Big plans for a big future

Development of the Chatham County Comprehensive Plan neared completion at the end of the FY17. The plan covers the next 25 years and provides guidance for county government to be better prepared for growth in residents and jobs, while maintaining many of our “small community” qualities, natural resources and scenic beauty.

By the end of FY17, the planning process had involved extensive public input through hearings, community meetings, stakeholder groups and county/town departments. More than 1,900 people responded to the public surveys and 132 responded to the Agricultural Focus Group Survey. The process also incorporated various existing plans and policies from departments, schools and towns.

The plan identified 10 goals and covers these focus areas: economic development, land use, housing, health, agriculture, natural resources, resiliency, parks & recreation, transportation and utilities/public services. The plan identifies recommended actions and a few “BIG IDEAS” for each focus area. The entire plan can be found at: www.chathamnc.org/comprehensiveplan

The county received special recognition from the Triangle J Council of Governments for integrating the Public Health Department’s county health priorities into the comprehensive plan process. The Health Department sought and obtained additional grant funding to cover this work.

NEXT STEPS – The Board of Commissioners will approve the final Comprehensive Plan in the fall of 2017 and the implementation begins in FY18.

Education

In FY17, the county made progress on several major school facilities in the county’s Capital Improvement Plan:

New High School: A site on Seaforth Road will be home to a new high school slated to open in FY21. Due to new student population projections, the county increased funding to expand the core capacity of the school to 1,400 students.

New Elementary School: A site on Andrews Store Road near Pollard Middle School was approved for a new elementary school expected to serve 750 students through fifth grade. It should open in FY20.

New Central Services Building: The CIP now includes funding for a new administration building for Chatham County Schools that would open in FY22.

Community College Health Sciences Building: The county furthered plans for a new Health Sciences Building for Central Carolina Community College, located on US 15-501 near Briar Chapel. Work begins in FY19. The facility might also house an early voting site for the Board of Elections or possibly a library branch.

During FY17, commissioners increased funding to add two new reading teachers, 3.5 instructional coaching positions, and three teachers to handle growth in enrollment. The county also increased by 9% supplemental salary funds to help Chatham County schools remain competitive with surrounding counties.

Economic development

Chatham Economic Development Corporation (EDC) continued enhancements to the Moncure Megasite and Chatham-Siler City Advanced Manufacturing (CAM) Site. Through Golden LEAF Foundation’s Major Site Development Initiative (MSDI), Siler City received $4 million to extend water service to the CAM Site and the City of Sanford received $4 million to extend wastewater to the Moncure site.

-Continued next page
Bord of Elections: In the weeks leading up to the 2016 General Election, long-time Chatham County Elections Director Dawn Stumpf had to step down due to an illness that led to her early retirement. On February 23, 2017, the North Carolina State Board of Elections approved the appointment of Pandora Paschal as the new County Elections Director. Paschal had served as interim elections director since August 30, 2016 and had been deputy director of elections for 13 years.

Emergency Operations: The end of FY17 meant saying goodbye to Janet Scott as director of Emergency Management. Janet worked in Emergency Management for 26 years. She was named Deputy Emergency Operations Director and Communications Director in 2002 and was promoted to department director in 2015.

Dawn Stump retired as Board of Elections Director after 16 years of extraordinary service. A new customer service award has been named in her honor. See page 3.

Major leadership changes

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She successfully led the 911 Center through several major improvements, including obtaining certification for Emergency Medical Dispatch and Emergency Fire Dispatch and opening a backup 911 center. At retirement, Janet received the top award from NC Emergency Management and Governor Cooper named her a recipient of the Order of the Long Leaf Pine.

In the past few weeks, Steve Newton was named the Emergency Operations Director and Mike Reitz was named Emergency Communications Director. Newton worked in emergency services for 24 years, most recently as second-in-command for Wake County Emergency Management. Reitz had worked in emergency services and communications since 1999, most recently with the UNC-Chapel Hill Police Department, where he was in charge of operations of the communications center.

