



## **Alliance of Brunswick County Property Owners Associations**

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### **Achieving Smart Growth in Brunswick County A Summary of 8.21.24 presentation to ABCPOA**

The rate of growth in Brunswick County over the last several years is having a dramatic and negative effect on the quality of life for residents - current and future. The issue comes up frequently in Board of Commissioner and Planning Board meetings, news media, social media, and conversations within communities. Growth is haphazard and inconsistent with County investment in infrastructure.

2020 saw the completion of a new Land Use Plan for Brunswick County, one that supported “smart growth”. This vision, entitled the Blueprint Brunswick 2040 Plan, outlined a thoughtful expansion of housing and infrastructure while supporting the natural beauty of Brunswick County. Blueprint Brunswick was approved by the Board of Commissioners in 2023, three years after its completion. The ABCPOA firmly supports this vision for smart growth. It established a subcommittee in 2023 to facilitate implementation of Blueprint Brunswick.

The Unified Development Ordinance is the primary legal document outlining zoning and development standards within the County. It establishes minimum standards for development approval. The current UDO was completed in 2007, over 15 years ago. Amendments made in 2015 loosened zoning and other protections to encourage development. The Board of Commissioners, 4 of whom remain commissioners today, approved these changes.

The changes made in 2015 were the catalyst for the unchecked and haphazard growth we see today. The consultants who facilitated completion of Blueprint Brunswick noted the inconsistencies between the current UDO (with the 2015 amendments) and the vision set forth in this new plan. The Board of Commissioners approved hiring a consultant to facilitate a UDO update that would be consistent with the vision set forth in Blueprint Brunswick.

The ABCPOA subcommittee formed to facilitate implementing Blueprint Brunswick has participated in this process for the past two years and has assisted the planning department as needed. We’ve provided research into tree ordinances and guidelines and outlined ideas for revising the UDO. We have supported efforts by the Department to amend the current UDO. Partly through our efforts, we have a “seat at the table” to discuss our member concerns with the consultant hired to update the UDO.

In just the two years we have followed these efforts, clear obstacles to implementing smart growth in

Brunswick County have been noted. Obstacles center on the current Board of Commissioners (BOC) and include delays in moving the Blueprint Brunswick forward (4 years between completion of the plan and granting permission to bring in consultant to update the UDO). There have been multiple delays and denials of efforts by the Planning Department to amend the UDO in areas of most concern to residents (trees, traffic, and buffers). To date, all proposed amendments – which ABCPOA supports – have been denied or sent back repeatedly for “more research”.

The bottom line is that the BOC is “slow walking” implementation of the Blueprint Brunswick vision for smart growth. As a result, development continues unchecked as it has since 2015. The 2007 UDO, acknowledged to be out of date, will remain the standard for development until the BOC approves an update. Over 30,000 new housing units have been approved since Blueprint Brunswick was completed.

The ABCPOA subcommittee has been in regular contact with the Planning Department and has spoken at hearings and BOC meetings to share our concerns over the pace of change and continued unchecked growth. We met with two of the current commissioners to express our concerns and have shared these with the press. Despite these efforts, Commissioners continue to support unchecked development. Clearly our efforts have fallen on “deaf ears”.

Three members of the BOC are up for re-election in 2024. The following information was published in the August 8, 2024 edition of the Port City Daily:

- Mike Forte is pursuing his 3<sup>rd</sup> term in office; for a total of 12 years. His campaign has received \$59,000 in donations, almost \$40,000 of which came from developers and engineers working for those developers.
- Pat Sykes is pursuing her 4<sup>th</sup> term in office, for a total of 16 years. Her campaign has received \$53,000 in donations, \$20,000 of which came from developers and engineers.
- Frank Williams is also pursuing his 4<sup>th</sup> term in office, for a total of 16 years. Williams has received \$109,000, at least \$20,000 of which came from the developer community.

Ms. Sykes and Mr. Williams approved the 2015 changes that were the catalyst for this unchecked growth. All three were involved in the creation and approval of Blueprint Brunswick. And all three have consistently voted to **delay or deny** any UDO updates that would help implement the vision of Blueprint Brunswick.

The three candidates challenging the above incumbents – Robert Fulton, Lloyd Simmons, and Jonathan Damico have each garnered less than \$7,000 in donations, none coming from the development community.

The information obtained and observations of the ABCPOA subcommittee have led us to ask the question:

### ***Who do our Commissioners Really Represent?***

In light of their involvement in the decisions leading us to this current state of unchecked development, and continued delays in implementing needed changes to slow and be more thoughtful about growth, we question if the concerns of developers take priority over concerns of County residents.

As we consider the upcoming election, we urge ABCPOA member communities and residents to take the time to know the candidates for County Commissioner and choose wisely based on your interests. This is the time for an informed choice.

Ask your commissioners what specific actions they will take to achieve smart growth in Brunswick County, how they plan to obtain the infrastructure needed to support this growth, why they have delayed changes to the UDO, and what they will do to speed changes to the UDO that will support implementation of the vision set forth in Blueprint Brunswick.

The Blueprint Brunswick and UDO are available online at: <https://www.brunswickcountync.gov>.

The Planning Department staff are always available to answer questions regarding the vision, current UDO requirements and proposed amendments. They can be reached at (910) 253-2025. A copy of the UDO and Blueprint Brunswick can also be reviewed in their offices at the Government Center in Bolivia.