

ABCPOA: Candidate Questions **September 5, 2024**
Please respond to the following questions in 250 in words or less

Candidate's Name: Robert "Bob" Fulton
District: 3 Brunswick County Commissioner

Question One:

One of the major consequences of the rapid pace of development in Brunswick County is the impact on the infrastructure (such as roads and public utilities) required to support that development. What measures would you propose to ensure that infrastructure investments in the county keep pace with development?

Response:

Roads, access to clean water and a sanitary sewer system that is not constantly dumping waste on our land and into our waterways are all key to public safety and public health. These systems, the infrastructure which we rely on every day, are all adversely affected by uncontrolled development. Our outcry against overdevelopment is a key issue facing every resident in Brunswick County. You can't expect the infrastructure to keep up with development if you don't have the financial resources to improve and expand that infrastructure as the development continues and the population increases. Where would the revenue for such infrastructure expansion come from? The state legislature has enacted statues favorable to the development community, which prevent county governments from charging development or access fees to developers to help offset the cost of infrastructure improvement and expansion. Would state and federal funding be available for Brunswick County? That would need to be. And should be pursued and considered if such funding is still available to repair and improve infrastructure. The last avenue is to slow development to match the capability of your existing infrastructure which I will address in the next part of your question.

Conversely, the pace of development could be tied to the ability of the county to provide adequate infrastructure. Do you support a slowing of development to match infrastructure enhancements? Please provide the reasoning behind your point of view.

Response:

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I see two parallel issues here which both must be addressed immediately.

First, slow down the growth, the approved development in Brunswick County. Fast track the revision of Uniform Development Ordinances to provide the means for the Planning Board and Commissioners to objectively assess the impacts of proposed development and determine if a proposed development can be sustained by the existing infrastructure. If not, the development is not approved until the means to grow the infrastructure is obtained. The second half of this is to lobby the legislature to remove existing statutes which favor developers and hinder county governance. Then approve development or access fees allocated specifically to expand and improve our water and sanitation systems and other public services. This will offset the infrastructure costs needed to ensure the demands placed on public services, health and emergency services as well as education are funded.

Together, these two initiatives will allow us to manage the development of Brunswick County without destroying our environment and natural resources or having to tax our residents to the point they cannot afford to remain in their homes.

Question Two: Population growth brings increased demands on public safety agencies such as Sheriff's office and fire districts. Fire districts are of particular concern not only for their ability to respond in an emergency but also the impact of low fire ratings on homeowners' insurance premiums. What specific steps would you take to ensure that public safety concerns are addressed as the county grows?

Response:

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Brunswick County fire districts and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) are stressed. The approval of more development with a wider variety of housing types to include multifamily units, townhouses and multi-story apartments pressure further strain fire departments resources. Addressing staffing, facilities and equipment needs is becoming more difficult. Adding to the problem is that purchase and delivery of fire vehicles and equipment often takes years. Where do the funds come from and where do the people to man the equipment come from?

Currently, much of Brunswick County has not yet experienced the full effects of an overstressed emergency services environment. As the population grows, the probability of the need for emergency services increases. If adequate resources are not made available then the potential adverse effects will have to be factored in, and bring about cost increases to insurance ratings.

Funding for staffing and equipment is needed. Currently, Commissioners have mandated no tax increases. It would appear they prefer Fire Districts raise their own money or services diminish. Public Safety must be made a priority and not be ignored. To sustain the public's safety, we need to slow development, that would slow the rapidly expanding need for additional fire and emergency services. Next, we would need to explore all state and federal assistance to access funds, grants or other options to offset the cost of additional fire services infrastructure. That becomes a priority. Ignoring these essential needs to sustain maximum development cannot be tolerated.

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Question Three: In 2023 the Board of Commissioners adopted Blueprint Brunswick 2040. Appendix G of that document outlines an implementation schedule with no specific implementation dates. What three specific steps would you like to see the Commission take during the next two years to implement Blueprint Brunswick?

The North Carolina Coastal Area Management Act required local governments to have a Land Use plan put in place to protect unique natural resources of coastal areas by guiding development. The Blueprint Brunswick 2040 plan was adopted in February of 2023. Consultants were paid for a plan which provided justification for decisions, promotes economic development, included an Action Plan and Implementation Schedule ... but was NOT legally binding. So, it was bought, paid for and shelved.