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GRAND OPENING: AGRICULTURE & CONFERENCE CENTER

The Grand Opening of the new Agriculture Center and Conference Center was held on March 25, 2017. Agencies housed in the center moved into their offices during January 2017. The center meets a critical need for flexible event space in the county and puts all agriculture-related agencies under one roof, including Cooperative Extension, Soil & Water Conservation and the local NC Forestry Service. Staff have been hired to manage public events booked at the facility, led by Larilee Isley. The Convention & Visitors Bureau continues to market the facility for public events, including creation of a website www.ChathamMeetings.com.

Shown above at the Grand Opening are (from left): Captain Charles Gardner (at back), Commissioner Mike Dasher, Commissioner Walter Petty, Commissioner Chairman Jim Crawford, County Manager Renee Paschal and Commissioner Karen Howard.
ONLINE IMPROVEMENTS

New GIS Portal
On Dec. 1, 2016, the county launched a new Geographic Information Systems (GIS) online mapping portal with several new applications helpful for realtors, developers, utilities, attorneys, planners and individual residents. The new website is more compatible with mobile devices. It also features an option for site visitors to download the county’s geospatial data. An array of features can be found at http://chathamncgis.maps.arcgis.com/home/index.html.

Public Website
A totally new county public website premiered in November 2016. Besides an updated look, the website addressed several issues identified by the public and county users, including improving compatibility with mobile devices and various browsers.

Track Your Permits
Central Permitting, Building Inspections, Fire Inspections, Planning, Environmental Health, and Watershed Protection worked together to manage software upgrades that will help both staff and customers. The new mobile feature allows site inspectors to spend more time conducting inspections because they can now post reports remotely. Coming soon: Public access to submit applications, pay fees, and check on status of work.

15th Leadership Academy
In August 2017, the county honored the fifteenth class of graduates of its Leadership Academy. The program was started to help develop leadership and supervisory skills and is taught entirely by county employees with expertise. Many graduates have been promoted to higher level responsibilities. A total of 31 graduated in August.

This year, the county presented the first Charlie Horne Award for the Outstanding Graduate, named for the former county manager who retired in the fall of 2015. Class instructors and classmates select the winner. The first recipient was Jennifer Park in the Public Health Department.

Other big news in FY17

Countywide Zoning
In August 2016, the Board of Commissioners voted to apply zoning to areas of the county not already zoned. The new zoned areas cover 388 square miles and 11,800 parcels. The action means that newly zoned areas are in one of two residential zoning categories. The Planning Department handled implementation, including identifying and contacting businesses impacted by the rezoning. Businesses were allowed to continue to exist and operate. Bona fide farms are exempt from zoning regulation.

Customer Service Award
In May 2017, Chatham County Manager Renee Paschal established the Dawn Stumpf Award for Excellence in Customer Service, which honored former Board of Elections Director Dawn Stumpf, who retired in November 2016 after 16 years of service. Paschal stated, “Dawn embodies what I call the Chatham Way. She did her job expertly, while making friends along the way.” The award recognizes employees and departments demonstrating great customer service delivered with a smile and expertise.

Domestic Violence Victims
Chatham County recognized the need to provide additional support for victims of domestic violence. In FY17, the county convened key stakeholders to determine how to best meet victims’ needs. The Board of Commissioners voted to fund victim services and advocacy. Two bilingual advocates were hired for the new county program, Family Violence Prevention Services, and two victim services coordinators were hired within the Sheriff’s Office. These staff members are closely collaborating and are available daily in Chatham County Judicial Center.

Child Victims: The Child Victims Coordinator began teaching the “Think First and Stay Safe” program to all county fourth graders. It covers personal safety, online safety, and safe personal boundaries.

