

## **Commercial and Mixed Use District**

Thank you Mr. Chairman, members of the Planning Commission, good evening. I am Mark Rinaldi and I can be found most days of the week at 4029 Ironbound Road.

I am confident that most of you understand the important role economic development plays in our community's well-being. Indeed, it intersects with nearly every other aspect of community life. To be sure, there are citizens in this County who would be content to see no new or expanded business and industry within our borders. But I suspect these well-intentioned people have not fully considered the implications of such a future. For a glimpse of that future, one need only look at the current fiscal stress the County is experiencing. There are ways to manage growth and maintain a sustainable community. Perhaps some of the following observations will be helpful as you begin to envision useful changes to our zoning and other regulatory ordinances to that end.

Redeployment of vacant or underutilized facilities and redevelopment of distressed or obsolete properties should be important emphases in our overall community development strategy. It is my hope that as a community we can quickly begin to view distressed properties not as temporary blights upon the landscape, but as unique opportunities to reset these properties and benefit from gains in energy efficiency, aesthetic improvements and contemporary functional relationships. In order to meaningfully capitalize on the opportunities that such sites offer, however, our ordinances, policies and programs will need to offer flexibility, reward creativity and encourage the use of offsets to achieve and maximize area-wide benefit where constrained site specific solutions may not be possible or practical.

With specific reference to commercial uses, I first want to applaud the County's efforts to date in moving a variety of business uses from Special Use Permit to by-right. Some of you were involved in several important modifications that occurred prior to the Comp Plan process, but there is more work to be done, and it is my hope that this ordinance update process will complete the task. As I recall, the pre-Comp Plan changes were described by Staff as relatively minor, low hanging fruit if you will. I stand here before you this evening to encourage you to now do the hard work necessary to move forward with this important, increasingly important, initiative. Businesses now, more than ever, need certainty as they plan for major capital investments. They will work with communities that establish clear expectations and avoid communities where its let's make a deal. Establishing appropriate performance standards for by-right uses cannot be done in a vacuum. Genuine and sincere collaboration between the regulated and the regulators and with other vital community stakeholders is the only way to achieve the desired results of increased predictability, for both businesses and interested citizens. Working teams including all the various stakeholders is the best way to success.

While a member of the County's Economic Development Authority, I participated in a number of discussions among and between EDA Directors and OED Staff about various issues related to the County's existing Enterprise Zone and the benefits to be derived from the creation of one or more Technology Zones. It is my understanding that there may be additional acreage available to add to the existing Enterprise Zone, and some acreage could reasonably be removed from the zone, all in an effort to better match suitable land inventory in the revamped zone with desirable economic development uses.

With respect to technology zones, the EDA recognized over 18 months ago that certain classes of technology business activities can have

special economic significance to the county due to the nature of the technology developed or employed, their interrelationships with other Hampton Roads based federal, institutional and private organizations/ businesses and their potential for high growth in employment and capital investment. The EDA felt that an appropriate method of offering effective incentives to certain classes of technology businesses is to create one or more technology zones in the county. The establishment of technology zones in other communities has been found to hasten redevelopment, serve as a retention mechanism for existing businesses and incubator clients and provide significant hi-wage and benefits employment and tax generation. To take charge of our economic future, the County must move forward in this update process to geographically designate one or more technology zones, identify the industry classes and clusters we wish to encourage therein and determine the types and magnitude of incentives the zones will represent.

Finally, the creation of an Economic Opportunity district in the recent Comp Plan is the first step towards creating a sustainable economic future in JCC. Building up, not out, and with multiple modes of transportation access to and away from significant employment centers will help to insulate JCC from the increasingly grim future of the single-occupancy private vehicle. Establishing the EO district as a receiving zone for the transfer of development rights will provide the ying to the rural land preservation yang. Conversion of residential development rights from the sending zone into commercial and office development rights in the receiving zone can lessen the pressures rural landowners face when they need or desire to monetize their land assets for retirement, health expenses and other necessities of daily living. Other mixed use, higher intensity districts can also be designated as receiving zones. In time, this market based approach to growth management could even replace the antiquated and ineffective PSA tool that the County has struggled to explain, implement and revise for decades.