



Report of the Blue Ribbon Committee

**Presented to the
Johnston County Board of Commissioners**

Presented by
Sammy Jackson and Harold Keen
Committee Co-Chairs

September 4, 2007

In February of 2007, the Johnston County Board of Commissioners established a Blue Ribbon committee to examine current and proposed growth management concepts, and to study issues related to the many challenges the county faces with finance and infrastructure.

We have had the privilege of co-chairing this committee. It has been a learning experience for everyone involved, and I want to publicly thank all of the citizens who served on this committee. They have spent many hours since March studying complex challenges. A full list of the committee members is included at the end of this report.

We established three workgroups to study finance, land use and infrastructure. These workgroups spent many hours researching their particular subject matters, and met several times during the spring and summer in preparation for their final reports to the full committee on August 7, 2007 at the Johnston County Agricultural Center. The recommendations prepared for you were voted on and received unanimous support on August 7, 2007.

These workgroups were chaired as follows:

Finance:	<i>Allen Wellons</i> Chair	<i>Kay Carroll</i> Vice-Chair
Land Use:	<i>Don Johnson</i> Chair	<i>Dennis Blackmon</i> Vice-Chair
Infrastructure:	<i>Dan Simmons</i> Chair	<i>Steve Biggs</i> Vice-Chair

The most relevant recommendation from the committee and workgroups was that Johnston County should start the process of a comprehensive land use plan, and that the implementation of individual land use items should be delayed until studied as a part of a comprehensive land use plan.

The workgroup recommendations follow.



“...Johnston County should start the process of a comprehensive land use plan ... the implementation of individual land use recommendations should be delayed until studied as a part of a comprehensive land use plan.”



Finance Workgroup Recommendations

- **Continue to encourage growth in Johnston County.**

From a financial point of view, the economic well-being and progress of this county depends on new growth. We cannot afford to become like some of the mid-western states where growth has stopped and economic “doom” has set in. Growth is certainly better than “no growth.”

We must build our infrastructure faster. We must build our schools faster. We must find a way to get more roads built faster. We cannot afford to have inadequate facilities that cause potential residents to go somewhere else.

- **Change the current practice of property revaluations from an eight-year cycle to a four-year cycle with a revenue-neutral pledge.**

This plan would reduce sticker shock for the public. It would also allow property taxes to stay current with property values. It will also be fairer to areas in the county which are not appreciating as fast as higher growth areas.

- **With the recent change in the law, it is recommended that the Board of County Commissioners allow the citizens of Johnston County to vote either for the land transfer fee or the increase in sales tax, with any new monies dedicated to school construction or debt service.**

There is no recommendation of which alternative revenue source to pursue initially.

The predictions are that the addition of a land transfer fee in this county would add approximately \$4.5 million a year to the budget. The predictions are also that the addition of a 1/4 cent sales tax would add \$3.4 million a year to the budget.

It should be understood that this potential revenue is not supplanting existing funds for school construction or debt service, but may be a means to avoid increasing ad-valorem tax and creating a truly revenue-neutral reevaluation.

- **Create a county concurrency committee that would consider the financing of water and sewer, fire and rescue, schools, roads, solid waste, drainage, and parks.**

A broad-based 20-year growth plan is recommended. A 5-year intense growth plan is also recommended. Concurrency agreements would be obtained from each municipality. This would alleviate the fears of different areas of the county by creating transparency in the planning process.

This committee would initially review all subdivision and industrial requests for construction from all over the county. It would measure the requests against a well-developed formula that would indicate whether or not this new construction would adversely affect any one of the areas mentioned above, and how that problem could be mitigated by either private or public actions or funds. This is not an “adequate facilities” policy, but the creation of a group that truly looks to the future in a very informed way to attempt to be ready for growth.

We are all in this together. Today, we identify ourselves as being from Clayton, Smithfield, Benson or Princeton. But one day, in the not too-distant future, it will be difficult to know where one town begins and another ends. We are Johnston County.

In order to make some of these dreams come true, we must have more sources of revenue, and therefore, a greater percentage of revenue that can be used for growth purposes. We will have to incur more debt. We must have more revenue to pay off the debt faster in our generation, so we can continue with our future plans without mortgaging the future of our children. We must work to get an infusion of funds sooner than later in order to try to get ahead of the curve of our expected growth. We are Johnston County - a great place to live and work. We must, first and foremost, have countywide planning so that we know what resources are needed where.

Growth and Infrastructure Workgroup Recommendations

- **Every resident of Johnston County should have access to a safe and reliable source of drinking water.**

The county is doing a good job of securing water resources. Efforts to secure the necessary financial resources to keep up with the needs of both the incorporated and unincorporated areas of Johnston County should be a high priority.

- **The current use of on-site wastewater disposal systems for the unincorporated areas of Johnston County should continue and all residential development outside of the municipal limits should be restricted to this method of wastewater disposal.**

The unincorporated areas of the county should develop at a rural density or in a low-density suburban pattern with public water, but without the necessity of public wastewater collection and treatment capacity. The county should operate wastewater treatment facilities primarily to support industrial and rural commercial development and to support urban growth patterns in municipalities. Urban growth should center around municipal hubs, with traditional urban services provided by municipalities.