Young Offenders
Beginning August 1, 2017, youth offenders in Chatham County have a new opportunity for a brighter future. The Sheriff’s Office, as well as the Pittsboro and Siler City Police Departments have been working in conjunction with Chatham 360 to implement the Chatham Misdemeanor Diversion Program. The Diversion Program was developed to provide first-time teen offenders who are 16-17 years old an option to avoid arrest or permanent adult criminal record.
Tax Office Achievements

**Revaluation:** The Tax Office completed a countywide revaluation of real estate property that took effect Jan. 1, 2017. State law requires counties to conduct revaluation at least every eight years. The county ended up with a fairly low rate of property owner appeals at 2.8%. It is not uncommon for the revaluation appeal rates to be 6% to 10%.

**Collections:** The Tax Office also reports that the FY2017 tax collection rate is almost 99%, the highest rate for at least 10 years (pending audit confirmation). The collection rate has been steadily increasing since 2013.

Mixed Recycling

In January 2017, the Solid Waste & Recycling Division made a big transition to mixed recycling at all 12 collection centers. Previously, residents had to separate household recyclables by type at the collection centers. Mixed recycling simplifies the process by allowing residents to mix most recyclable items together: cardboard, paper, plastic, aluminum cans, and steel cans. Glass bottles and jars are still collected separately, but glass no longer has to be separated by color in the recycling bin. See diagram at left.

The collection centers can also accept more items, such as several plastic and bulky plastic items, including buckets and baskets.

The transition process took several years and involved installing several new compactors, signage, and a recycling station with compactor at the main facility. Department staff report that they have already documented reductions in both vehicle mileage to haul recyclables and the number of hauls needed. They also report an increase in the overall recycling rate.

Sheriff’s Office outreach

**STAR Program:** Sheriff Mike Roberson initiated the Sheriff’s Training Academy for Residents (STAR) Program in March 2017. It is a seven-week, interactive program designed to teach residents more about the daily functions of the Sheriff’s Office. The course involves hands-on activities and relationship building. Three sessions have been held, with a total of 46 participants.

**Community Appreciation Night:** In Sept. 2016, the Sheriff’s Office hosted its first Community Appreciation Night in Pittsboro. The events are family-friendly with food, games, information booths and fellowship. The main goal of the event is for officers and the community to get to know each other in a welcoming environment. Local businesses served as event sponsors.

**Other Efforts:**
- Mobile Meetups allow residents to talk with deputies or share information about things going on in their neighborhoods.
- A focus group with Latino and Hispanic residents served as a chance to build relationships and cross-culture understanding.
- Deputies made church presentations on opioid abuse, church safety and how to interact with law enforcement.
- Coffee with a Deputy is a new monthly opportunity for deputies to visit with residents and senior communities.
- The Sheriff partnered with Special Olympics to help them with fundraising. Sheriff Roberson participated in a sponsored event where he rappelled the side of a skyscraper in Raleigh. The Sheriff’s Office will host the group’s 2018 golf tournament.
Elderly Protection — Adult Social Services staff worked with the Council on Aging, Sheriff’s Office, Daymark Recovery, and others to form a new task force focused on suspected elder abuse cases. The team identifies strategies to help people in need.

VITA Tax Filings — The Council on Aging served 303 people through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA), which provides free tax filing help for qualified low-income people. This is 9% increase over 2016.

Veterans — The Eastern Senior Center provided office space for a state Veteran’s Services Officer to meet with veterans in Pittsboro a few hours a month.

New & Improved Services – The Council on Aging added several new programs:
- A blood pressure management program in Siler City
- An Aqua-Arthritis Foundation Exercise program taught at Chapel Ridge’s swimming pool
- A Choral Group, which has had several public performances
- Geezers, Gulpers and Gardeners meeting group, which increased male participation in senior center programs
- A new Meals on Wheels route for the Bear Creek area, thanks to donations from Tyson Creek Baptist Church.

