

*This is a statement I read to the County Commissioners on 5-15-06 regarding their proposed resolution to end involuntary annexation.*

Mr. Chairman, Commissioners:

My Name is Chris Smithson. I live at 920 North Saylor St. in Southern Pines. I am a citizen of Southern Pines, member of the Town Council, and most importantly for you, a resident of Moore County.

Let me say that last part again. I am a resident of Moore County. For far too long, the board of Commissioners seems to have forgotten that they serve ALL the voters.

I am here today in opposition to your proposed resolution regarding annexation.

First, we'll focus on the four largest towns: Southern Pines, Pinehurst, Aberdeen, and Whispering Pines. My information comes from published government sources.

These four towns make up 6% of the County's Land area  
They make up 36% of the County's population  
They pay well over 50% of the total real estate tax levy for the entire county.

6% of the land houses over 36% of the population, and contributes the majority of property taxes to the county budget. At the same time, the county provides minimal or no services to these county taxpayers in many areas. Just three examples are:

-Recreation Dept- \$735,000

-Planning Dept- \$1 million

-Sherriff's Dept-almost \$5 million

The proposed resolution states, among other things, "...it no longer seems necessary for municipalities to undertake involuntary annexation in order to provide local public services..."

A year ago, the UNC center for Civil Rights brought the nation's attention to what they considered disparities within our county. They focused on areas like Jackson Hamlet, Midway, Waynor Rd, and Lost City. The issue was that these small unincorporated "county" areas did not receive the same level of "local public services" that were available in the surrounding towns and other county areas. Some of the press was unfair, but not completely so. Integral to this issue is that the practical and moral solution to the problem is for the municipalities to annex them and begin providing services that the county is apparently unwilling, or more accurately, incapable of providing to suburban or urban development. If your proposed resolution is followed, these areas so in need of services will continue to languish, ignored by the county government responsible for providing services to them. Is that the message you want to send to these county citizens? Is that the message you want to send to the UNC Center for Civil Rights? Is that the message you want to send to the front page of the New York Times ...again?

As I mentioned earlier, the small percentage of the County that is municipal already subsidizes county services they don't receive. Why in the world would the county NOT want more areas to become municipal? It costs the county LESS if a property is located within a municipality. The only loss to the county is a small amount of sales tax revenue, which is surely more than offset by decreased county services and higher property values. The higher density of municipalities also means that services the county still provides, such as schools, cost less.

I ask you, MY county commissioners, to not let private gated communities or the rhetoric of the millionaire-backed crowd in Raleigh dictate how the County and its municipalities will deal with the inevitable and rapid growth we have experienced and will experience over the next few years. The county already has a say in annexations when it considers applications for extensions of municipal Extra-Territorial Jurisdictions. For sure, judge the new applications for extensions more carefully, but don't throw the baby out with the bath water.

Thank You