Blueprint Brunswick 2040 has sound principles and guidance to protect, preserve and sustain our quality of life in Brunswick County. We need to take ACTION and IMPLEMENT such a plan. We have an experienced and professional County Manager and Planning Department. We must use them and not discount their recommendations. First, the Board of Commissioners needs to direct the County Manager and Planning Department to work together to review and propose any revisions needed in the 2040 plan. Next, establish a revised Action Plan and Implementation Schedule to be submitted for approval of the Board of Commissioners. The third step would be find the means to coordinate changes with the Planning Board and put in place a moratorium on planned developments until expeditious updates to the Uniform Development Ordinances could be put in place to support the revised Blueprint Brunswick 2040 Action Plan and Implementation Schedule. Sound planning is not enough, we have to implement those plans and see to it that our ordinances are adequate and enforced.

Question Four: The ABCPOA perceives that there is a prevailing concern among citizens that the interests of real estate developers take precedence over the interests of the public at large. How would you address this concern?

Response:

The question is stated as if there is a perception. I would be more direct ... Commissioners and their appointed Planning Board have set up protocols to approve any development meeting the most minimum standards believable. The Chair of the Board of Brunswick County Commissioners (July 8, 2024) as much as admitted this to be the case in an open meeting with the public in his criticism of the Planning Board (stating that "*in our community its development first, citizens second, and that's a shame*"). The Planning Board's scope and authority must be revoked. The appearance of favor being granted to special interest, and conflicts of interest has to be addressed. Three current Commissioner positions are up for election, and those Commissioners need to be voted out to change the path of destruction this county is currently on. Myself and the other two challengers for those three positions can do that.

The Planning Board needs to be comprised by people with experience but not exclusively by developers. That can be accomplished and still maintain an objective balance which favors the well being of citizens of Brunswick County over the profit of developers. I would endorse reconstituting the Planning Board to review Planning Department assessments and make recommendations to the Board of Commissioners for final approval of development proposals. This puts the responsibility on elected officials where it should be and not given away to political appointees.

Question Five: The bulk of residential development in the county over the past 8-10 years has focused on housing for predominantly upscale and older population groups. How would you perceive the role of the County Commissioners addressing the residential needs of a broader population?

Response:

Currently the unoccupied housing rate in Brunswick County hovers around 30%. Yet there remains an outcry for “affordable” housing. That is because the profit for developers comes from upscale houses, not from affordable single-family houses. Everyone wants a “house on the coast”. But then when we move here, we are apt to complain about long waits or not being able to get basic services for repairs or even dining. Service personnel, healthcare workers, teachers and many first responders all struggle to find housing which they can afford in Brunswick County. The County Commissioners must break down the “maximum profit” wall. They must guide and direct the Planning Department and Planning Board to work to establish community friendly, cooperative development schemes with reasonable housing opportunities which are affordable to single parents, families just starting up, even single nurses, teachers and first responders. We must understand that this comes about only with significant effort to revise our current Uniform Development Ordinances and put in place reasonable guidelines for the Planning Board to carry out. This will help provide for a diverse housing environment which will strengthen the economic stability of our County for the future.

Question Six: Article 3.3 of the current Uniform Development Ordinance, UDO, vests final approval for Subdivisions and Planned Developments in the appointed Planning Board. Would you support changing the process so that approval of Subdivisions and Planned Developments rests with the elected County Commissioners? Please provide the reasoning behind your point of view.

Response:

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The responsibility for governance of Brunswick County lies with the elected Commissioners not appointees. Delegating the responsibility and final determination for zoning and planned development approval to a Planning Board absolves the Commissioners of their responsibility. This hands unlimited power to the Planning Board to make decisions without regard for or responsibility to the public. That is the situation we find ourselves in now. Environmental concerns ... not the responsibility of the Planning Board. Wetlands concerns... someone else's responsibility. Clean water and sanitary sewer capacity ... that is handled by someone else. Road capacity and emergency evacuation responsibility ... oh, that is the responsibility of the NC DOT. Planning Department (professionals paid for by taxpayer dollars) recommendations ... we don't have to consider those.

Currently the Planning Board believes they must approve any development proposal that meets our very minimum standards, regardless of the adverse safety and health potential of other issues.

We are better than that and must do better for the residents of Brunswick County!
We must replace the current mindset and revise our Uniform Development Ordinances (UDO's) to bring our standards up. We must rely on the recommendations of our Planning Department to provide us with guidance to sustain our environment and the quality of life in Brunswick County. We must return the ultimate responsibility for these decisions, recommended by the Planning Department and the Planning Board to the County Commissioners who were elected to do the best they can for the people of Brunswick County.

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**Thank You for your participation in this survey.
Please save and send your responses by September 20 to:
presidentabcpoa@gmail.com**