

Letter to County Commissioners, County Manager & the incoming Assistant County Manager  
regarding Article 46 Tax

I am writing you concerning the possibility of Chatham County enacting an Article 46 tax on the March 2020 ballot, as was reported by the Chatham News + Record earlier this month. I understand that the discussion is very preliminary and there is still much work to be done, but I would be remiss if I were not in touch with you through the process. As you're aware, Chatham County is in desperate need of a dedicated funding source to support affordable housing. This issue has been discussed to death in recent years – in the six years that I have been with Chatham Habitat, every elected official has pledged support for affordable housing, and yet we still have not established a dedicated funding source which is realistically the only meaningful way to address this problem. Last year, you established the affordable housing trust fund, a fund reliant on an approved base allocation of \$200,000 or board-decided amount each year. Between the need for funding for affordable housing developments, housing repair, and emergency housing programs, this fund is already limiting the level of need that can be addressed. Despite the fund's existence, at this point, Chatham County is the only county in the Triangle that does not have a dedicated funding source for affordable housing. Due to our lack of incentive, there are virtually no organizations other than Chatham Habitat who are working to address this crisis.

In 30 years, Chatham Habitat has built 135 safe, healthy, affordable homes for families in our county with very little tangible support from Chatham County or the local municipalities. Affordable housing agencies and builders from outside our community see our county as unwelcoming – why take on the task alone where there is no incentive? I have come across this roadblock when seeking partners to work on affordable rental and veteran's housing. I am proud to work in Chatham County, and I am proud of the work that Chatham Habitat has done. I can't help but think of how much more we could do if there were a dedicated funding source to support our work and to attract other organizations that could bring their creative, diverse solutions to address this crisis in Chatham County.

The Chatham News + Record article correctly reports that all of our neighboring counties have passed resolutions defining how the funds will be used. It's time for Chatham County to take a bold step to show that affordable housing is a top priority by designating this proposed funding for affordable housing. Darrell Butts, a budget analyst for the Chatham County Manager's Office stated that this is "a dependable source of revenue... it's not one-time, it's going to be there year after year." This is exactly what we need to begin to solve the affordable housing crisis in Chatham County.

Designating this proposed funding for affordable housing would be the sort of commitment that we as a county need to show those agencies that are looking for a reason to come to our county. This is a once in a decade chance to even the playing field. If affordable housing is overlooked again, it could very well be too late to catch up when the opportunity comes up again.

I realize that there are many issues facing our county, all of which are worthy of funding. However, I'm not sure that any of them have been talked about as much in the last five years. If there are other priorities being considered for this funding, I respectfully request that affordable housing not be shut out entirely. Think of the message you will be sending by including affordable housing in this effort. Think of the message you will be sending by *not* including affordable housing in this effort.

I ask for your thoughtful consideration of this request, and for 30 minutes of your time to further discuss this issue over lunch or a cup of coffee. I will be in touch in the next couple of weeks to set up a time to meet. Thank you for your consideration and, as always, thank you for all of the great work that you do for Chatham County.

Respectfully,

Jerry Whortan