More help for older and disabled residents

Collaboration at work

Regional and local collaboration emerged as another key theme for FY17. Just a few examples are highlighted below:

Affordable Housing – This issue is an ongoing priority of the Board of Commissioners. The Affordable Housing Task Force worked with the Triangle J Council of Governments to develop an “Affordable Rental Housing Report & Strategy Toolbox for Goldston, Pittsboro, Siler City, and Chatham County.” The toolbox recommends policies and strategies to increase affordable rental options. In addition to the toolbox, Triangle J Council of Governments created an infographic on how to talk about affordable housing issues and created an infographic on the relationship between affordable housing and various community factors.

Chatham Health Alliance – The Chatham Health Alliance, an award-winning community partnership based in the Public Health Department, continues to gain momentum. It formed three active subcommittees focused on identified health priorities: obesity prevention, access to health care, and access to mental health & substance abuse services. A new website premiered in FY17 at www.chathamhealthalliancenc.org. The Health Alliance hosted an Interagency Fair in the spring of 2017 that featured over 30 organizations and agencies from across the county and region. It was a chance to know who does what and identify potential partners in meeting local health and mental health needs. See more Alliance achievements under Awards & Honors on page 6.

Future Pittsboro Town Hall – The Board of Commissioners agreed to set aside $450,000 in the new budget to help the Town of Pittsboro buy land in downtown Pittsboro for a future town hall complex, where the county is considering renting office space. If the county does not end up leasing space in the facility, the town would have to refund the money.

Utilities Master Plan – The county initiated a partnership with the towns to develop a joint utilities master plan.

Home Repairs for Seniors & Disabled — With the help of a UNC-Chapel Hill intern, the Council on Aging developed a shared online database of home repair needs so that local partner agencies can more effectively collaborate on meeting these needs while reducing duplication of services. The project led the county and the Town of Siler City to waive fees for the building of ramps for persons with disabilities. The program won a Local Government Federal Credit Union Excellence in Innovation Award in August 2017. Rebuilding Together of the Triangle is a key partner in this effort.

Photo at Left: Repairs underway at a local residence.

Historic Farmland Preservation – Several different grant sources allowed the Chatham Soil & Water Conservation District to partner with the Triangle Land Conservancy (TLC) to protect a 204-acre historic farm in the Silk Hope area that was placed in a conservation easement. TLC will perform annual monitoring and stewardship.
Major Grants

- **Briar Chapel Park** – The Parks & Recreation Department successfully applied for a grant from the Parks & Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) to make major enhancements to Briar Chapel Park near Margaret Pollard School and Woods Charter School. The $150,000 grant will match county funds to add a walking trail, picnic shelter, playground, sidewalk connection to Woods Charter, and additional fencing and landscaping. These facilities had been identified as priorities during public input.

- **Trails Grant** – Parks & Recreation also received a $100,000 grant from the NC Recreational Trail Program to complete work on the Haw River Trail that runs from Guilford County to Jordan Lake. The grant will help build a pedestrian bridge across Pokeberry Creek and provide a one-mile natural surface trail on either side of the bridge.

- **Family Visitation Services** – This 15-year-old county program provides a safe, supervised location for visits and exchanges between parents and children involved in domestic violence cases. It is the longest continually-operating center of its kind in the state and one of only 25 in the nation awarded a federal grant in 2017 through the Office on Violence Against Women.

- **Safe Closure of Waste Pond** – The Chatham Soil and Water Conservation District received $19,929 in funding for the closure of a formally-operated animal waste storage pond. The Environmental Enhancement Grant gives priority to closing inactive animal waste storage ponds and lagoons. For the selected farm, approximately 1,209,584 gallons of dairy waste was safely removed.

Awards & Honors

- **EDC President** – Kyle Touchstone, president of the EDC, was a recipient of the 40 Under 40 Award, sponsored by the Triangle Business Journal.

- **Healthiest Counties Challenge** – Chatham County was selected as one of 50 communities in the country to participate in the Healthiest Cities and Counties Challenge, which came with a $10,000 award. Funds were used to partner with the county’s Comprehensive Plan development process to add a section on health planning, including recommended strategies.

