

Blue Ribbon Committee on the Future of Wake County

Meeting Summary

**Thursday, June 1, 2006
RBC Center, 8:00 – 11:30 a.m.**

Goals/Objectives

To go forward with a consensus report to the Wake County Board of Commissioners containing specific recommendations that reflect the views and interests of committee members to the maximum degree possible.

- ⇒ By consensus we mean a process for making collective decisions through which we have strived to reach substantial agreement on matters of overall infrastructure direction and policy.
- ⇒ Such an agreement may not satisfy each member's interests equally or receive a similar level of support from all members, but there is a general feeling of agreement.
- ⇒ Differences may exist, but when the report is completed, every committee member understands and can explain the findings, and respect the process that led to the findings of the report.

Process

Co-Chairmen Frank Holding Jr. and Fred Day welcomed the committee, and outlined the day's goals and process to be used. They reminded committee members of the importance of taking the long view while fulfilling the committee's mission, and to work together to reach consensus on recommended funding solutions.

The process used was a SWOT analysis, which allowed individual committee members to assess the draft report's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Committee members then worked in groups to identify actions and strategies to address these issues in the next draft report.

The following summarizes the feedback from the SWOT analysis.

STRENGTHS

<p>PLANNING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good facts on population growth • Takes into account the infrastructure needs of a growing, diverse population * • Pro-growth strategy • Common growth assumptions • Addresses long-term needs • 25-year action plan created to keep Wake County world class • Focused on improving quality of life in Wake County • Visionary * • Good job of identifying gaps in projected vs. anticipated funding * • Forces us to realize revenue shortage • Developed plan to fund the “gap” • Willingness to take a provocative position (i.e., tax increase) • Identifies sources of revenue (different funding options) • Proposes legislative changes needed to implement new revenue sources 	<p>COMPREHENSIVE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive * • Addresses all issues • Thorough • Clear language • Well organized and presented • Captured essence of the group’s thinking in a concise, clearly stated format • In-depth analysis • Good needs identification • Big picture point of view • Long-term focus • Meets the goal to identify specific long-term vision • Proper framing of the question that was asked • Significant areas have been explored 	<p>DIVERSITY OF OPINION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many recommendations indicating diverse input • Allowed for some variation in viewpoints • Process has involved many people who are reasonably well informed about public services • Aggregation of unvetted needs into one report • Collaborative effort of some of the most active and involved business men and women in the community. • County commissioners developed this committee in order to involve citizens – to be proactive in an opportunity to make improvements • Wake County commissioners should be commended for this effort! • Developed by businesses and community • Broad-based; good cross-section of citizenship represented
<p>SPECIFIC CATEGORIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassess property every four years • Public support of schools • Improving the quality of education is central to the report • Recommends joint water-sewer authority • Expedite construction of Little River Reservoir • Excellent work by criminal justice group; implement plan to build new courthouse; criminal justice plans not held hostage to downtown fixation • Agreement to support a positive place to live and work 		

* Same point made multiple times

WEAKNESSES

PROCESS CONCERNS

- Report reflects a process that didn't allow for alternative funding discussions.
- Not enough discussion time
- Plans have been presented and reviewed but not evaluated, debated or tested
- Good information report, but it shows a lack of debate on issues.
- Consensus of items is questionable.
- Weak or little consensus on some key issues
- We are weak because of the "minority report." We must come out of this as a united front.
- Minority reports should be for everyone or no one
- Grass roots involvement lacking
- Need a "what's next" section – a plan for follow-up
- Accountability and next steps
- No clear understanding of how the report is going to be used
- Too much to digest
- Overall, may be too broad to give enough attention to specific areas
- Lack of prioritizations across topics and within topics *

INTERGOVERNMENTAL

- Does not project contingencies
- Does not address change in population make-up and federal push-down
- Needs more comparisons with other governments
- Dependence on state legislature for new tax authority
- Approval of judges is dependent on state legislature
- Nothing is binding on any governmental agency (state, county, city, school board)
- Federal and state government will gladly allow local government to assume their responsibilities
- Need to tie to dependencies for state and federal funding
- Can only achieve goal through partnerships

