



Planning, Development & Inspections

A Division of Community Services
P.O. Box 550 • Raleigh, NC 27602
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MINUTES OF REGULAR PLANNING BOARD - April 2, 2025

LOCATION: Wake County Justice Center, 301 S. Salisbury St., Room 2700, Raleigh, NC

MEMBERS PRESENT:

1. Mr. Thomas Wells (Chair)
2. Ms. Brenna Booker-Williams (Vice-Chair)
3. Mr. David Adams
4. Mr. Amos Clark
5. Mr. Asa Fleming
6. Mr. Bill Jenkins
7. Dr. Kamal Kolappa
8. Ms. Suzanne Prince
9. Ms. Sally Rice
10. Mr. Ted Van Dyk

COUNTY STAFF:

1. Mr. Steven Finn
2. Mr. Tim Gardiner
3. Mr. Timothy Maloney
4. Mr. Josh McClellan
5. Ms. Akul Nishawala
6. Ms. Sharon Peterson
7. Ms. Beth Simmons

COUNTY ATTORNEY:

- Mr. Kenneth Murphy, Deputy County Attorney

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1. **Meeting Called to Order:** Mr. Wells called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.
 2. **Pledge of Allegiance**
 3. **Election of Chair and Vice Chair:** Mr. Wells opened the floor for nominations for Chair. Mr. Fleming nominated Ms. Booker-Williams for Chair, and she was elected unanimously. Ms. Booker-Williams then called for nominations for Vice Chair. Dr. Kolappa asked Mr. Wells if he would be interested, and he declined. Mr. Adams nominated Mr. Van Dyk, who was elected unanimously.
 4. **Petitions and Amendments:** None.
 5. **Approval of March 5, 2025, Minutes:** Mr. Clark made a motion to approve the March 5, 2025, minutes as presented. Ms. Prince seconded the motion, and the Board adopted unanimously.

6. Eastern Wake Area Plan Update – Akul Nishawala, Planner III

Mr. Nishawala introduced the Board to the Eastern Wake Area Plan, consisting of 72 square miles (4,132 acres) in the northeastern portion of the County. The Eastern Wake Area Plan will replace components of the Southeast Wake, Northeast, and E. Raleigh / Knightdale Land Use Plans. The area is primarily rural, with partially developed pockets of Community Reserve, where new development would be served by municipal sewer and water. Nearby Walkable Centers are pedestrian oriented and transit ready to serve higher density development.

The majority of the area is zoned Residential, with seven Multi-Use Districts (MUDs) spread throughout. The Eastern Wake Area includes watershed zoning districts, which have more restrictive development standards, and mitigating environmental impacts from development runoff is a priority in this area. The Eastern Wake Area Plan also includes multiple overlays: Resource Conservation (RCOD-1), Special Highway (SHOD), Water Supply Watershed II (non-critical / WSO-2NC), and Airport (AO). Mr. Nishawala noted that the airport overlay is tied to a small local airport in Franklin County, and exists to restrict developments that might impact the airport service.

Current land use is overwhelmingly Agricultural, accounting for 654 parcels and 20,522 acres. Residential areas occupy 11,916 acres in 5,423 parcels, with 5,172 acres of Exempt uses (religious or government-owned property). Mr. Van Dyk expressed surprise that 4,836 acres were listed as “Vacant,” and Mr. Nishawala responded that he verified that statistic with the Tax Department, and added that those parcels could be open space, but are considered vacant for tax purposes. Dr. Kolappa asked for clarification regarding the Exempt properties, and Mr. Nishawala explained that they were exempt from taxation, but fell under zoning districts and land use laws.

Public Engagement began with a virtual meeting on March 6th, and currently includes an online interactive map, survey, social media, and road signs to help gauge input from residents. Mr. Nishawala identified 475 visits to the interactive map from 294 unique users, 42 comments, and 86 survey responses. Map comments indicated a strong desire not to develop the area, and survey responses expressed concerns about traffic congestion, along with requests to protect the environment and add parks and green spaces. Mr. Nishawala added that an in-person meeting is scheduled for April 16th at the Eastern Regional Center in Zebulon from 4:30 p.m. - 6:30 p.m. He invited the Planning Board members to attend and meet with residents.

The Eastern Wake Area Plan’s timeline should reach a Draft Plan in June, followed by a second round of public engagement during the summer, with a Plan Proposal in the Fall and potential approval in Late 2025.

Mr. Adams asked how frequently staff reviews the area plans after implementation, and Mr. Nishawala explained that they regularly look at growth and development with an eye towards revisions in the future. The area plans become a living document that reflect shifts in the County, and that it is normal to make changes as trends shift. Mr. Van Dyk asked what aspirations the municipalities have relative to the County’s, and Mr. Nishawala responded that they are in discussions with each community regarding their comprehensive plans. He added that each of the municipalities is involved in the Little River Inter-Local Agreement (ILA), which limits changes to the area.

