

## **Is Chatham Park Sustainable?**

**Elaine Chiosso, Haw River Assembly**

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Whenever I hear Chatham Park and sustainable used in the same sentence, I wonder what is really meant. The landmark 1987 definition from the World Commission on Environment and Development said it is ***“Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”*** That's the standard Chatham Park must meet if it is to be truly sustainable. So, what are our present needs, and what do future generations need?

Defining the needs of the present population depends on one's perspective. The needs of the developer and investors may be very different from the needs of the people who currently live here. Economic gain is often at the expense of the livability of small town life, such as Pittsboro, plus the viability of farms and the natural world that we who live here value so highly. What will be the overall sustainability of our quality of life, when we consider the huge increase in traffic, air pollution, and water pollution that Chatham Park will bring? The decades long construction time frame for this massive development means we will be living in a world of construction traffic, noise and muddy waters for a long time.

What do future generations need? Of course they will need clean water, and enough of it to sustain the increased population living here. They will need more sustainable forms of energy and transportation that do not increase carbon in our atmosphere. We have known for many decades that fossil fuel economies have brought us a warming planet with more extreme weather. Future generations would not call "sustainable" a development which leads us towards increased climate change by building new roads for huge tracts of houses dependent on cars. The very forests that provide clean air and protect streams, will be destroyed and replaced by rooftops and pavement, radiating more heat on hot summer days. They would not consider “sustainable”, a development that unravels the resiliency that nature's defenses provide. Global temperatures have been setting new records every year, along with increasing floods and droughts. Future generations will need a world where clean water and the management of much heavier rainfalls (or drought) will depend greatly on wetlands and forests to mitigate these changes.

I was in Ellicott City, MD on July 30 when over 6 and 1/2 inches of rain came down in 2 hours, sending an enormous surge of floodwater through the town, killing 2 people and destroying businesses and houses. It was considered a "one in a thousand year" event. Massive new development in the watershed upstream of Ellicott City, the fastest growing area in Maryland, has created a 34% increase in population in the last 10 years. More houses, roads, parking, lots, big box stores all exacerbate stormwater run-off problems. The West Virginia flood this past June was also a "one in a thousand year" event, and record breaking flooding is destroying lives and homes in Louisiana this August. Chatham County saw creeks out of their banks, flooding streets, yards and roads in the pre-Christmas torrential rain last December. Our current regulations for managing

stormwater are based on historical storms that are no longer the norm. Heavy rain events in the southeast US increased 27% between 1958 and 2012. To be sustainable we will need to grow smarter and grow very differently than before. Replacing forests with buildings and pavement needs to be reconsidered and balanced with the future need for a more resilient world.

How will Chatham Park provide clean drinking water for future generations? Our current methods for treating drinking water are not sufficient to protect us from unregulated industrial chemicals and other pollutants that enter our waters through sewage effluent. Jordan Lake and the Haw River are polluted with the stormwater and wastewater of almost a million people upstream. The state's plan to decrease pollution from all sources upstream has been stalled by the legislature since 2011, and every year more pollution flows into the lake. And water quantity? A future drought like the one we had in 2007- 8 could severely test how much water Jordan Lake and the Haw River would be able to provide when a much larger population depends on it.

Chatham Park Investors, have now released the "Additional Elements" that were required under the approval for the project's Master Plan. We look for details on how this 8000 acres of forested land, near the Haw River and Jordan Lake, could be turned into a very dense metropolitan area with a population 10 times larger than Pittsboro's is now and still "*preserve critical environmental resources*" as Pittsboro requires in their PDD ordinance. Those of us who are guardians of local water and who have labored for years to protect a sustainable vision for the future of Pittsboro, would argue that they have failed to meet these goals. An Environmental Impact Assessment for the total acreage has not been required or done, nor do they intend to follow the recommendations from scientists and consultants to preserve 30% of the natural area and forest, especially closest to the Haw River and Jordan Lake. The Additional Elements say only 10% tree coverage would be required, including new plantings after land disturbance, not preservation of existing forest. The Additional Elements for stormwater, drinking water and wastewater do not offer sufficient details to support their claims that "*Chatham Park will be the best expression of smart growth values, incorporating long-range regional considerations of sustainability*". Where are the facts?

And so, we return to the question of what is sustainable. Have the current needs of the people who already live in Chatham County been sufficiently considered in the plans for Chatham Park? Perhaps more importantly, are the needs of future generations, who will live in a world where climate change is fully a reality, being compromised? It is up to us, the people and our elected representatives - not real estate investors, to define what sustainable development means.

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