TAX IMPLICATIONS

- 1% sales tax should be split between education and transportation
- Need to address impact fees as an option
- Not enough discussion about how Wake property tax works
- Not enough focus on property tax (broad based, progressive, transparent, forces political accountability)
- Proposed new and additional taxes will harm economic development
- Answers to gap is almost always "tax increases" *
- Need to have more innovative ideas than simply increasing property taxes
- Nothing new – same old, same old
- Report reads like increased taxes are the preferred funding for many needs, rather than innovation *
- Burden disproportionately on service people (teachers, police officers, etc.) and lower income
- Removing tax exclusions for government and non-profit is totally unrealistic
- Would like to see revenue projections from finance work group

WEAKNESSES

<p>SCHOOL ISSUES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School support too positive • Not enough focus on details of school options (charter schools, construction costs and options) • More time and creativity needed in addressing biggest gap – public schools • P. 17 – unresolved issue on operating cost needs to be removed (no prior discussion by full committee) • More emphasis on public-private partnerships to build things (schools in particular) * 	<p>TRANSPORTATION RELATED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More emphasis on equitable state support of roads • Transportation fees • Encourage and support multi-modal transportation options • Address need for regional rail system • Transit infrastructure needs to be mentioned * • No mention of encouraging bicycle/pedestrian networks 	<p>SPECIFIC OMISSIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No financial numbers on impact of our recommendations * • Finance section way too skimpy (no explanations, needs revenue numbers) • Does not evaluate in detail the efficient use of current resources • Open space goal of 35% too high • Promote regional planning of water ources in the watersheds
<p>COST SAVINGS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not spend time on cost-savings or the revenue side of the equation * • Does not adequately prioritize “demands” or reflect critical “in your face” discussion of financing • Not enough challenge to future infrastructure plans • Plans presented are unconstrained by available resources * • Mission definition (pp 3-4) excludes the possibility of reducing the projected cost through efficiency • Does not prioritize plans, needs OR spending * • Does not challenge assumptions (no analysis of funding gap – forced to accept the numbers provided) • No creative cost savings except for Wake Tech section 	<p>OTHER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need outside government audit of systems and effectiveness • No work on human services needs (i.e., mental and behavioral health issues) * • Did not discuss libraries, although it was part of our mission • Mutually exclusive competing objectives (e.g., guide land use to protect open space and encourage density in only certain areas vs. water/sewer in whole county) • The pp 19-21 discussion of sprawl and density is superficial, based on faulty assumptions • Report doesn’t include what we do NOT recommend • What did we miss??? • Need more innovation – not enough work on different ways to approach government • Saying “those differences won’t be resolved here” (p. 3) is like saying “ignore that elephant on the table” 	

OPPORTUNITIES

COLLABORATION & COALITION BUILDING

- To create a collaborative effort between government and the private sector to solve our problems long term rather than put a bandaid on it as we historically have done
- A collective voice as to how to move forward as a region
- Community to buy into a process of moving collectively toward a common goal *
- Plan for public inclusion/discussion of recommendations *
- Prevent community from going downhill by addressing issues now
- To practice the holy experience of “disagreeing without disapproving”
- Provide public/private funding
- To have legislative agenda over long period of time
- Chance to build a broad coalition for supporting economic prosperity
- Chance to bring community together to solve/address county’s growth problems

ACCOUNTABILITY

- Continued accountability for report
- Pressure to use ideas presented (because of diversity of committee)
- Reduce spending recommendations to a five-year horizon
- Facilitate discussion with state legislature on revenue sources (taxes)
- Wake County can avoid the costly errors of other municipalities
- Set up process to challenge spending proposals
- Report can become strong economic development tool – shows commitment to address issues
- To work more o balance of cost savings with what we will need to spend
- Information in this report gives “food for thought” to our county commissioners so they can address many issues
- Reasons for tax reform
- To give specific numbers (rather than guesses)

EDUCATION OF PUBLIC

- Citizen education leads to broad-based support
- Encourage more thought about issues at hand
- Provides forum to educate public on what growth means
- To show the larger community understands all of the issues (more than just schools)
- Educate citizens about opportunities, challenges and costs of having a great community *
- Promotes discussion of impact of growth on public priorities and funding decisions
- Explain that infrastructure = high property values
- To explain that stopping growth is not a positive – that a downward spiral would hurt us economically
- To explain why growth doesn’t pay for infrastructure; that infrastructure is an investment that funds growth
- Blue Ribbon web site for feedback
- Citizens will look beyond the present
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OPPORTUNITIES