Mr. Maloney added that this Plan is the first that has had to consider a water supply watershed, and they do not anticipate many development changes. The Little River ILA dictates residential, low-density development only, with very limited commercial options. The watershed is already in close vicinity to the towns, and staff is being mindful of the urban-rural divide while discussing planning with municipal stakeholders.

Mr. Fleming asked if the agricultural areas are entering VAD agreements, and Mr. Nishawala responded that they are not currently, but that Soil and Water Conservation District would be present at the community meetings to explain the benefits and encourage farmers to join the program. Mr. Wells asked if they would be having discussions with municipal planning departments, and Mr. Nishawala noted that they were meeting with Zebulon next week and the other towns soon after.

7. NC Department of Transportation Update on Highway Corridor Planting – NCDOT / Tim Gardiner, Planner III

Mr. Gardiner refreshed the Board on the NCDOT's Highway Corridor Planting project to foster reforestation and allow trees to grow without maintenance or interference. Partnering with the Triangle Expressway Turnpike Authority proved fruitful, thanks to the amount of land surrounding NC 54 and 540 in the Morrisville area. Mr. Gardiner introduced Alan Shapiro, Deputy Chief Engineer for the Turnpike Authority, and Azad Atashi, Senior Landscape Architect for the NCDOT Roadside Environmental Unit, to provide updates on a section of NC 540 now open to the public.

Mr. Shapiro provided an overview of phase one of the Complete 540 Project, which opened to traffic in September 2024, which encompasses 18 miles from NC Hwy 55 to the I-40/I-42 Hwy interchange in Garner. Mr. Shapiro indicated that NCDOT's plan is to reforest the remnant parcels (460 acres over 127 parcels) that resulted from the right-of-way process of the Project and per a federal settlement agreement.

Current landscaping plans are under review for maintenance and feasibility with staff currently assigned to the Triangle Expressway, and the goal is to plan for landscaping that is self-sustaining and easily maintained. Phase one of landscaping will cover the NC Hwy 55 to NC Hwy 50 interchanges, followed by a second phase near Knightdale.

Mr. Atashi provided the Board with slides of prototype design layouts for interchange plantings. The primary concept for the interchanges were alternating Dogwood and Cloverleaf layouts, comprised of pine trees in a grid system. Layouts were chosen to direct water runoff and limit the visibility of bridge abutments and noise walls. Proposed trees included loblolly pine, American holly, Burki juniper, Eastern red cedar, Blue Arrow juniper, scarlet oak, black gum, and Main Street maple. They would be supplemented by ornamental grass, small shrubs, perennials, and rocks in a clover leaf pattern.

Mr. Adams asked if they had considered planting long leaf pines over loblolly pines, given their longer needles. Mr. Atashi responded that they had considered it, but that the soil near these interchanges had been disturbed during construction and that the loblolly pine stood a better chance of survival. He indicated that they would be performing soil tests, and if it appeared to be favorable for survival, long leaf pines would be considered. Mr. Van Dyk recommended that they consider planting along linear portions of the turnpike in addition to the interchanges, in the interest of improving air quality. Mr. Atashi noted that they have, in some instances, already planted along the linear areas. Close to 2,700 trees are already in place over the three areas, with plans to add another 1,800. Mr. Fleming asked if any public input had taken place during this process, and Mr. Shapiro responded that historically landscaping decisions were made exclusively by the Roadside Environmental Unit, but they would welcome staff and public participation. Ms. Booker-Williams asked what their timeline was, and Mr. Shapiro explained that after the review period, planting would be scheduled for Winter 2025.

8. Proposed Ordinance Amendment – OA-03-25, Timothy Maloney, Director, Planning Development & Inspections

Mr. Maloney explained that the purpose of this request is to amend the Wake County Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) to accommodate a new pattern of growth and development consistent with Research Triangle Park's (RTP) latest vision called 'RTP 3.0,' continuing their mission of business and scientific research and development, training, and production. It will also promote dense mixed-use development that creates a live-work-play environment while making RTP more attractive to the next generation of workers and remain in-step with industry peers nationally and globally.

The Wake County jurisdiction of RTP represents 27% of the park (the balance in Durham County) and is located between Cary and Morrisville. RTP is the only area within Wake County's planning jurisdiction where the Research Applications (RA) zoning district is applied – it was created with the sole intent to regulate and guide site development within RTP. The zoning district has experienced only minor amendments over the years – in 2017, it was amended to allow schools. An estimated 55,000 people work across 375 companies in the Research Triangle Park.

RTP is served by municipal water and sewer utilities from the Town of Cary, which Wake County funds through a Capital Improvement Plan to promote development and encourage companies to relocate in the area. Through this amendment, RTP is positioning itself to accommodate new development trends and foster a wider range of uses. County and RTP planners have been working in partnership to determine what development standards need to be codified in the UDO and those that should stay in RTP's own covenants and restrictions.

