

Hearing was about watershed rezoning, not 751 development

The [Durham] Herald Sun (Guest Column, 24 Oct 2009).

Like Mark Avitable, Herald Sun Guest Column author (Oct 15) and avid supporter of the not-yet-determined 751 Assemblage development rezoning, I was present throughout the Jordan Lake Rezoning public hearing (Oct 12).

Despite his subjective and insubstantial arguments, I feel I must correct several statements.

First, Avitable directs his article at opponents of the 'proposed *development*.' The hearing concerned the *WATERSHED REZONING*, not the 751 Assemblage. [Interestingly, the October 10th Herald Sun Editorial makes the same mistake.]

Board of County Commissioners Chairman Michael Page should have disallowed any statements regarding the development as clearly off topic. Of course, this would mean Avitable, like many proponents, would have nothing to say.

Second, regarding Avitable's off-topic contention that such development "does not necessarily pull away investment and business from other areas of Durham," he must not be familiar with (particularly South) Durham, where retail/office space (including Southpoint Mall and surrounds, Highway 54 and 751, and Highway 54 and 55) are severely vacating, and 'for lease' signs permeate. Avitable would probably argue this is cause for more retail/office development -- though I can't see any rational angle, I've learned not to underestimate 751 Assemblage proponents.

Third, Avitable complains that opponents 'focused' on arguing that "the proposed mixed-use development will only benefit wealthy, white residents."

In fact, only two opponents made direct economic arguments-- Kathryn Spann, 2008 Soil and Water Conservation candidate, and David Krabbe, 35-year construction industry veteran. These were in response to proponents supporting the *watershed* rezoning based on 751 developers' unfounded promise of approximately 3000 low-median income jobs.

Spann and Krabbe demonstrated, analytically, that the developers' economic numbers are grossly inflated. *One* analysis revealed that their projected property tax revenues require combined incomes of approximately \$230,000/year for 751 Assemblage homeowners. Durham's average income is ~\$48,000/year, arguing against the reality of the developers' numbers-- and against their assertions that citizens would live *and* work here, since retail jobs generally pay lower than the median.

Furthermore, this development is at the county's southern edge. There's no indication of extending mass-transit/bus out here, so it's even less likely that inner-city residents, who most drastically need jobs (referencing Wagstaff and others) will commute to work here. Regarding Avitable's contention that 751 residents will provide employment through landscaping, daycare, cleaning, etc., the same argument holds. It is absurd to approve this *watershed rezoning* based on blind acceptance of the highly controversial hypothesis of 'trickle-down economics.'

As for Avitable's 'race-baiting' accusations, I only heard mention of race when Wagstaff heatedly and divisively argued the 'other side' was not 'diverse' enough, implying that the opponents were all 'white, wealthy residents.' (Darius Little further discriminated by gender, arguing the opponents are all housewives -- 'hens' trying to rule the roost.)

I was insulted by this racism. I am Polish-Lithuanian (from immigrants during WWII), and

other opponents are of British, Welsh, Irish, Italian, Ukrainian, French, German, Jewish, Middle-eastern, Hispanic, Asian, and yes even *AFRICAN* descent.

If Avitable and Wagstaff bothered to do any homework, they'd realize that many *signatures* on the protest petition against this watershed rezoning (submitted to planning on Oct 5, and therefore public knowledge) were African American. Of course, it is fitting to assume that inquiring into such factors is racist in its own right.

Thus, if anyone is 'race-baiting,' it's Avitable, Wagstaff, Little, ... oh, and perhaps those development team members associated with the Friends of Durham (a decidedly developer-based group), who in this case seem *only* to have 'reached out' to the Committee for the Affairs of Black People -- a group of whom they once said:

"The committee doesn't care about black people; and it certainly does not care about white people or brown people. It cares only about getting its hands on the County's budget, finding government jobs for its otherwise unemployable insiders, and obtaining power over you. It is counting on your apathy and failure to vote to help it gain and consolidate its control over Durham ... We will not be 'taken over' by the Durham Committee... Let's make the Durham Committee's efforts as big a fiasco as their boycott of Northgate Mall."

--Friends of Durham Newsletter, August 2002, Patrick Byker Chairman.

[Patrick Byker is the K&L gates attorney, employed by the developers since the 751 Assemblage project's onset, who joined Wagstaff, Lavonia Allison, etc., in supporting the watershed rezoning Oct 12.]

Before I moved to Durham, I thought water was colorless. Jordan Lake clean-up costs certainly are, and will be long into the future.