

CHATHAM County Line

where all voices are heard



www.chathamcountyline.org

FOCUS: CHATHAM PARK CONTROVERSY

INSIDE:



FEARRINGTON
FOLK ART SHOW
Page 9



SIBLING RIVALRY
Page 6

ONLY@CHATHAMCOUNTYLINE.ORG

ALARMING SUICIDE RATE
FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

Vol. 13, Issue 1

FREE ~ GRATIS

February, 2015

Chatham Park economic study raises troubling questions

By Jeffrey Starkweather

As a former seven-year board member of the Chatham County Economic

OPINION

Development Corporation, I am deeply troubled by the EDC's recent publication and promotion of a questionable assessment of the economic benefits of Chatham Park. The study and press release made the astounding claim that Chatham Park "will" generate \$80 billion in economic benefits — including 61,000 jobs — for Chatham County.

No wonder the study is raising more questions than answers about what the developers hope will be one of the largest mixed-use developments in the nation, on the scale of Reston in Virginia. First, it was financed by Chatham Park developers, a fact that the EDC neglected to mention before it began its public relations blitz. It also was based on data and assumptions provided by Chatham Park developers — all of its public records that at press time had still not been shared with the public.

It is especially troubling that the county's official economic development organization has allowed itself to publish a one-sided public relations aid for outside developers who have refused to allow essential independent professional assessments of the environmental, fiscal, traffic and socio-economic impacts of their massive development. Meanwhile local citizens raising legitimate concerns about the development's master plan can't help but feel that the EDC — a public county agency — has abandoned the concerns and interests of Chatham County residents.

This is a complicated and important matter. I'd like to briefly address some of the limitations that experts have raised about the assessment tool used for this study; indicate how this type of "benefits" assessment should only be used in conjunction with more important "cost" impact assessments; and make suggestions about how the county should address these issues, especially the proper role of the EDC.

WHY ARE WE RELYING ON A ONE-SIDED MODEL?

The IMPLAN tool used in the EDC assessment is a static mathematical model not appropriate for evaluating the massive multi-use Chatham Park proposal, which could take 40 years to fulfill. According to UNC School of Government Professor Jonathan Morgan, this model assumes all economic factors remain constant, which is unrealistic for the long term. This type of assessment is primarily useful for looking at the impact of a large prospective employer whose labor force will reach its peak in a few years.

The model is based on a best-case scenario development build-out. The EDC study author

TRUUBLING CONTINUED, PAGE 8

Chatham EDC has always supported Chatham Park

by Dianne Read

In November 2013, the Chatham Economic Development Corporation's board of directors unanimously approved a motion to adopt a resolution supporting the 7,100-acre Chatham Park project. The resolution was written and signed by Larry Hicks and Keith Hurand, board co-chairs at the time, on November 26, 2013. The minutes and resolution are available here: bit.ly/chathamparkresolution

Since that time, the Chatham EDC has publicly promoted and supported the mixed-use development. In February 2014, an article titled 'Why Chatham Park Matters' published in this paper outlines the problems with Chatham County as an unsustainable bedroom community, and further explains how Chatham Park's plans could help balance the tax base,

provide better local employment opportunities and improve access to basic goods and services for residents. The entire piece can be read here: bit.ly/whychathamparkmatters

The commercial components of Chatham Park align with Chatham EDC's goals of creating good, well-paying jobs and increasing the commercial tax base. By providing opportunities to live, work and get services within the community, Chatham Park can help reduce the out-commuting and stem the county's loss of retail sales to neighboring counties.

Because of the project's scale, Chatham EDC and the Chatham Park developers agreed that it was important to assess the economic

OPINION

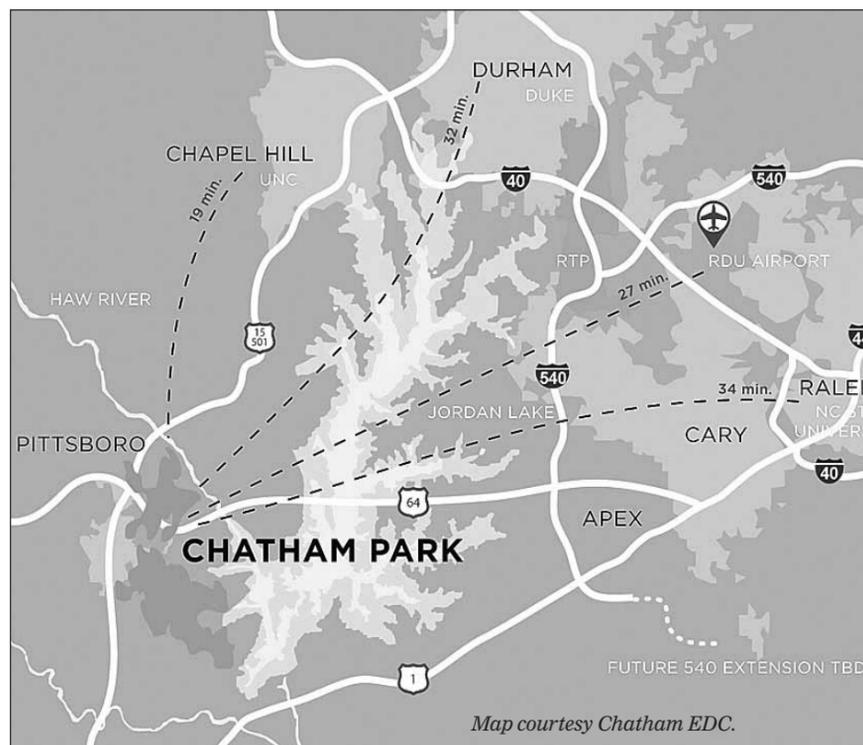
impact of the project over its full forty year life. Dr. Michael Walden, an accomplished North Carolina State University economist who has conducted hundreds of such studies, was the obvious choice to perform the study.

The Chatham EDC, as the lead economic development agency in the county, contracted with NC State University to perform the study with Dr. Walden as the principal investigator.

The EDC does not have a budget for studies of this sort and Chatham Park deemed the work important enough to provide funding earmarked for this purpose. The total cost of the contract was \$22,664, which was paid to the NCSU Office of Grants and Contracts by Chatham Economic Development Corporation.

Questions have been raised about the IMPLAN (Impact analysis for PLANning) tool, used for analyzing economic impact in the study. IMPLAN has been used for economic impact modeling since 1976. It is the most widely-used software for economic impact data in the United States. The limitations of the study were clearly identified in the study itself. The parameters for investment originated from the developer. Housing and commercial data is available in the Chatham

PARK CONTINUED, PAGE 8



The Haw River is a living organism

by Joe Jacob

When you cross over the Haw River while driving on Hwy. 15-501, do you ever wonder where the water comes from? Do you ever ask yourself, what a river is?

The Haw River originates in Forsythe County when pure water comes out of two springs on land owned and protected by the Haw River Assembly. That spring water then joins with water from several large creeks to flow 110 miles through Rockingham, Guilford, Alamance, Orange and Chatham Counties to its junction with the Deep River a mile downriver from the dam that created Jordan Lake. Then, it is on its way to the Atlantic Ocean as part of the Cape Fear River.

So, where does that spring water come from? Rain that seeps into the ground of course, but where does the rain come from? Warm water vapor over the oceans evaporates

View of the Haw from Chicken Bridge.
PHOTO BY JULIAN SERENO



HAW CONTINUED, PAGE 4