- **Public Health Leadership** – Mike Zelek, director of Health Promotion and Policy Division, was accepted into the inaugural class of the North Carolina Public Health Leadership at UNC-Chapel Hill.

- **Health Transformation** – The Chatham Health Alliance received the Health Transformation Award at the Communities Joined in Action conference in February 2017. The national award specifically recognized Sarah Weller Pegna, Alliance coordinator, for her work in implementing the Exercise is Medicine program, a collaborative initiative between Piedmont Health Services and the Health Department.

- **Statewide Leadership** –
  - County Manager Renee Paschal was elected second vice president of the North Carolina City & County Management Association.
  - Chatham County Fire Marshal Thomas Bender was elected to serve as the president of the North Carolina Fire Marshal’s Association.
  - Angela Birchett, zoning and land use administrator for Chatham County, was elected president of the NC Association of Zoning Officials (NCAZO), the statewide professional organization for zoning officials.

- **Departmental Customer Service** – The Department of Social Services became the first department honored with the county’s Dawn Stumpf Award for Excellence in Customer Service. The department earned the award when a new client survey showed that a whopping 98% of visiting clients said the department provided good or excellent service.

- **Sheriff’s Institute** – Sheriff Mike Roberson completed the National Sheriffs’ Institute (NSI) in April 2017. The NSI is the only national executive development program designed for sheriffs.

- **2016 Sheriff’s Awards** –
  - Taelor Tyson, Detention Officer of the Year
  - Feliciano Jimenez, Officer of the Year
  - Leslie Mason and Rischetta White, Rookies of the Year
  - Narcotics Unit, Unit Citation Award
  - Colby Williams, Community Service Award and Top Gun Award
  - Will Cockman, Life Saving Award
  - Meritorious Achievement winners: Sara Pack, Phillip Richard; Colby Williams, Kim Hughes; David Scott and Preston Clemons

- **Sustainable Agriculture** – Extension Agent Debbie Roos received the 2016 Search for Excellence in Horticulture Award, presented by the National Association of County Agricultural Agents.
More highlights from departments & offices

Human Services

Huge Immunization Progress — Data from the Annual Child Care Immunization Reports show the percentage of Chatham County children age 0-5 in licensed child care who are up to date on immunizations increased from 25% in 2014 to 96% in 2016. This success is due to innovations by the Child Care Health Consultant in the Health Department.

Youth Social Services — The Department of Social Services (DSS) started two programs that expand services to young people:

- “Foster Care to 21” provides some foster care services until age 21. Implemented in January 2017, it provides more flexible housing options for youth who have aged out of foster care and who need other supportive services.
- DSS clinical social workers created two SPARCS groups (Structured Psychotherapy for Adolescents Responding to Chronic Stress) for youth exposed to violence and trauma. One group is based at the Youth Development Center and the other works with youth in foster care or foster care alumni.

Mental Health & Substance Abuse — Chatham County Manager’s Office worked with Cardinal Innovations and a team of county agencies to secure a new basic mental health service provider with a strong track record in rural areas. Daymark Recovery started serving county clients in Siler City on July 3, 2017 and is already setting records for new patients.

The Public Health Department’s Marketing Team, in collaboration with the Chatham Health Alliance, developed a mental health resources webpage and created printed materials that link residents to services. Visit www.chathamnc.org/mentalhealth for more information. A team of UNC students also developed a brochure for teens and parents on opioid misuse.

Food & Lodging Inspections — In FY17, all food and lodging inspections staff in Environmental Health became nationally standardized in risk-based food inspections based on USDA standards. This certification required an extra 60 hours of in-person and online courses and other extensive requirements. The results will enhance staff efficiency and reduce the risk of food-related illnesses at local eateries.


They also hosted a regional workshop for childcare providers to help them incorporate healthy snacks and physical activity for children.

Public Safety

Emergency Response Team — The Sheriff’s Office created a team to work with County Emergency Management and county fire departments in responding to large-scale emergency incidents around the county.

