

At a Mini Retreat of the Southampton County Board of Supervisors along with the Southampton County Planning Commission held at the Workforce Development Center in Franklin, VA on September 12, 2006 at 6:30 PM

SUPERVISORS PRESENT

Dallas O. Jones, Chairman (Drewryville)  
Walter L. Young, Jr., Vice-Chairman (Franklin)  
Carl J. Faison (Boykins-Branchville)  
Ronald M. West (Berlin-Ivor)  
Moses Wyche (Capron)

SUPERVISORS ABSENT

Walter D. Brown (Newsoms)  
Anita T. Felts (Jerusalem)

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Dr. Alan W. Edwards, Chairman  
Ira H. "Pete" Barham, Vice-Chairman  
Douglas A. Chesson  
Michael G. Drake  
Freeman J. Harrell  
Dallas O. Jones  
J. Michael Mann  
Oliver J. Parker  
Keith Tennessee

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT

None

OTHERS PRESENT

Michael W. Johnson, County Administrator  
James A. Randolph, Assistant County Administrator  
Robert L. Barnett, Director of Community Development  
Sandi P. Plyler, Data Processing Manager  
Julien W. Johnson, Jr., Public Utilities Director  
Hart Council, Public Works Director  
Robert Croak, Utilities Systems Supervisor  
Jackie D. Vick, Facilities Maintenance Supervisor  
Vernie W. Francis, Jr., Sheriff  
Wayne M. Cosby, Clerk of the Circuit Court  
David K. Britt, Treasurer  
John Robert Harrup, Commissioner of the Revenue  
Richard E. Railey, Jr., County Attorney  
Susan H. Wright, County Administration Executive Secretary

Supervisor Faison gave the invocation at 6:30 PM and dinner and fellowship immediately followed from 6:30 PM – 7:00 PM.

Chairman Jones called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

Mr. Michael Johnson, County Administrator, welcomed everyone and then turned the meeting over to Mr. Jay Randolph, Assistant County Administrator and Secretary of the Planning Commission.

Mr. Jay Randolph advised that in light of the growth that Southampton County was experiencing and the growth that was ultimately heading our way, and in light of the Comprehensive Plan update that was currently underway, he thought it was important that the Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission share a common methodology to handle this growth.

Mr. Randolph shared a video entitled A Tale of Two Counties. The video compared the experiences of two counties in Virginia: Clarke and Stafford Counties, and the results of their differing approaches to growth and development. Clarke County in northwestern Virginia and Stafford County in north-central Virginia were both about the same distance from Washington, D.C. Beginning in the 1970s, the two counties became greatly different in population. Stafford,

only a third bigger in area, had eight times the population of Clarke by 1996. That growth had some striking effects. Thirty years ago, rural Stafford could have easily been mistaken for rural Clarke and vice-versa. Today the two counties were very different. Clarke County and Stafford County looked the way they did now as a direct result of the development plans the governments of those counties made around 1980. Stafford adopted an aggressive pro-growth position and thought that all growth was good growth. Stafford wanted and got growth. But what developers wanted was growth on cheap land. That meant growth outside existing population centers. So the county had to get big money to extend water and sewer lines and to widen roads in areas where there had been only farms and rural traffic before. Between 1980 and 1998, over 7,000 new houses were built in Stafford County, almost all of them in newly created neighborhoods.

At about the same time that Stafford's county government decided to face the future by recruiting as much growth as possible, Clarke County's government decided to grow carefully and in stages. More often than not, Stafford had considered the highest and best use of open land to be residential and commercial development. Clarke decided that places like this had value in their own right. That was a major difference between the two counties. But after all the self-conscious economic development in Stafford, the per capita income was 25 percent higher in Clarke. And in spite of all the recruitment of new businesses in Stafford, property taxes were nearly 30 percent lower in Clarke. In addition, Stafford was in the bottom third of all Virginia localities for per student educational expenditures. Clarke spent money on additional facilities and services as it needed them – and growing outward from existing facilities and services, it needed them less often.

Farms and open land were not only by themselves almost as profitable to a county as commercial development, they also had the added advantage of not requiring the services that made residential development so expensive. It actually paid local governments to keep farmers in business because farms kept taxes lower than development did. Stafford went hugely into debt bringing new development into the county. The facts spoke for themselves: Growth alone was not necessarily progress. Clark County, which chose to grow conservatively, had a higher income and lower taxes than high-growth Stafford.

The Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission, and staff discussed the video. They concluded that although Clark County was the obvious favorable choice in the video, the best approach for Southampton County was somewhere in between Stafford and Clarke's approaches. They noted that they had taken a stand against development in the rural areas of the County by creating the Rural Residential (RR) Zoning District and requiring that any property zoned Agricultural A-1 be rezoned to RR before it could be subdivided.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:10 PM.

---

Dallas O. Jones, Chairman

---

Michael W. Johnson, Clerk