

## Statement on Moratorium 5/13/08

-Chris Smithson, Southern Pines native, resident, and Councilmember

The word “moratorium” seems to be a word that means something different to just about everyone.

Some choose to believe and tell others that the proposed moratorium ordinance before us is some kind of attempt at stopping development in Southern Pines. Considering that the moratorium would still allow approximately three thousand homes to be built in already-approved developments, such inaccurate doomsday interpretations certainly do not hold water. Significant commercial development and redevelopment is also possible even if the moratorium passes.

This moratorium proposal comes down to the town’s 1988 Land Development Plan and the fact that the Council has failed to review it since it was adopted. This is despite the fact that the ordinance specifically states it should be reviewed every three to five years. At best, we are fifteen years behind schedule.

Some have argued that the plan just needs to be dusted off and some of the numbers updated to reflect current conditions. Others have more harsh opinions of it. Either way, a review is far overdue. It is so far overdue in fact that we must take some drastic measures, like a moratorium, to ensure we are still heading in the right direction.

For far too long, the Council, or at least a majority of the Council, has failed in its duties as stewards of the town. Leith, Pine Needles, and other controversies could have been avoided or diminished if the Council had not been asleep at the wheel. Only in the face of an outraged citizenry who said they would no longer accept outdated plans and “trust us” assurances, did the Council finally consent to begin the much-belated process of updating our Land Development Plan. A year later, we are only now beginning the process.

Some of the biggest critics of the proposed moratorium are current and past Council members. I have served with some of them while others came before me.

To them, I ask why did you not update this plan? Why did you not proactively review the zoning map and UDO for anomalies? Perhaps, most importantly, why in the six years between December 1997 and December 2003, did you fail to hold twenty-eight\* regular Tuesday meetings like the one we are holding tonight? That's 40%! That's a total of more than two years that citizens could not attend meetings like this one and be heard. Should this ordinance pass tonight and you are not in agreement, blame not those who voted in favor of it, blame those who through their many years of inaction and apathy forced this situation upon us.

If the last two tumultuous years have taught us anything, it is that the people of Southern Pines care about the future of their town and want to have a say in how it grows. For sure, they have a say every two years at election time, but it is clearly important that they also participate in a planning process that creates a guiding vision for reference by whoever holds elected office. If not for the fact that our current plan is fifteen years overdue for review, I might agree we could do a review without a moratorium. Things can change over a period of twenty years. We owe it to the town to do what we must to get things back up to date and keep them that way.

A moratorium of up to one year cannot erase years of neglect, but it sure will be a good start. Some people won't like it, but I'll go with the advice former Mayor Bowness gave to the Council when he retired from the Council in 1993. He said, "it would be better at the end of my term to have made a few people mad at me for what I had done rather than making everyone mad at me for having done nothing."

\*Number based on lack of meeting minutes for regular meetings in specific months during that period. See chart of missed meetings below. Available minutes are online at [www.southernpines.net](http://www.southernpines.net)

2003	October	July	April	March	January	
2002	August	July	March	January		
2001	October	August	July	March	Feb	January
2000	December	November	August	July	April	January
1999	January					
1998	December	July	April	March	Feb	January