Narcotics Team — FY17 was a busy year for narcotics arrests in the Sheriff’s Office. As an example, one large operation involving several agencies led to 32 people charged with 280 felonies and 63 misdemeanors. Ten investigators received Clandestine Lab Certifications for Meth Labs.

Cashless Jail — The Sheriff’s Office Detention Division implemented a cashless ATM system for inmates at the Detention Center, which enhances staff efficiency and provides real-time financial reports.

Body Cameras for Deputies — The Board of Commissioners approved funding and purchase of the cameras. The Sheriff’s Office will apply for a grant from the NC Governor’s Crime Commission to offset some of the costs. Cameras for patrol officers will be deployed early in 2018.

Youth Programs — The Sheriff’s Office has integrated the Youth Leadership program into the Gang Resistance Education and Training Program for seventh graders. The Sheriff also has increased donations from community partners to help cover costs of the Youth Summer Camp.

Stay in Touch with Chatham County Government

Sign up for email notices at www.chathamnc.org/enotify
Other Offices & Departments

Thank a Vet — On Nov. 1, 2016, the Register of Deeds announced a new program to encourage local veterans to register their military discharge papers (DD Form 214) at no cost. Veterans who opt into this program receive an ID card that qualifies them for discounts at about 50 businesses across the county. The program is a collaboration of the Register of Deeds Office, Human Resources, and businesses.

Broadband Survey — MIS Director Darlene Yudell developed a survey of residents to collect information on their access to broadband, with the goal of verifying that maps from service providers greatly overstate coverage. Thus far, 711 people have completed the survey.

Elections News — Chatham County had a very busy 2016 General Election, with the county again having the highest voter turnout in the state. Elections Director Pandora Paschal was nationally recertified by the Election Center. A new deputy director has focused on campaign finance training for candidates.

Animal Services — This division of the Health Department is using new software, Chameleon, that has improved staff efficiency, customer service, accountability, and records management. They also increased public visibility with a new trailer used for emergency sheltering, off-site adoption events, and community outreach.

Water Customer Access — The Water Utilities staff have added more online forms to make it easier for water customers to access services, including new service applications.

Fire Hydrants & Valves — Fire hydrants and valves play a vital role within the county’s water distribution system. To ensure that these are fully functional throughout the entire water distribution system, the Utilities Division initiated a comprehensive assessment of every single valve and fire hydrant to identify those in need of repair.

Poultry Disease Prevention — Cooperative Extension had a major focus on preparing poultry farmers for possible outbreaks of High Path Avian Flu. This included a special workshop for 375 farmers.

2016 Safety Awards — For the fourth year in a row, Chatham County received several top awards from the NC Department of Labor for outstanding safety practices. For calendar year 2016, Chatham County received ten Gold Awards (up from seven last year) and two Silver Awards for various departments.

Library Summer Reading — In 2017, the summer program circulated 30,000+ books and children logged almost 600,000 minutes of reading.

Visitor Spending — The countywide Convention & Visitors Bureau received the most recent statewide tourism spending report, which showed that domestic visitors spent $33.79 million in the county in calendar year 2016, an increase of 4.11% compared to 2015. This increase continues an eight-year trend of climbing visitor spending in the county.

Chatham County is also growing its meetings and weddings market, with much publicity in the past year showcasing venues for a professional meeting or special occasion.

Library Visits Seniors — The library system’s outreach staff work to deliver materials to an array of people who find it difficult to come to the library. In FY17, the Board of Commissioners funded a full-time outreach coordinator to provide programming in senior citizen residential facilities. In cooperation with facility activity directors, the county’s library staff engage residents in activities that stimulate positive memories and promote socialization.

4-H Community Clubs — Cooperative Extension increased its number of 4-H Clubs to seven clubs around the county. Some clubs have specific areas of specialty, including livestock, dairy, equine, robotics and pollinators. Above the equine group shows off their skills.