

2007

Chris Smithson, Southern Pines native, resident, and Councilmember

Now the holidays are over, I'm sure the "fun" around town will kick into high gear again. Here are a few of the things I am thinking about for 2007. Beware; some of it is a bit feisty.

PUD/Pine Needles Debate: The PUD part seems to be nearing a conclusion. Hopefully the town will finally get the chance to review an application from Pine Needles and see if the specific project might be a good thing for the town. "No Growthers" will probably continue to bash the council for not locking the gates to the town. The "Business/Growth at All Costs" crowd will also probably continue to bash the council for locking the gates to the town. I always chuckle thinking about how two completely opposing groups can accuse us of caving in to the other at the same time.

Municipal Elections: Two Councilmember seats and the Mayor are up for election this year. Will the "no-growth" crowd try to put up a candidate(s)? Will the "business at any cost" crowd put up a candidate(s)? Will the incumbents run again? There are lots of rumors but nothing for sure at this point.

New Municipal Building(s): One or more buildings should begin construction this year. Where will they be and what will they look like?

Morganton Rd: It is very likely significant development will start on the south side of Morganton Rd this year. Although that area has been zoned to allow significant retail there for many years I'm sure someone will be "surprised" and try to stop it. I certainly think someone will protest the removal of trees on the property and being a newcomer will not know the real fuss was 20 years ago when the *real* trees were clear cut there. Others will either not care or will be happy we're finally getting certain stores we're "missing" (maybe a Target, etc.). Whatever development happens there should be of a very high quality and will be significantly different than other new retail developments put up in the area in the past. BTW, I am told that the Kmart building has sold, but I don't have info on the plans for the building.

Growth: We'll probably pass 12,000 in population this year. Even if some people were to get their way and stop anyone else from moving here, people will still move nearby, causing as much or more of an impact. Will we ever be able to get the legislature to allow local governments to force growth to help pay for itself or will the deep-pocketed builders and realtors with their lobbies in Raleigh continue to keep the burden of growth on the backs of the existing population? Why not call your realtor and tell them you don't want to have to pay to build a school for someone who has not even moved here yet. They'll probably tell you impact fees will make housing less affordable, especially for people of more modest income. I ask, is housing still affordable if one's yearly property

taxes have to be hiked up astronomically to pay for \$140+ million in new schools, not to mention other construction needs? What about simple fairness?

To all the “no growers” there, I say get your heads out of the sand. A LOT OF PEOPLE WILL BE MOVING HERE and there is pretty much nothing we can do to stop it. In light of that fact, we have to do our best to minimize the negative impacts of that growth. There are a lot of ways to do that, but pretending we can stop growth is not one of them. It’s really the responsibility of the whole county to address this issue, but there doesn’t seem to be a lot going on.

Just because other entities are not addressing growth needs as much as we might like, it doesn’t mean we don’t have to do our part and do what’s right. It’s kind of like the water situation here in the late 1970’s. Nobody else in the county wanted to go in on a new water treatment plant, so we chose to go it alone to take care of our interests. Now, Southern Pines is in pretty good shape with water while the county undertakes yet another water study. I have a copy of a study from the late 70’s and can tell you no new rivers or aquifers have appeared around here in the last 30 years. I don’t know what we’ll learn this time. There’s all this feel-good talk about how all the systems need to be interconnected, but the reality is that they already are mostly interconnected. Robbins is on its own and there are people out there pushing for running pipes all the way from there down to Seven Lakes, but it’s not going to be cheap. If the County decides to run that line, pay attention to how it is funded. Pinehurst will likely push for it to be funded with *your* tax money instead of through utility rates increases on their water (they’re on the County system).

Water: Since I’m on the subject of water. We will continue to move forward towards building the town’s new raw water reservoir. With the greatly increased capacity, a situation like we had in the drought of 2002 is almost impossible. With increased conservation in a time of need, we would have enough water for perhaps a month of usage even if our source completely dried up. That doesn’t even take into account interconnections put in place since then allowing us to get water from Aberdeen, among other places. We should be able to take care of ourselves and help others too. Oh yeah, when we sell water to others it keeps our rates down.

Agree or disagree with what you just read? Want to provide feedback? Please do so. It’s not even necessary to send anonymous letters or create anonymous “concerned citizens” websites. Just send an e-mail. e-mail: Chris@ChrisSmithson.com