<p>GENERAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrates need for debate on new taxing authority for local government• Identifies funding weaknesses in Wake County budget/projects over the next 25 years• To create funding sources that are designated for important needs• To evaluate the dollars used to provide which services (do we want the level of services recommended?)• To make changes in funding• Further discussion and debate on different taxing structures• To better align revenue sources with user costs• To set priorities and include a hierarchy of needs (can't have it all) *• It is time to look at new and creative ways and means to achieve the end (new sources of revenue other than taxes and fees)• Allows us to leave the environment in better shape for children and grandchildren• Shows increased need to revisit plan in shorter time frame (3-5 years)	<p>GENERAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To manage growth *• Blueprint for future is identified – execution by future generations To make a significant contribution to our community (just the commitment of time shows that people care)• Educated business leaders in community• RTP was the foundation of our current great place; we need to include great breakthroughs of the future• Vision and leadership will help maintain a high quality of life• Open discussion of all issues affecting growth in Wake County• Setting the agenda for another committee to study these issues in greater depth• The possibility of establishing more diverse subcommittees of citizens to develop strategies, review status, be engaged in the actualization of the plan• Chance to speak in a unified voice as to how to raise revenue• Have growth with continued quality of life	
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THREATS

COMMITTEE RELATED

- Resistance by small group will keep us from moving forward
- Committee divisiveness will threaten report's credibility
- Lack of true consensus of BRC *
- Everyone is watching – if we do not support a report, we hurt the county's effort on schools
- May promote argument more than consensus
- Presenting limited alternatives to solve the problems at hand (also, limited in its intellectual and artistic scope)
- Not being aggressive enough in our recommendations
- Failing to consider dissenting opinions
- Failure of committee to discuss overall affordability issues (how much should government cost?) –will provide to be a political problem

GOVERNMENT RELATED

- Lack of confidence in government to act *
- Lack of confidence in elected officials; getting them to do the right thing and make the tough decisions
- County will mismanage its funds based on false assumptions
- State legislature rejection of new taxing authority

UNCERTAINTY

- National trends and the economy change *
- Miscalculation of gap
- Dynamic realities change assumptions and funds are wasted
- Handling the needs of growing diversity *
- Inflation in building materials is huge (45% in three years for DOT)
- Likelihood of being unable to provide services to all new citizens (can water, police, jails, schools, roads, energy, landfill and other services keep up?)

LACK OF TRUST IN THE OUTCOME

- Allowing our report to be watered down to the point where it doesn't say anything
- If we don't move forward with a comprehensive plan; a piecemeal approach will not solve problems and may be more expensive
- Report is shelved and nothing is done
- This committee will disband and the plan will change as the leadership changes
- Perception and use of dollars (misinformation)
- Reach wrong conclusions, send wrong message, make wrong recommendations

TAXES/COSTS

- Tax increases can cause real estate bubble
- Unconstrained taxes/fees *
- Too much cost with no offset to spending *
- Public balks at tax increases *
- Insufficient resource base
- We need a vehicle to zero base or cost justify (considering all alternatives) everything. If we don't, we will fail.

THREATS

COMMUNITY RELATED

- Community resistance – leadership loss
- Anti-tax folks will continue to limit our ability to pursue excellence *
- No-growth view takes over and Wake stagnates
- If all report recommendations accepted, it will increase the cost of living in Wake County (too high)
- Attacks from other groups without a spokesperson to respond quickly
- The future of activities like this community forum (more needed!)
- Exclusion of grassroots segment in the implementation process
- Public distrust of goals and process employed (and subsequent findings)
- Readers may not look beyond the cost to see the real benefits
- Telling the public that growth will cost them \$19 billion in higher taxes and fees will produce an anti-growth backlash
- Not enough citizen support to meet needs *
- General public “giving up” and abandoning the goal of keeping Wake County a positive place to live and work
- Essential to insist that we as a society face these issues
- Size of school bond may absorb voters’ willingness to approve future bond referendums
- Threat to lower income and working class

OTHER

- Demagoguery and rhetoric such as in the minority report; it needs substance
- Growth solutions become political football and we would not be able to solve any problems
- Political maneuvering against common interests and the common good
- Not funding what we really need because we spent foolishly
- Too many items at one time to address
- No analysis and consideration of alternative school building plans
- Failure to prepare for paying for planned future infrastructure
- That “Eden” will go away if we put our heads in the sand and don’t address the issues
- Kill the golden goose that laid the golden egg
- Poor follow-through to keep the report in the news
- Continuance of prevalent view that problems aren’t that bad, there’s plenty of money to take care of them, and that everything will take care of itself without our efforts

