

People's Alliance PAC 2008 Questionnaire Durham Board of County Commissioners

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1. Do you think that the County Government has exhibited an adequate response to the drought and water crisis? If not, what else could be done and how would it be paid for?

While the County is not in the water business, we have encouraged water conservation in County facilities, and through the Soil and Water Conservation District, we have offered rain barrels at essentially wholesale prices. Our General Services office has offered County employees free low-flow showerheads and aerators for faucets. At Commission meetings, we have especially encouraged water conservation by County residents using well water. Ground water depends on rainfall and during drought it must be conserved. Finally, we can do more by delaying big developments outside the City. We have asked the City to look at growth the City Council has approved and how much water it will take for this growth.

To see the details of the County's water conservation see the State of the County report at

http://www.durhamcountync.gov/departments/bocc/Documents/State_of_the_County/State_of_the_County_Speech_Handout_25JAN2008.pdf

2. Are you aware that the Department of Homeland Security has chosen Durham/Granville counties as one of five possible sites for a facility to study dangerous and poorly known viruses and diseases? Do you support the location of this facility in our community? When economic development and public health and well-being are in a potential conflict, where does the burden of proof lie?

I do not support the BioLab facility as proposed for Durham/Granville Counties. I believe just about all local governments in the area oppose this project. The potential for biohazards like viruses and other exotic, deadly agents to escape into the environment including our watersheds far outweighs any potential economic development. There are too many unanswered questions, including emergency evacuation plans for area hospitals, schools, and prisons, as well as for the general population. The County has requested our Environmental Affairs board to review the EIS and provide information to the BOCC.

3. The Durham City and County governments' Measuring our Progress report of 2005 focused on 8 measurements. For each, please state Durham County's biggest current challenge—and the single first thing you would try to do as a Commissioner to solve that challenge. One short sentence for each challenge, please! This is an overview question. State the challenge briefly, and briefly state your first method of approaching that challenge.

**A reminder that a commissioner can do very little alone, it takes 3 votes for action.
A commissioner's job is to persuade others to do the right thing. Leadership!**

- A. *Children are ready for and succeeding in school:* The challenge is finding resources to provide more child care funding and early education such as Smart Start, Head Start and More at Four; a good start in life is a must do - I will work as a commissioner, make trips to Raleigh (as I have done before) to secure all available funding resources.**
- B. *Durham citizens enjoy a healthy environment:* The challenge is to preserve land for open space as well as development and the solution is to convince other commissioners that we must preserve open land for the future, control poorly conceived development, greenhouse gases, erosion, destroys trees, has health consequences, and depletes our water resources; I will continue, as I have in the past, to protect our environment through preserving open space and responsible zoning to accommodate future development and protect neighborhoods.**
- C. *Durham's citizens enjoy a community that is vibrant, rich in aesthetic beauty and embraces and promotes its cultural heritage:* The challenge is to enact ordinances that will give added protection to our environment and places listed in our Inventory of Natural and Cultural Resources (I worked on this with Margaret Nygard) and Inventory of Endangered Species, and work with Preservation Durham in protection of historic buildings. I will work to preserve our environment and cultural heritage.**
- D. *Every citizen in Durham has access to adequate, safe and affordable housing:* The challenge in housing needs for Durham is there are never enough resources to fund housing for the homeless and mentally impaired as well as rehabbing and removing derelict housing to make our neighborhoods safer, and as a commissioner I do support the 10 year plan to end homeless (I hope it would not take 10 years), and work through the County Home Grant and the City Redevelopment Department to repair and rebuild boarded up houses**
- E. *Durham enjoys a prosperous economy:* Industry means jobs which help to reduce both poverty and crime, but the challenge is education including training so more of Durham's residents will qualify for jobs, and I worked to acquire Holton School and will be active in seeing that we accomplish this mission to provide education and skill training for high school students and adults.**
- F. *Durham citizens are healthy:* Uninsured citizens are a major challenge that has been addressed in part by easy access for the uninsured to specialists, helped by the County funded program that begins this summer; Lincoln clients will now have specialized care at no costs, this program is Project Access with a goal of providing 2400**

specialized services per year. As a commissioner I will work with our partners to support this needed program.

G. *All Durham citizens are safe:* The challenge is solving the root cause of crime and I will push for after school mentoring and other activities, training opportunities for both adults and youth, and urge social services to try and keep families together. The Sheriff's office was recognized by the Commission on Accreditation of Law Enforcement Agencies for achievement and expertise of some of the most successful public safety entities. I will continue to encourage and continue to support these efforts.

H. *Durham citizens enjoy sustainable thriving neighborhoods with efficient and well-maintained infrastructure:* The challenge is to have safe and well-maintained neighborhoods, and I will continue to encourage and support neighborhood associations, community watch, plan development in neighborhood appropriate (no warehouse in a residential neighborhood), and support the Inter-neighborhood Council. As a commissioner I will continue to review our ordinances to ensue our citizens need are met on land use and infrastructure.