Mr. Maloney identified the 4 proposed amendments:

- 1) Introduce three new alternate development options (UDO Section 3-51) in the RA zoning district; Mixed-Use, Residential Neighborhood, and Enhanced Corporate Campus.

Mixed-Use would accommodate high density / intensity development that embodies key elements of walkable / bikeable urbanism, well-connected to the regional transportation network. It will also accommodate mixed-uses to include research and development, offices, retail, entertainment, public and quasi-public uses, and moderate and higher density residential uses. A Residential Neighborhood option would accommodate traditional neighborhood development in compact form with a neighborhood center and would include primary residential development with a range of housing options and a mix of non-residential neighborhood uses. An Enhanced Corporate Campus option would accommodate the expansion and redevelopment of the existing corporate campuses in RTP, or the development of new corporate campuses. It also allows for a mix of uses and greater densities / intensities than is allowed under the current Traditional development option. This requires improved pedestrian and street connections between existing and new buildings.

- 2) Amend the Permitted Use Table (UDP Section 4-11) to identify a wider range of uses allowed within the RA zoning district.

This amendment would permit a wider range of uses within the RA zoning district, including residential and commercial (eating establishments, entertainment / recreation, and other daily service needs).

- 3) Amend the Lot and Building Standards section (UDP Section 5-20) to reflect the new alternate development options in the RA zoning district.

This amendment would reflect new development options (including maximum building height, minimum lot width, and maximum lot coverage area).

- 4) Amend the Sign Section (UDO Section 18-13) to reflect the prohibition of electronic changeable message signs within the RA zoning district.

This amendment would prohibit the use of electronic changeable message signs in the RA zoning district.

The Research Triangle Foundation held over 120 meetings with RTP companies and additional stakeholders throughout the RTP 3.0 planning process, and appointed a working group represented by fifteen companies to develop consensus on RTP 3.0. In December 2024, RTP Owners and Tenants Association approved revised land covenants and authorized the Foundation to pursue zoning changes with a 96% majority vote.

Mr. Maloney invited Travis Crayton, Vice President of Planning and Public Policy for Research Triangle Foundation, to address the Board regarding questions raised during their Code and Operations committee meeting in March. Mr. Crayton noted that RTP maintains an existing side path / trail / greenway network that connects to Morrisville and will connect to Cary in mid-2026 near Kelly Chapel Road. The RTP campus now includes Parkside Elementary School, with a combined middle / high school under construction on the same parcel. Church Street Park, located in RTP's jurisdiction, is operated by the Town of Morrisville, and it is publicly available to primary residents of the Town. RTP also hosts mountain bike trails near Parkside Elementary and partners with Triangle Off-Road Cyclists (TORC).

Mr. Crayton offered answers to questions raised in March: the intensity of existing development in RTP today includes 26.3% total impervious surface (split between buildings, parking, and NCDOT Right-of-Way), with 73.6% undeveloped land, totaling 1,937 acres. Roughly 400 acres are designated as Natural Area Preserves that will not be developed. The Board also asked for more information regarding RTP's covenant regulations. The covenants create private regulations regarding where development can take place, what it looks like, and what standards it must meet. He provided a list of Regulatory & Policy topics for RTP Enforcement, noting it was not a comprehensive list, but one that addressed signage, buffers, lighting, allowable uses, and sustainability standards.

Mr. Maloney presented staff findings that the Ordinance Amendment:

- 1) Introduces three new development options as an alternate from the traditional development approach in the RA zoning district.
- 2) Promotes more dense mixed-use development that creates a live-work-play environment in the center of the Triangle regions while making RTP more attractive to the next generation of works.
- 3) Allows RTP to retain development plan review and approval for consistency with their covenants and restrictions.
- 4) Furthers the latest vision of RTP while continuing their mission of business and scientific research and development, training, and production.
- 5) Is consistent with the Wake County Comprehensive Plan in that it delegates authority for area planning to the Research Triangle Foundation.

Staff recommends that the Planning Board recommend to the Board of Commissioners that it 1) adopt the drafted statement of consistency for Ordinance Amendment 03-25 as presented, and as a separate motion, 2) recommend that the Board of Commissioners adopt Ordinance Amendment 03-25 as presented.

Mr. Van Dyk asked what the rezoning policy would be on the County's end if this ordinance passed, and Mr. Maloney explained it would remain the same – a site plan would be received, Research Triangle Foundation would conduct internal reviews, and the plan would be submitted to staff for a by-right planning review.

Public Hearing

Ms. Booker-Williams opened the floor for public comment and, hearing none, closed the floor at 3:02 p.m.

