



Planning, Development & Inspections

A Division of Community Services
P.O. Box 550 • Raleigh, NC 27602
www.wake.gov

MINUTES OF REGULAR PLANNING BOARD - December 4, 2024

LOCATION: Wake County Justice Center, 301 S. Salisbury St., Room 2700, Raleigh, NC

MEMBERS PRESENT:

1. Mr. Thomas Wells (Chair)
2. Ms. Brenna Booker-Williams (Vice-Chair)
3. Mr. David Adams
4. Mr. Asa Fleming
5. Mr. Bill Jenkins
6. Ms. Sally Rice
7. Mr. Ted Van Dyk

MEMBERS ABSENT:

1. Mr. Amos Clark
2. Dr. Kamal Kolappa

COUNTY STAFF:

1. Mr. Timothy Maloney
2. Mr. Josh McClellan
3. Mr. Akul Nishawala
4. Ms. Terry Nolan
5. Ms. Liz Oliver
6. Ms. Sharon Peterson
7. Ms. Beth Simmons

COUNTY ATTORNEY:

- Mr. Kenneth Murphy, Deputy County Attorney

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1. **Meeting Called to Order:** Mr. Wells called the meeting to order at 1:32 p.m.
 2. **Pledge of Allegiance**
 3. **Petitions and Amendments:** Mr. Van Dyk made a request to add a Tree Canopy update to the agenda.
 4. **Approval of October 2, 2024, Minutes:** Mr. Adams made a motion to approve the October 2, 2024, minutes as presented. Ms. Booker-Williams seconded the motion and the Board adopted unanimously.
 5. **Western Wake Area Plan – Akul Nishawala, Planner III**

Mr. Nishawala updated the Board on the Western Wake Area Plan, which is designed to replace the Southwest Area Plan of 2010. This is the fourth of seven Area Plans updates that staff is conducting following PLANWake. Although smaller than the Southwest Area Plan, it includes Harris Lake, the Shearon Harris Nuclear Plant, and communities bordering Cary, Apex, Holly Springs, and Fuquay-Varina. The Area Plan covers 43 square miles (27,480 acres) and borders Chatham County.

Mr. Nishawala noted that the population in the area remained stable, despite the growth of municipal areas and changes to the plan's boundaries. This reflects the area's stability compared to other parts of Wake County, partly due to the physical constraints imposed by the park and power plant. Census data showed an increase in the Asian and "Two or More Races" categories, while Black and White populations decreased. In response to a question from Mr. Fleming about the 113% increase in the Asian population, Mr. Nishawala suggested it might be linked to local schools in Cary and Apex, with community input consistently highlighting school concerns. WCPSS partners were involved in outreach efforts to address these issues.

Mr. Nishawala highlighted key social equity concerns in the area, including high unemployment, low educational attainment, housing vacancies, and poverty. The area's demographic includes a large proportion of residents under 18 and over 65, leading to increased dependency. Rent and mortgage payments exceed 30% of household income for many, with transportation costs also a significant burden.

Current land use is primarily institutional, with Duke Energy and the Army Corps of Engineers being the largest property owners. Residential, agricultural, and forestry uses follow. Agricultural land extends into Harnett County and includes Bicentennial Farms, tracts granted by the King of England in the 18th century. Farmers in the region are generally committed to keeping their land in agriculture, which has informed future land use planning. Mr. Nishawala also noted the area's soil quality, which is suitable for farming, and staff is exploring potential development opportunities with Duke Energy. Collaboration with Soil and Water Conservation encourages the establishment of Voluntary Agricultural Districts (VADs) to mitigate future development pressures. Ongoing community meetings with farmers will continue.

Mr. Van Dyk asked about creating a tree canopy district in forestry areas. Mr. Adams explained that most VADs have less open space than forestry areas, and while it might be possible, few old-growth forests remain, and forestry activities typically involve clear-cutting. Mr. Van Dyk suggested this could be an area for future research, and Mr. Nishawala agreed it could be considered in other Area Plans.

Community engagement efforts included a dedicated webpage, story map, and two interactive maps (one for general comments and one for draft land uses), along with a growing email list. Three community meetings were held: one virtual (May 21), and two in-person (June 12 at New Hill Community Center, and September 11 at White Oak Foundation), with good attendance, including Planning Board members. Feedback showed many residents preferred the area to remain as it is. Mr. Van Dyk noted that much of the perceived change was happening within municipalities, and Mr. Nishawala concurred.

Future land use will maintain utility conservation, as in the Southwest Area Plan. Land designated for Duke Energy and the Army Corps of Engineers will remain for flood protection and as a buffer for the lake and power plant. Based on community feedback, the density in New Hill/Friendship has been reduced to one dwelling unit per acre to prevent future rezoning. Critical and Non-Critical Watershed overlays will allow one dwelling per 2 acres, consistent with other parts of the County. The number of Multi-Use Districts (MUDs) has been reduced to two, as former MUDs are now within municipal jurisdictions. One remaining MUD, located on Old US-1 near the Chatham County line, is home to the North Carolina Railway Museum.

Mr. Wells asked if additional MUDs could be added to County jurisdiction. Mr. Nishawala responded that residents generally preferred fewer commercial areas to preserve the rural character of the region. Staff also recommended changes to the Development Framework Map, including a reduction in density in New Hill/Friendship and the removal of a 36-acre parcel that is no longer within County jurisdiction. Additionally, the map will update Greenway and Walkability network descriptions to include a proposed "rail" addition, as the NC Railway Museum intends to expand its railway.