4. Does the above imply that these statements do not apply to residents who are not citizens (i.e. non-citizen immigrants)? What challenges does the County face with regard to these immigrants/residents, and what policies are needed?

The "illegal" immigrant problem is the current Gordian Knot. I don't think local government can cut it. The non-citizens are a burden on our health facilities and social services as well as our schools. We have no choice other than to provide these services, and it is the humanitarian thing to do.

5. How do you think that the City and County can work together better? Would you support some form of City - County government consolidation? If not, why not? If so, what are the obstacles to it and how should they be mitigated or overcome?

I do not support city-county merger. The mission of each government is different. The City works mostly with "hard" services - water, sewer, police, fire and housing. The County provides more of the "soft" (though expensive) services – health and social services and of course funding of schools, libraries, sheriff's office, courts and jail. We have merged property tax collection, planning and zoning, and inspection/permitting. We jointly fund several other things such as greenhouse gas emissions office and an additional DA for domestic violence. Where can we cooperate more? Development! The City and County see development differently. The City is after the property tax, but it is the County that has to fund the schools and human service agencies. For example, each new student costs the tax payers about \$3000 per year in education expense, and this is in addition to State funding.

6. What part can the county play in providing a safety net for the most profoundly mentally ill persons, given the difficulties with state privatization?

The State has again pushed down to the counties much of the cost of mental health services. We are fortunate to have in Ellen Holliman an excellent Director of Mental Health. She helps us during this crisis in utilizing existing resources. We have not had any complaints from the users of Mental Health services. We are rehabilitating the Oakley facility (next to Durham General Hospital) as an access service center for mental health patients, especially those with alcohol problems. We look forward to new leadership in Raleigh to help with the crisis in mental health.

7. In order to raise much-needed revenue for capital needs and operating funds, do you favor enacting a land transfer tax? An increase in the sales tax? Both? Would you support placing these on the ballot for county voters this fall or in 2009?

I strongly support the land transfer tax, and I oppose another increase in the regressive sales tax. The realtors and homebuilders have a powerful lobby, and they contribute a lot to other candidates (look at the contribution reports on the Board of Elections web site). As of now, I see little chance for passage of a LTT, but I support putting it on the ballot for this fall and if it fails, the following fall. I supported putting it on the ballot last November, but the other commissioners did not. A lot of lies have been peddled about what the transfer tax is and is not and how it would be used. Without other sources of revenue the recent education bond issue for \$500,000,000 represents 5 cents on the property tax which affects property owners including renters.

8. Do you support increased mass transit? If so, in what form and how would you propose funding it? If not, why not?

There is a transit problem, but I don't see a rail system as the solution. I favor HOV lanes as well as increased regional express bus service, which offers more flexibility than rail. Both should be accomplished with little or no tax increase. I do NOT favor the proposed sales tax increase to fund a rail system.

9. The County has provided economic incentives to lure new companies and new jobs to the area. Do you support the current County strategy? Do you have suggestions to enhance this strategy, or would you restrict/reduce it? Do you support the County providing incentives to Greenfire and Scientific Properties for their current proposals? If so, should the County provide similar incentives in the future? Should the County impose certain requirements, e.g., require the creation and maintenance of a certain number of jobs? If so, why, and if not, why not?

Yes, I support the current County economic incentives strategy. It is unfortunate that any incentives must be offered, but like-it-or-not, we must do it. We require that the incentive not exceed the tax revenue generated by the facility within eight years. We also require a minimum number of jobs for Durham County citizens. We do not give the incentive in one lump payment. We have a claw back in the contract that states that if the agreement in the contract is violated, the industry must give back up to 80 percent of the award. A real weakness in our industrial recruitment lies in not encouraging industrial development within the City. In fact, the City has changed some area zoning from industrial to others

such as residential. More jobs in the City could slow and reverse the decay of neighborhoods and schools, helping to control sprawl.

We have not received a proposal from Greenfire, but we have from Scientific Properties. Both the City and County funding the same project will be double taxation for City residents.

10. What is the primary issue facing Durham County in its land use policies? How would you address this issue?

The primary land use issue is the City's aggressive annexation policy. If a developer proposes a big project out side the City, they can go to the City for annexation, bypassing County scrutiny despite the merged planning and zoning operations. Unfettered growth feeds the problem of school costs as in question 5 as well as water use. There is a State law passed in the seventies that allows cities to annex without county approval or even notification, so there is not much we can do to control growth. The NCAC has asked the Legislature to modify the annexation law, but there is no indication of change. Continued uncontrolled growth will surely strain our water resources, schools and human services.