

Wm. Weston J. Newton, Chairman  
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When Beaufort County Council began preparations for its 2010 retreat; several vital initiatives were placed at the top of our agenda. These were the priorities identified as having the most impact on our cherished quality of life. They were presented to our facilitator, Lyle Sumek, who used them to build the foundation of our discussions. Although Mr. Sumek is still in the process of developing all the data, discussion materials and council recommendations into a final report; these priorities remain essential.

Council's 2015 vision for Beaufort County is a *Sustainable County*. This requires personal livability, effective environmental stewardship, economic opportunity and community building. These are broad and lofty terms that require many specific goals and objectives. They will only be achieved by continuous and meticulous planning, unwavering commitment and lots of elbow grease.

The first requirement for sustainability, personal livability, includes many elements. Number one: residents must feel safe. This means a low crime rate. It also means easy movement within the County with acceptable, predictable travel times, public transportation and walking and bicycle trails. It means recreation and leisure opportunities for citizens and visitors of all generations, a reasonable, affordable and stable tax rate with good public services, harmonious racial relations, arts and culture, convenient access to a full range of choices for shopping, healthcare, medical services education, water and government services, availability of quality housing, proper preparation for disasters and a good public school system.

Good environmental stewardship is another pre-requisite for county sustainability. I'm sure we all agree that protection of our natural beauty and resources is paramount. An effective stormwater management program is necessary. I am encouraged by the effort the County has made in this regard, but much is left to be done. We have strengthened our water protection requirements and hold developers to strict standards that requires them to mimic pre-development conditions. Unfortunately, we have no authority in neighboring counties where development can cause harm to our waterways.

Our buildings, homes and commercial areas must be designed with environmental sensitivity and we must increase opportunities for residents and visitors to have access to the water and our natural environment.

A new era of environmental compliance and monitoring is arriving in Beaufort County and with that – enforcement. Without enforcement, our protective measures have no real authority. We simply must not allow violations that result in pollution of our priceless waterways and outdoor environment.

Beaufort County must also promote and support economic opportunity in order to sustain itself well. This requires a qualified workforce, retention and expansion of local businesses, available land for economic development, diversification of businesses at the regional and local level, jobs with good wages and financing opportunities for business development.

The fourth building block of a sustainable county is community building. This means having community gathering places where residents can interact, volunteerism, effective communication regarding changes in the County, community pride and celebrating our history, heritage and culture. It also calls for residents sharing in the responsibility for making the community safe and local governments working together for the benefit of all.

Can Beaufort County become a sustainable county? Of course! Are we there yet? Not entirely, but we know how to get there and we are on our way.