Feedback from the Town of Apex regarding commercial areas along Richardson Road highlighted differences in land use approaches. Apex's Western Big Branch Area Plan, currently in the public hearing stage, focuses on the New Hill/Friendship area and has provided opportunities for alignment between the County's and Apex's goals.

Staff found that the Western Wake Area Plan aligns with the goals of PLANWake, incorporates input from residents, municipal partners, and stakeholders, and updates existing policies, the development framework map, and land use designations. Staff recommends that the Planning Board endorse the plan and map amendments as presented and recommend approval to the Board of Commissioners on January 6, 2025.

Mr. Adams and Mr. Fleming commended staff for their work on the plan and public engagement efforts. Mr. Wells asked about collaborating with Duke Energy on their property. Mr. Nishawala indicated willingness, though collaboration would depend on Duke's interest. Mr. Maloney added that the County already partners with Duke on Harris Lake County Park.

Mr. Wells opened the floor for public hearing at 2:20 p.m.

Public Comment

Mr. R. Victor Varney, a volunteer at the NC Railroad Museum, explained that the Museum operates a rail line along the New Hope Valley Railway, covering 13 acres. He noted that while the Museum predates the American Tobacco Trail, the trail ends just 44 feet from their rail line. In 2022, Duke Energy donated 6,000 feet of rail to the Museum to facilitate a potential connection between the trail and the park on the other side. Mr. Varney has been in discussions with Chris Snow, director of Parks and Recreation, as well as with the State Legislature, NCDOT Rail Division, and NC Railroad. He also mentioned the possibility of working with Duke Energy to access an easement. NCDOT Railway has proposed an engineering survey and studies are set for 2025. Mr. Varney requested that Mr. Nishawala update the Development Framework map to change "trail" to "trail or railway" in the Greenway and Walkable Centers.

Mr. Nishawala asked that the staff recommendation be amended to add the text correction proposed by Mr. Varney.

With no further comment, Mr. Wells closed public hearing at 2:30 p.m.

Board Motion for Approval

Mr. Van Dyk made a motion that the Planning Board recommend that the Board of Commissioners adopt the Western Wake Area Plan as an amendment to the Wake County Comprehensive Plan, PLANWake, and amend the Development Framework Map with the proposed text amendment introduced by Mr. Nishawala.

The motion was seconded by Ms. Rice and was approved unanimously.

6. Tree Canopy Update – Timothy Maloney, Planning, Development & Inspections Director

Mr. Maloney updated the Board on the Pilot Planting project at the Morrisville interchange on Highway 55 and the proposed site for a second reforestation project at Turnipseed Nature Preserve. He explained that the partnership with Leaf & Limb would be most effective in an area that showcases the value of reforestation and offers educational opportunities. Leaf & Limb plans to donate multiple pocket forests, with a target for winter 2025/spring 2026 planting.

Mr. Maloney also mentioned that Mr. Van Dyk had suggested other potential sites based on DOT locations, including NC 540 at Green Level West Road and NC 540 at US 1. He shared photos of the sites and noted opportunities to enhance existing vegetation along the corridors. Mr. Van Dyk recommended that the Planning Board reengage with NCDOT, possibly through the Transportation Committee or by including an update from the Turnpike Authority. He also mentioned that NCDOT had opened an additional 18 miles of the NC 540 expansions. Mr. Maloney noted that planting had not yet occurred in that area, but it could provide space for collaboration.

Mr. Maloney stated he would reach out to NCDOT in the coming year to continue the tree canopy project.

7. Committee Reports

Mr. Jenkins noted the Land Use Committee meeting held prior to their regular Board meeting and thanked the Town of Garner and Ms. Nolan for their presentations. A third Land Use Committee meeting would be coming up in January to address requests for additional information.

8. Planning, Development, and Inspections Report

Mr. Maloney informed the Board that their new member, Suzanne Prince, had been appointed in November and her first meeting would be in February. He noted that there would not be a regular meeting in January, but a Land Use Committee meeting would be held, with the potential for Code and Operations, depending on the status of text amendments. Staff was working on changes to RTP requests to zoning applications in their jurisdiction. Additional updates to Environmental Services and Bed and Breakfast Home Stay Language are also underway. Mr. Maloney also added that the March meeting would include presentations from RDU and the Convention Center.

Mr. Jenkins asked if it would be possible to hear from the Lenovo Center alongside RDU and the Convention Center. Mr. Van Dyk asked for clarity if the Lenovo Center was in the County or City of Raleigh, and Mr. Nishawala responded it was not in their Planning Jurisdiction.

9. Chairman's Report

Mr. Wells noted the critical importance of communication, and thanked staff for making sure that the citizens in Garner and the Western Wake Area Plan felt their concerns were heard. He stated that consensus may not always be possible, but that listening and maintaining open lines of communication were important.

10. Adjournment

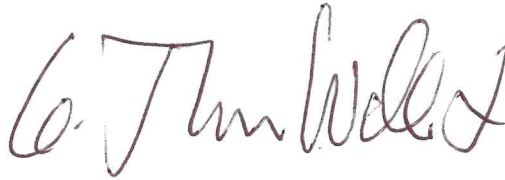
The meeting was adjourned at 2:47 p.m.

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REGULAR MEETING
WAKE COUNTY PLANNING BOARD
December 4, 2024

Chair Thomas Wells declared the regular meeting
of the Wake County Planning Board for
Wednesday, December 4, 2024, adjourned at 2:47 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "G. Thomas Wells", written in a cursive style.

Thomas Wells
Wake County Planning Board

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