Board Motion for OA-03-25

Ms. Rice made a motion that the Planning Board adopt and offer to the Board of Commissioners the following recommended statements finding that the proposed text amendment is consistent with the Wake County Comprehensive Plan and Wake County Unified Development Ordinance (UDO). The purpose of the Wake County Comprehensive Plan and the Wake County UDO, as seen in Article 1-22, is to provide a guide for the physical development of the county, preserve and enhance the overall quality of life of residents, and establish clear and efficient development review procedures. The text amendment included herein accomplishes this as described in the following statements:

- 1) Introduces three new development options as an alternate from the traditional development approach in the RA zoning district.
- 2) Promotes more dense mixed-use development that creates a live, work, play environment in the center of the Triangle region while making RTP more attractive to the next generation of workers.
- 3) Allows RTP to retain development plan review and approval for consistency with their covenants and restrictions.
- 4) Furthers the latest vision of RTP, RTP 3.0, while continuing their mission of business and scientific research and development, training, and production.
- 5) Is consistent with the Wake County Comprehensive Plan in that it delegates authority for area planning to Research Triangle Foundation.

The motion for Consistency was seconded by Ms. Prince and approved by the Board unanimously.

Board Motion for Approval on OA-03-25

Dr. Kolappa made a motion that, in the matter of OA-03-25, the Planning Board finds that the adoption of the text amendment is consistent with the Wake County Comprehensive Plan and Wake County Unified Development Ordinance and is reasonable and in the public interest and hereby make a motion to recommend approval of the proposed text amendment to the Wake County Board of Commissioners.

The motion for Approval was seconded by Mr. Jenkins and approved by the Board unanimously.

9. Committee Reports

None.

10. Planning, Development, and Inspections Report

Mr. Maloney informed the Board that this was Ms. Peterson's final meeting prior to her retirement on April 30th.

Ms. Peterson noted that the latest Census Bureau data was recently released, listing Wake County's population at 1.2 million. When she arrived in 2000, the population was slightly above 600,000, an indication of the growth in the County, particularly in municipalities. The County's population in the unincorporated areas have remained roughly the same. Ms. Peterson thanked her staff for all the hard work with area plans and ETJ administration, and Mr. Van Dyk for his role in advocating for tree canopy restoration. She expressed her appreciation for Mr. Maloney's ability to quickly synthesize and represent the Planning Department and thanked the Planning Board for their work.

Mr. Finn informed the Board that public information requests from citizens have yielded exceptionally conscientious questions relative to the development community. Information request volume remains high, but individual citizens are more engaged than is typical. Intake remains active, and Mr. Finn anticipated that it was likely to exceed the previous high-volume mark in 2018. He identified Leila Coe, who is assisting with the Eastern Area Plan, and spoke highly of her work with Development & Inspections. Mr. Finn thanked Ms. Peterson for her service.

Mr. Maloney updated the Board on the Garner ETJ Request which was scheduled to be presented to the Board of Commissioners on April 14th. The request has been tabled due to activity in the General Assembly. He reminded the Board that the legislature is currently considering a bill that would put a moratorium on any ETJ requests in Wake County for a three-year period. The Town of Garner, Chair of the Board of Commissioners, and the County Managers Office agreed that it would be best to hold the request until such time as the status of the bill changed.

Mr. Maloney noted that the Ordinance Amendments approved in March would be presented to the Commissioners on April 7th. The Board had requested additional time to review the short-term rental amendment for further discussion and possible public input, with a plan to vote in late April or in May. Either the current or former Chair or Vice Chair were requested to attend to provide the Planning Board's perspective on their recommendation. The RTP Ordinance Amendment would be going before the Board of Commissioners later in the summer or in the fall to allow Durham County ample time to advance their amendment.

Mr. Maloney thanked Ms. Peterson for her service to the County and the Planning Department, noting that she is considered the "go-to" person countywide, when it comes to demographics, input, or setting up committees.

Mr. Van Dyk provided an update on the tree canopy project, noting that the continued advocacy of the Planning Board would help shape the Turnpike Authority's designs as they head towards implementation. He and Mr. Maloney shared photos of the trees planted last year. Mr. Maloney added that the survival rate of the trees is just over 50%. Mr. Maloney reminded the Board that Leaf and Limb Tree Service is donating a pocket forest demonstration at Turnipseed Nature Preserve, totaling 4,000 square feet. Staff feels it is a much more appropriate location to demonstrate the reforestation project.

11. Chairman's Report

Ms. Booker-Williams thanked Mr. Wells for his service as Chair to the Board.

12. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:21 p.m.

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REGULAR MEETING
WAKE COUNTY PLANNING BOARD
April 2, 2025

Chair Brenna Booker-Williams declared the regular meeting
of the Wake County Planning Board for
Wednesday, April 2, 2025, adjourned at 3:21 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Brenna Booker-Williams
Wake County Planning Board

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