

Recently, Ron Jackson, owner of the Independent, a board member of the Moore County Homebuilder's Association, and a builder and commercial property owner, wrote an article likening zoning laws to terrorism.

Much of the article deals with the subject of overly-stringent residential architectural and appearance standards and how he believes it will contribute to a shortage of affordable housing. To a certain extent, I agree. When municipal residential aesthetic standards outside of certain historically significant areas get more stringent than even the most zealous homeowner's association covenants, it might be going too far. However, the real issue here is not about municipal zoning, it's about affordable housing and where it can be built.

Many tout the impact of retirees and tourists as "low impact" to our community. Boosters point to their lack of need for schools and their higher-than-average incomes. There are advantages to an economy largely based on retirement and tourism. We have more and better restaurants than an area like ours would normally have. The same goes for the number of nice golf courses, upscale grocery stores, hotels and spa facilities, and medical care. None of that would be here if not for the large number of retirees and tourists coming here.

Did I just say that retirement and tourism bring in all these businesses that wouldn't normally be here? If that's true, is there not an impact? Who builds all these places? Who waits all those tables? Who stocks those shelves? Who mows the grass? Who gives a pedicure? Who cleans all those rooms? The answer, of course, is those things are all performed by non-retirees and non-tourists. Unlike retirees and tourists, those working to provide services to them are much more likely to utilize schools and other community resources.

They also need a place to live. Some say we need to set aside areas where you can build smaller houses on smaller lots. That's a pretty good idea, but where do we do that? Southern Pines is mostly platted and built out. Additionally, there is a great deal of pressure by business interests to rezone to commercial many of the smaller and more affordable residential properties. Pinehurst is pretty much completely platted with a good number of available lots, but the land may already be too expensive for many. Whispering Pines just opened up a fair amount of land for residential growth, but it was pretty controversial just to get the lot sizes down to ½ acre- not exactly "small." Aberdeen may have a little room, but I'd need to study their situation a bit more to know for sure. The bottom line, however, is that most of the municipalities are either almost "full" or are already priced out of the "small affordable lot" category.

That leaves things to land located in county territory. Unfortunately, there are obstacles there too. First, once you get outside the municipalities, sewer and water availability drastically drop off. You cannot build tons small houses on small lots without access to utilities. Septic systems and wells are a no-no under those conditions. Additionally, most of the zoning in the county is of a low-density "rural agricultural" nature, so even if one had utility access, they'd have to change the county's zoning plan too. The County

Commissioners recently unanimously denied the Stafford Land Company's request to rezone some rural property down to two-acre lots. If two acres is too small for the county, how can we get these smaller lots with more affordable homes? When the County enacted its land use plan several years ago, it was almost entirely focused on retaining the county's "rural agricultural nature."

Moore County is expected to grow tremendously in the next 20 years. As residential property is scooped up more and more by retirees and higher income professionals, prices will continue to rise. This growth requires even more service industry workers and trades people. There won't be room or options left for them in the towns. Where will they go? This is a question for the entire county, not just the southern end. Every person in the county is affected by what happens in the municipalities.