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REPORT

(FROM SWOT ANALYSIS 6-1-06 – flip chart pages from group work)

Overarching Themes

Comments on the Content in the Report

- Language of report does not set firm priorities among the list of recommendations
- Finance section way too skimpy – needs details, calculations, cost to taxpayers
- Language needs to be much tougher on local officials lobbying for appropriate state, federal action. Ex: transportation equity formula; Medicaid cost share by counties; show be moved to general recommendations
- Language needs to be read tougher, clearer, regarding school design and more charters
- Edit and rewrite report to adopt consistent style, make the summary agree with the components, don't have separate section for minority report
- Show pros and cons in report
- Section to address costs /revenue efficiencies
- Clearly state mission and limitations of BRC
- A vision – not a mandate include in executive summary
- Incorporate thoughts from “stickys” in the final report
- Consensus statement on needs / vision
- Provide menu of options to achieve vision
- Sign the report

Comments on How to Frame the Report

- Describe the process (comprehensive)
- Identify the participants (Name and interests)
- Context: Past, Present and Future
- Include “alternative views” in body of the report
- Consensus – There is a shortfall – starting point for the report
- Make easy to understand: graphs, numbers, pictures
- Focus on impact to the individual and family. “What does it mean to me?”
Bring down to individual level: “my commute,” “my kids’ schools,” “access to parks / amenities,” “job availability”
- Frame Report – Quality of Life

Comments on What's Next: Immediate Steps

- Distribute report to all groups (including municipalities) seeking affirmation, criticism suggestions, input
- Interactive website seeking input
- Report summary mailed to taxpayers
- Seek media follow-up
- Speakers Bureau of BRC members to speak at civic groups and churches

Comments on What's Next: Future Steps

- Follow-up on the future – perhaps reconvene BRC every year or two / three to check on progress, changes, success & failures to keep public informed
- Break report into sections and see specific input from existing, former or new interest groups (e.g. reconvene CAC to review school conclusions)
- Recommend in the report that a new committee, or team of consultants, or both be convened to study the cost side of the equation in detail. There is disagreement as to whether any tax / fee recommendation be contingent on the findings of this new effort

- Set priorities for future growth
- Follow-up on the future – perhaps reconvene BRC every year or two / three to check on progress, changes, success & failures to keep public informed
- Break report into sections and see specific input from existing, former or new interest groups (e.g. reconvene CAC to review school conclusions)
- Series of forums for public discourse
- Periodic update commitment
- More of these sessions of debate within this group
- Step process for follow through (including re-convening BRC)
- Prioritize in the next steps of this process

Comments on What the Creation of the BRC has Yielded

- Reality
 - To develop a strategic and detailed blueprint for the future
 - Demonstrate need for new taxing authority to create additional revenues to fund growth
 - Opportunity to ensure fiscal responsibility and accountability
 - Leverage assets for continued growth, economic development and quality of life
 - A view on how to move forward and speak in a unified voice to generate new financial resources in a responsible way
 - Accountability and oversight
-

ORIGINAL SWOT ANALYSIS (from flip charts)

Strengths

- Describe the process (comprehensive)
- Identify the participants (Name and interests)
- Context: Past, Present and Future
- Sign the report
- Include “alternative views” in body of the report
- Consensus – There is a shortfall – starting point for the report
- Make easy to understand: graphs, numbers, pictures
- Focus on impact to the individual and family. “What does it mean to me?”
- Bring down to individual level: “my commute,” “my kids’ schools,” “access to parks / amenities,” “job availability”
- Reality
- Frame Report – Quality of Life

Weaknesses

- Follow-up on the future – perhaps reconvene BRC every year or two / three to check on progress, changes, success & failures to keep public informed
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Opportunities

- To develop a strategic and detailed blueprint for the future
- Set priorities for future growth
- Demonstrate need for new taxing authority to create additional revenues to fund growth
- Opportunity to ensure fiscal responsibility and accountability
- Leverage assets for continued growth, economic development and quality of life
- A view on how to move forward and speak in a unified voice to generate new financial resources in a responsible way
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Threats

- Show pros and cons in report
- Section to address costs /revenue efficiencies
- Accountability and oversight
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- Periodic update commitment
- More of these sessions of debate within this group
- Step process for follow through (including re-convening BRC)
- Prioritize in the next steps of this process