

# CHATHAM County Line

where all voices are heard



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FREE ~ GRATIS

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## Pittsboro Matters doesn't really matter anymore

I have been following the comings and goings of the Chatham County Commission and the Pittsboro Town government and elected officials for years.

It is obvious that after the real estate recession of 2008 created "zombie subdivisions" and slowed growth in Chatham County, we are again having discussions about growth.

I am seeing more concrete trucks, dump trucks and lumber trucks on the roadways and more emails and online messaging from groups such as Pittsboro Matters, who are concerned with growth, specifically Chatham Park.

And frankly, I am on the same side of most issues and values with a majority of the folks who support Pittsboro Matters and I believe that they raise compelling points for the discussion on growth and other related subjects such as affordable housing and climate change.

I remember moving to Northern Chatham County decades ago and seeing beavers, otters, quail, small green herons, and other amazing and rare species of wildlife in and around my pond.

I enjoyed the experience, but these wildlife friends left many years ago when the development brainchild of Harold Williams, Highland Forest, first came to Chatham County.

But ultimately I understood the balance we were trying to strike in Chatham County and I continued to advocate for planned growth.

What bothers me about the debate that Pittsboro Matters has engendered over the past two and a half years, is the tone of their communications and public statements, their tactics and their willingness to quickly push a half truth or a theory before verifying all of the information.

A half truth is also half untrue and to me that is a problem.

Whether it is disregarding inconvenient facts or just sloppy work, Pittsboro Matters is doing a disservice to itself and the community.

For example, for over two years we have heard about the many legal members they have or constituents in the community. Amanda Robertson, its chair, represented in a statement to the Pittsboro Town Board on June 22, 2015 that they have over 600 constituents or members.

She later repeated a similar number in one of her letters to the Chatham Record during the fall of 2015.

Jeffrey Starkweather, its vice-chair and founder, represented in a notarized affidavit in 2014 to the Superior Court in Chatham County that Pittsboro Matters had 200 members. Pittsboro Matters is a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation and that affidavit was offered as proof that it actually had legal members in its court filing last fall with the Superior Court.

A funny thing happened. The Court found it didn't have any members — zero — in its order dated December 9, 2015. The notation by the Judge was in part influenced by the sloppy

**OPINION**  
by Virginia Penley

**OPINION**  
By Amanda Robertson

## Facts Matter

The Board of Directors of Pittsboro Matters believes readers of the *Chatham County Line* deserve to know the facts concerning false statements recently made by Virginia Penley regarding our ongoing lawsuit and appeal involving the Town of Pittsboro and intervenor,

Chatham Park Investors. In this regard, we consider Penley's attack to be a diversionary tactic designed to draw public attention away from serious questions involving her colleague and mentor, former Pittsboro Mayor Randy Voller. These questions need to be answered for the public now.

1. Under what authority does Randy Voller organize secret meetings with county and town commissioners and CPI to help sell the idea of having the public help finance Chatham Park's infrastructure?

2. Is Randy Voller a paid employee/consultant of CPI?

3. Is Jim Goodnight still financially backing CPI?

4. If so, why does CPI suddenly need Pittsboro and Chatham County to financially support their infrastructure development?

The public waits for Voller and CPI to answer these questions before Chatham County taxpayers are hooked into providing millions of dollars for either direct or indirect financing of any part of Chatham Park.

We have consulted with our attorney, Robert Hornik, on the following specific claims Virginia Penley, who is not an attorney, has made. His points, in *italics*, highlight the inaccurate claims made by Ms. Penley.

1. Regarding Penley's claim that the Court found in its order that we have zero members: *The Court did NOT find that Pittsboro Matters has no members; the Court said in paragraph 8 of its Order that a factual dispute existed on the question.*

In fact, our lawsuit states that we have more than 200 members. This was not challenged by CPI. They asserted only a minor filing error, which we have since corrected. (See below)

2. Regarding Penley's claim that Pittsboro Matters has been "sloppy with our paperwork": *Perhaps instead we should consider our first and second lawsuits where the Town and CPI denied outright that there had been any procedural errors on their part, as we alleged in our Complaints, but then turned around and corrected the very same procedures we said had been improperly performed, or not performed at all.*

Penley's claim of "sloppiness" has to do with a mistake involving checking the wrong box on a form, which has no bearing on our member's status per the NC Secretary of State's office.

