

Dear Ms. Hatton: (from Bill Gunby & Tony DeMaria, Forsyth Citizens for Responsible Growth)

We have all been working diligently over the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, and I think we've been at it long enough to offer some observations. We hope these will be of value to the process.

The data that you have collected appears to indicate that 75% to 80% of the Homeowners are against any further high density development, and especially against any additional apartments. Let me offer some background that will help understand that position.

THE HISTORY (facts, already "in the books")

We Homeowners, in very large majority, chose to invest our money in Forsyth County for the following reasons:

- 1) We liked the low intensity and low density of past development. This includes all types, residential, commercial, and retail.
- 2) We liked the low intensity of the traffic. Sure, there was traffic, but it was livable "low stress" traffic.
- 3) We liked the high quality uncrowned schools. It seemed like a great place to raise our kids in a safe environment.
- 4) We liked the natural rolling topography covered with large mature beautiful trees. It was a "pretty place to live."

Over the past decade, we have seen the rise of high density development in Forsyth, uncharacteristic of this area, and contrary to the "character" of Forsyth County. The result of that is the degradation / destruction of the very reasons we invested our money here in the first place.

Is there any wonder why 75% to 80% of Homeowners are against any further high density/high intensity development?

On the other hand, we all know why the change to high density development occurred. It raised the price of land for the landowners, and it benefited the developer / real estate community. Here however, is the salient point: we Homeowners are investors also, and our financial investments are just as important as the investments made by landowners. Lately, it is clear that recent land use decisions were made totally in favor of landowners and have ignored the right of Homeowners to rightful enjoyment (financial and non-financial) of their investments.

THE PRESENT - revision of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan

While we appreciate the work Jacobs has done so far, there are some omissions that need to be highlighted.

- 1) Planning for the future has begun without any critique of the past. Has all past development been “good, responsible” development, consistent with the interests of all Homeowners? Have there been any “mistake” developments? Without understanding past failures, isn’t it true that we are destined to make the same mistakes in the future? An example of a “mistake” development: McFarland area was intended to be a hub of business employment offering well-paying jobs. Somehow, apartments got zoned in the area. The result is space that should have been generating jobs has been taken away by high density residential, further stressing the infrastructure in the area.
- 2) It is true that we Homeowners are being given the opportunity to “have a voice” in the process. However, it seems that we are allowed to only choose options to support a population of 400,000, without considering whether that population number is a positive or a negative; indeed, we were told that we can’t even explore the question. The consensus among Homeowners is that the approach seems to be “how can we use all this land,” as opposed to a careful examination of present conditions and asking the question “What is it that we need?” and then constructing a plan that fulfills those needs.
- 3) There seems to be an attitude of “There are a lot of people who’d like to move here, and we must build enough housing to meet that demand.” Really? Who says? Please tell us where it is written that we have an obligation to do that. Building that quantity of additional housing will benefit only landowners and developers, and it will just continue the past trend of degrading the very characteristics that attracted us Homeowners here in the first place. It will also decrease future demand for people to want to move here, because of the negative effects on the county.
- 4) We are not allowed to factor in approved zonings that have yet to be built. Case in point: the 2,000 apartment units to be built between McFarland Road and Ronald Reagan Road. The homeowners who are aware of this vote emphatically NO to additional apartments. The homeowners who are not aware of this are asked “Where would you like to see high density development,” They are pressured to pick some area for that, so they pick McFarland since it’s already highly developed, figuring (wrongly, of course), what more harm could it do. If they knew about the already approved 2,000 units, their vote might very well be different.

We certainly understand and agree with the rights of private property. A landowner certainly has the right to sell their land. However, the landowner does not have the right to drive up density to achieve a maximum sale price it that is detrimental to surrounding Homeowner citizens. **Surrounding homeowners have invested cumulatively 10 to 20 X more funds than the large land owner - - - - - therefore greater investment & citizen population always side with the Homeowners rights!**

MOVING FORWARD, A PATH TO THE FUTURE

- 1) Acknowledge the present conditions. Roads are terribly overcrowded, as are the schools.
- 2) Acknowledge that road and school improvements take a relatively long time to complete, whereas new housing can be built in a comparatively short while.
- 3) Acknowledge that since road and school improvement already lags behind the development that is already in place and approved but not yet built, a long term plan needs to afford sufficient time for infrastructure to catch up. If we continue to build the same high density developments at the present pace, we will never have sufficient infrastructure.
- 4) Acknowledge that Homeowners overwhelmingly disapprove of any additional high density / high intensity development.

A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

To be acceptable to the majority of homeowners / taxpayers, any new development of any type:

- 1) Needs to be of a low intensity / low density character, and should ONLY be considered where sufficient infrastructure is already in place.
- 2) For residential development, bring back the Estate Residential classification, defined as “homes on larger lots, with more space between homes in typically lower traffic conditions.” It should be a county-wide designation. Other jurisdictions do this, and it is perfectly logical for Forsyth to do this given our traffic and school situation. This is the only way by which we can buy time to let infrastructure catch up. Why would we not do this? It seems to be perfectly logical.
 - a. It helps preserve the very characteristics which prompted us Homeowners to invest here.
 - b. Ban mass grading. One of our most irreplaceable natural resources is our great quantity of mature trees growing on our gently rolling topography. It is an integral part of what makes up the high demand to live in Forsyth. Require that large specimen trees be left in place, and natural topography be undisturbed where possible.
 - c. Ban any further apartments, townhomes, or condominiums. We must keep an eye on the future and realize that there is no such thing as a 10 - 20 year old “luxury” apartment property. Just ask any experienced law enforcement officer and they can explain in detail the meaning of this, and how the resident profile always changes over time. We do not need to be building future crime scenes.
 - d. Seek to develop more high-end housing choices. We have been building huge quantities of low-end “first time buyer homes” for the last decade, but virtually nothing to appeal to high end buyers. How can we expect to attract companies that offer high paying jobs, if we have no place for their executives / hiring authorities to live?
- 3) These steps will somewhat limit supply, and that should be viewed as a positive. Basic economics tells us that when demand (which will remain strong) exceeds supply, then prices go up. Isn't that to the benefit of us Homeowners? Will that not raise the value of our investments? Of course it will.

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- 4) Will the steps prohibit large landowners from selling their properties? No, it will not. It will however, stop them from selling at maximum benefit to themselves at the detriment of all other homeowners.
- 5) For retail development - understanding that groups of retail outlets create traffic nodes, which in turn create high intensity driving conditions, designate new retail only in areas where the road infrastructure is in place. Pose the question: Would additional new retail fulfill a need that can't be currently fulfilled? Do a cost / benefit analysis - does the benefit (a new place to shop) outweigh the cost (additional traffic stress on the road infrastructure)?
- 6) Class A office parks - designate areas to attract companies that will employ technical and professional staff.

We do hope that the issues raised herein will receive your diligent attention. Please know that we are available at any time for any further thoughtful discussion that you think would be helpful.

Best regards,

Bill Gunby & Tony DeMaria

for the committee: Forsyth Citizens for Responsible Growth

www.ForsythCRG.org or email HomeownersCoalition@ForsythCRG.org

Note to Forsyth Citizens:

Forsyth Citizens for Responsible Growth is pleased to provide this information. We believe that a fully informed local citizenry will make Forsyth the best place to live and work!

We hope you will let the people¹ doing the new Land Use Plan know your sentiments about Forsyth's recent and desired long term growth.

¹ Amanda Hatton, Project Leader for Jacobs Engineering amanda.hatton@jacobs.com