

Sure, Let Them Vote On It but Let Them **All** Vote

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

I normally do not comment on things involving Pinehurst as it drives me crazy when people from Pinehurst try to tell us how to do things, but this is mostly about Pinewild, which is not currently in Pinehurst. Besides, the Pinewild anti-annexation crowd drags us into the fight with their “kitchen sink” approach to highlighting the “evils” of NC annexation law.

First, I’ll get to the main point, which involves allowing for a vote to decide whether or not Pinewild should be annexed into Pinehurst. The law does not require a vote, but I think there is a way to make it fair. Instead of the vote being only among residents of Pinewild, it should also include all current residents of Pinehurst. That way, current residents who are already paying Pinehurst taxes and their fair share of the quality of life that Pinehurst provides can speak as to whether or not they think their Pinewild neighbors should continue enjoying Pinehurst living without paying municipal taxes. On several occasions I have overheard Pinewild residents bragging to others how they “live in Pinehurst but don’t have to pay city taxes,” so I know at least some of them know what they are getting away with.

As far as dragging Southern Pines and other Moore local governments into the fray goes, the Pinewild anti-annexation crowd and their friends at Stop NC Annexation, are quick to bring up the Waynor Road, Jackson Hamlet, and Midway neighborhoods as some kind of “proof” that involuntary annexation is wrong. Frankly, I think it is shameful that they use this tactic, especially since they know (or should know) the situations in those neighborhoods have almost no similarities to those areas fighting annexation, especially Pinewild. For one, none of the areas mentioned are populated densely enough that they CAN be subject to involuntary annexation. Of course, that does not stop annexation opponents from implying that local municipalities are only interested in high-dollar annexations while ignoring poorer neighborhoods. The real irony is that these neighborhoods would likely benefit more if the rules involving involuntary annexation were relaxed to make it *easier* for municipalities to annex them. If the anti-annexation crowd gets their way, it can only hurt those neighborhoods they pretend to care about.

There are needs in the Waynor Road, Jackson Hamlet, and Midway neighborhoods and local governments are working to address them as finances and regulations allow. For example, water and sewer will soon be in place in the Waynor Road area and the neighborhood will legally be part Southern Pines. This is only possible because of help from funding from Southern Pines, Community Development Block Grants, the UNC Center for Civil Rights, and the fact that all the property owners are applying for annexation. The fight against involuntary annexation does not help this neighborhood one bit, so you may want to take what opponents have to say about it with several grains of salt.

Pinewild’s annexation opponents and their friends in the fight against involuntary annexation probably would not like the results if the referenda they ask for also allowed current municipal residents to speak too. They also need to stop using certain “underbounded” neighborhoods as disingenuous “proof” of the unfairness of forced annexation.