3. Penley claimed our case was dismissed with prejudice because it "lacked credibility." *There was never a question of "credibility." The judge said that even if the facts we alleged were true, he didn't think we had stated a legal claim for relief.*

This was surprising to our attorney, and one of many reasons for our appeal.

4. Penley claimed that for a civil matter a dismissal with prejudice is over forever. *This again is false if that Order is being appealed, which it is. Regardless, if it is ultimately upheld,*

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**FACTS CONTINUED, PAGE 11**

## A healthy economy depends on a healthy environment

by Joe Jacob

By now, if you have read any of my previous articles, you know that I like to reference quotes from thoughtful people. To quote Dr. Guy McPherson, "If you think the environment is less important than the economy, try holding your breath while you count your money."

Why is it that we often think we must sacrifice the "environment" for the sake of the "economy"? In the dictionary you will find the word economy defined as the wealth and resources of a country or region. You will find the word ecology defined as the branch of biology that deals with the relationships of organisms to one another and to their environment. Obviously, there is a connection between the words ecology and economy. They both start with *eco* which is Latin from *oeco* which means house or household. For me, it does not take much brain power to come to the conclusion that if we have a healthy environment, then we will have a healthy economy. Another way of saying that is "keep your house in order and things will go well. Don't keep your house in order and expect that things will get worse".

For over six years the world's nations grappled over the issue of climate change. In this country, many conservatives just did not see the connection between human actions and a warming climate with wild changes in weather patterns and changing sea conditions. Six years later, there are still non-believers. I suppose that after Christopher Columbus

returned to Europe, there were still those who believed that the world was flat. Why is it that change often comes so slowly even in the face of facts?

One of my favorite books is "Ishmael" written by Don Quinn. The book begins with a classified ad that reads "teacher seeks pupil, must be willing to save the world, apply in person". A man in his mid-life answers the ad and finds that a gorilla named Ishmael becomes his teacher. Like all good teachers, Ishmael tries not to directly answer the man's questions. He leads him to seek the answers. Most of the questions of why things are the way they are is because Mother Culture has always done it that way. Ignoring the facts, it is Mother Culture that judges things to be a certain way. It is Mother Culture that kept people thinking the world was flat. It is Mother Culture that keeps us believing that we can continue to poison the earth and alter our environment because the economy is more important. Mother Culture is failing to see the connection between a healthy environment and a healthy economy.

Mother Culture has a lot to learn from Mother Nature. Take the Haw River for an example. There was a time when the Haw River changed colors daily depending on what dyes the textile mills were using. It was Mother Culture that said polluted water was necessary for a healthy economy. Today, Mother Culture is saying that a plan to clean up Jordan Lake to improve drinking water for thousands of people living in the Triangle is too expensive or too restrictive and will hurt the economy. The Clean Water Act passed the U.S. Congress

over 40 years ago. In the Act, our government made a promise that all of the Nation's waters would be swimmable, drinkable and fishable in 20 years, but Mother Culture says we can't afford to clean up our act. It will hurt the economy, so we must delay. How long do we have to wait? At what point does it become so costly that Mother Culture says we must do something because the economy is suffering? Do people have to become sick? Do water bills increase so much that water becomes a major living expense like electricity is today? Doesn't it make more sense to make sure that Haw River water entering Jordan Lake is healthy in the first place and does not need to be treated? Ever hear someone say that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure"?

The Haw River is much cleaner now than it was at the time the Clean Water Act passed. It still carries too much nutrients in the form of phosphorus and nitrates, the major cause of algal blooms and fish kills in Jordan Lake. Mother Culture is very slow in recognizing that what is good for conservation is good for business and that a healthy environment and a healthy economy go hand-in-hand. By the way, we are Mother Culture. It is time we stop sacrificing the environment for the sake of the economy.

Joe Jacob, a Chatham resident for more than 30 years and a marine biologist by training, is president The Haw River Canoe & Kayak Co., www.hawrivercanoe.com, 336.260.6465. He worked for The Nature Conservancy for 20 years and served as Director of Science for TNC's Southeast Region.