of NC 87 along with an ordinance (countywide) to regulate commercial and club-like gun ranges, with setbacks or meaningful distances from existing residences, schools, churches, and businesses; so that to promote the health, safety, and general welfare of our citizens.

Board members Wilson, Copeland, Curtis, Gaeta, Galin, and Bock all voted in the majority for this approach.

The majority of the planning board recommended using a combination of zoning, regulations, and ordinances to meet the desired goal.

That was the second time in 12 months the planning board made a recommendation on this issue and the second time you rejected those recommendations. We stress that both times the planning board had months of deliberation and discussion and both times the idea of county wide blanket residential zoning was expressly rejected.

In contrast, the latest vote was deliberated and discussed for less than one hour. Residents once again spoke to us about their concerns and raised new issues previously not discussed. Issues such as zoning businesses to current use rather than residential. Issues of zoning some areas as R-1 that would be more appropriately zoned R-5. Issues such as creating additional zoning classifications to recognize the differences in areas of the county. Issues such as zoning Army Corp of engineering land where we don't even have the authority to zone. Each of these issues and more require subsequent and costly steps to remedy. Not to mention the additional burden on our residents.

So what changed to make the majority of the board suddenly accept a strategy after rejecting it for so long?

- 1) There are new members on the board who did not have the benefit of participating in the months of discussion that resulted in our previous recommendations. It was one member's very first meeting. That isn't fair to them and it isn't fair to the public.
- 2) This time we were not asked to vote for what we thought was best for the county, we were asked to vote on one option, leaving some members to feel it was this or nothing. When given only one choice the majority voted in favor. The choice of blanket residential zoning or nothing was a false choice forced on the board in a hasty manner.
- 3) We were not given time to review the reasons this approach was rejected by the board in the past for the benefit of the new members.

Think how the citizens must feel when commissioners tell us the decision is made prior to referring to the planning board (June 6, 2016 planning board meeting). Think how the citizens must feel when PB members read statements prepared before the meeting that say we hear your concerns, knowing all along they had their mind made up prior to hearing new information. We can't restore trust when months of work by the planning board is ignored not once but twice, while the work of one hour is extolled as the best possible plan. We can't build trust or do what is best when the planning board members are stripped of all choices but the one desired by the commissioners.

We are also concerned that the rush to zone all of Chatham may be in conflict with North Carolina statute 160A-383, which states:

"Zoning regulations shall be made in accordance with a comprehensive plan".

The county is working on a comprehensive plan, state law would suggest we need to wait on that plan to be finished. To zone over ½ of the county prior to adopting the comprehensive plan is a disservice to the public and goes against the intent of law.

You have it within your power to begin rebuilding trust and incorporating the wishes of all sides of this issue. You rejected all options presented to you by planning staff and the planning board and forced an up or down on the one option you wanted. Even three of the planning board members voting with the majority expressed dissatisfaction with the process used to arrive at that vote and some admitted this wasn't the best solution, but the only choice we had at this point.

We strongly recommend that you reject this blanket one size fits all approach and adopt the recommendation forwarded to you in October of 2015. This may stall county wide zoning by a few months but that is a small price to ensure a result that is better for our county and will start the process of restoring trust.

Respectfully submitted;

B J Copeland
Cecil Wilson
Gene Galin
Brian Bock