- **The most likely threat to quality of life and sustained quality growth comes from the degradation of quality school facilities. Involvement by local citizens, community leaders, and other governmental agencies should be considered in making school site selection. Community schools, as a concept, must be a higher priority.**

The cost and growth implications of extending water and wastewater infrastructure should be factored in when a school site is chosen. Schools should be constructed in close proximity to existing infrastructure and denser population centers. One of the factors a developer considers when selecting a site for development, is the school district the property is located in. The Board of Education must address imbalances in public school achievement in order to better distribute growth across the county.

- **It is recommended that the Board of County Commissioners appoint a citizens committee to make recommendations concerning the expenditure of funds in the open space fund.**

It is also recommended that the board seek more discretion from the N.C. General Assembly in how these funds can be spent.

- **It is recommended that further research be done on how to handle the impact of growth on the local roadways.**

It appears the municipalities are better equipped to handle the impact of growth to the local roadway system than the county. The municipalities operate and maintain their own roadway system. They can also share in the costs of improvements to existing NCDOT roadways within the municipality through state-municipal agreements.

Land Use Workgroup Recommendations

- **The Board of County Commissioners should use the Strategic Plan proposed in the year 2002 as a starting point for incorporating the Land Use Planning Guidance October 2006 recommendations for developing a comprehensive land use plan for the county.**
- **The Board of County Commissioners should approve the municipal request for extensions of ETJ's to facilitate development towards the cities.**
- **Johnston County needs to consider the preliminary approval process for subdivisions.**

Is there enough preliminary due diligence in the platting on paper of possible lots on a tract of land? Conforming to design standards without consideration to soil conditions, infrastructure availability and environmental issues presents a picture of “development gone wild” when nothing more than a paper approval has taken place. The process to acquire vested rights should also be reviewed in the light of what is significant investment, to justify granting unlimited vested rights to a preliminary approval.

The land use workgroup voted on the following aspects of the recent growth management report prepared by the growth management committee in the following manner:

- The growth management report recommended all land be developed at an average density of one dwelling per two acres of usable land.” *(No)*
- In the same report, there was a recommendation of a standard subdivision density of one house per two acres. *(No)*
- The report recommended special use subdivisions related to higher density with findings of fact shortfalls. Those shortfall considerations were for community capability; traffic impact and road conditions; school capacity and planned capacity; recreation and other amenities, and public utilities. *(No)*
- The growth management report suggested caps on permits. *(Maybe)*
- The growth management report suggested impact fees, land transfer taxes and property tax increases. *(Maybe)*
- The growth management report suggested four-year revaluation schedule. *(Yes)*
- The growth management report suggested a “Welcome Stranger” program to put property on tax books at market value. *(Yes)*
- The growth management report suggested multi-track year-round schools. *(No)*

On behalf of the blue ribbon committee members, we thank you for the opportunity to participate and respectfully ask that you consider adopting these recommendations in the near future.

Members of the Blue Ribbon Committee

Atchison, Alex (Town of Clayton)
Barbour, Jimmy (JC Surveyors Association)
Barbour, Larry (Farm Bureau)
Biggs, Steve (Town of Clayton)
Blackmon, Dennis (JC Surveyors Association)
Boyette, Kay (Farm Bureau)
Byrd, Donald (JC Realtors Association)
Byrd, Fleta (Town of Wilson's Mills)
Byrd, Teresa (JC Realtors Association)
Carroll, Kay (JC Schools)
Creech, Wayne (JC Homebuilders Association)
Durham, Dennis (Farm Bureau)
Embler, Paul (Town of Smithfield)
Gudac, Anthony (Town of Pine Level)
Hines, Jamey (Farm Bureau)
Holloman, Randy (Town of Pine Level)
Jackson, Sammy (First Citizens)
Johnson, Chris (JC Economic Development Board)
Johnson, Don (Town of Benson)
Jones, Buddy (Town of Micro)
Keen, Harold (KS Bank)
Knight, Beverly (Town of Kenly)
Lee, Stacy (Town of Four Oaks)
McLamb, Tracy (Town of Benson)
Moore, Andy (Town of Smithfield)
Nichols, Bruce (JC Homebuilders Association)
Parker, Linwood (Town of Four Oaks)
Parrish, Joe (Town of Wilson's Mills)
Peterson, Mark (Town of Selma)
Price, Marshall (Town of Princeton)
Poole, Yates (Town of Micro)
Rains, Don (Town of Princeton)
Simmons, Dan (Town of Kenly)
Sellers, Eric (Town of Selma)
Summerlin, Randy (JC Homebuilders Association)
Wellons, Allen, (JC Economic Development Board)
Wellons, Mark (Farm Bureau)
Williams, Ann (JC Schools)
Woodard, Ronnie (Farm Bureau)
Vinson, Tom (Farm Bureau)