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Williams Corner: How Did We Get Here?

by Randolph S. Voller

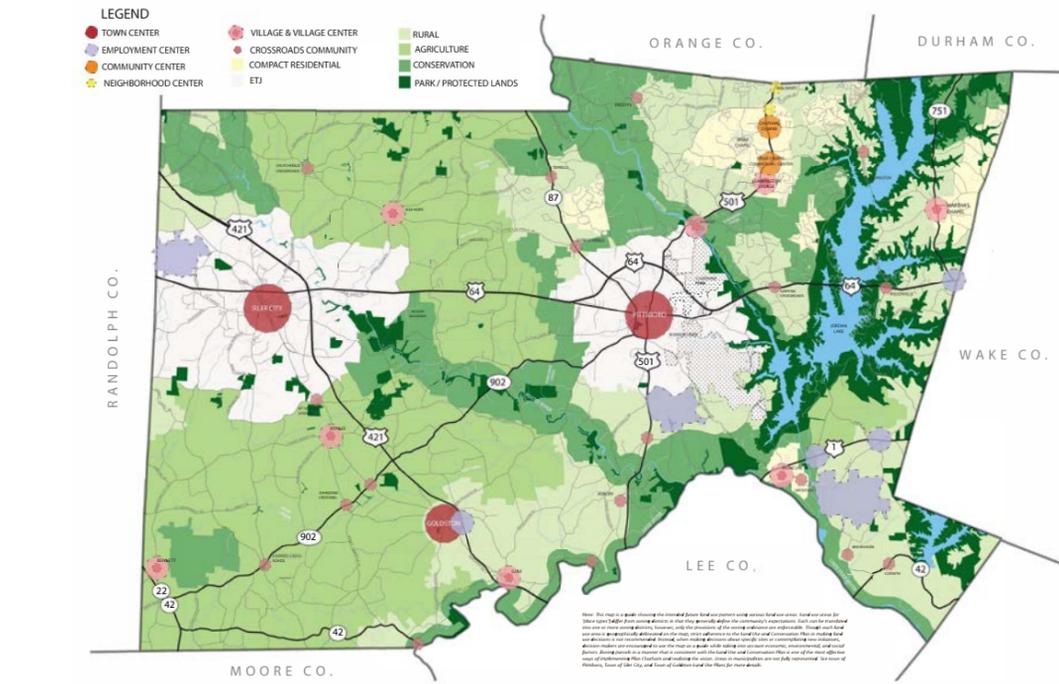
Development pressures have been a vexing issue in Chatham County for the past twenty years. Development issues have played a central role in every primary and general election since 1998 when popular County Commissioner Betty Wilson was ousted in the Democratic Primary by Carl Outz.

The battle over the direction of development planning for Chatham County reached a fever pitch during the 2002 primary season when pro-growth challenger, Bunkey Morgan, edged out the incumbent Chairman, Gary Phillips. The course was again reversed in 2006 with the election of smart growth advocates George Lucier, Carl Thompson, Tom Vanderbeck who swept out Emerson, Morgan and Outz in the democratic primary.

Besides the controversial approval of Briar Chapel, the impetus behind the political change in 2006 was the number of plans and subdivisions approved by the county board of commissioners led by Morgan and the failure to have an approved land use plan and map at the ready to inform and guide the process. This double gut shot gave the unfortunate impression, whether true or not, that the county was flying blind and under the thrall of the pave over America crowd.

Subsequent elections replaced the Lucier, Thompson and Vandebeck board in 2010 with a Republican slate of Brian Bock, Pamela Stewart and Walter Petty who were then beaten in 2014, 2016, and 2018 by the current Democratic county board majority of Jim Crawford, Mike Dasher, Diana Hales, and Karen Howard.

The relative stability of the board of commissioners since November of 2014 allowed the current board, led



by commissioners Jim Crawford and Diana Hales and their advisory boards, to study and address the issues of land planning and countywide zoning fully. This resulted in approval of a Comprehensive Land Use Plan on November 20th, 2017. The approval was adopted, in the words of Chatham County, “after careful analysis, extensive public input, many meetings, and thorough

vetting over the course of two years.” The plan is intended to be a “long range document establishing policy that sets forth goals and feasible implementation steps for the next 25 years.” The plan’s approval, after nearly 20 years of political

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Star Power

by Lisa Neal



I have just had the rug pulled out from under me. I don’t know what to believe anymore. A couple of decades ago I came across a terrific astronomy book, written for the lay person, which opened my mind and heart to the heavens like never before. It is called *Secrets of the Night Sky: The Most Amazing Things in the Universe You Can See with the Naked Eye* by Bob Berman. It gave me hours of entertainment, to read about various phenomena and then seek them out in the sky. I learned to spot human-launched satellites, in the first couple of hours after twilight, during their season of best visibility from May to August, zipping across the sky one right after the other. I found out that, if I could travel fast enough to get from New York to Tokyo in 1/20th of a second, then I would need 10 million years to reach M81, one of our closest neighboring galaxies.

Published in 1995, *Secrets of the Night Sky* has been a cherished resource for me, even though some facts have changed with time. For example, Mr. Berman said that the expansion of the universe was slowing down—which was what many astronomers thought at the time—but, in fact, it was and is accelerating. For the most part, though, much of the information in the book, backed by oh-so-many laws of physics, has felt as relevant to me today as it did when I first discovered the text in the late Nineties. I enjoy the author’s wit. I admire his gift of relating the vast distances, speeds and forces to smaller-scale analogies, which we can better comprehend.

There is a chapter in the book that I especially like,

having to do with the bright star called Betelgeuse, found in the constellation Orion. (Betelgeuse is pronounced several acceptable ways in English. A common one is “beetle juice”, which I prefer, because it’s fun to say). This star is a red giant, an enormous star that dwarfs our own sun. According to Berman’s book, if Betelgeuse were the center of our solar system, instead of

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our Sun, then it would stretch out so far that the Earth would be contained well within it. This huge star also “breathes” in and out, contracting and expanding. In its inflated state, it would reach all the way out to Jupiter.

Now for my favorite two facts from the book concerning this giant star. The first one is that it is the “largest single thing” that we will ever see with the naked eye. The second one is that, if the diameter

of Betelgeuse were the height of a 20-story building, then the diameter of Earth would be “the period at the end of this sentence.” Wow! Just let that one sink in.

Hanging above the equator, Betelgeuse can be seen throughout the world. Over the years I have enjoyed being outdoors at night, sometimes with friends, looking up at Orion. In the Northern Hemisphere, Orion is a winter constellation, commonly viewed in January, February, and March after dark and before bedtime. If I am stargazing with others, someone might say, “Hey, there’s Orion’s Belt” or mention the Orion Nebula located in the scabbard hanging down from the belt, which is a nursery of newborn stars. Or they may know very

little about the night sky and ask if anybody knows what those three stars in a row are, and I or someone else will answer, “That’s Orion’s Belt.” And, of course, then I’ll bring up Betelgeuse, my favorite star topic. I’ll say something like, “See that bright red star above Orion’s Belt? Orion’s left shoulder? That’s Betelgeuse.”

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