

# TAXPAYER BLUES

## CITIZENS FOR CAROLINA BEACH

*Contributions Welcomed:*

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### Decisions by Council members continue to reflect poor business sense and lack of vision

Our town economy is in decline, businesses are closing, developers are looking elsewhere, retailers are reporting poor summer sales, DOT grants are in jeopardy, and hundreds of thousands of dollars due our town by Kure Beach remains uncollected.

In the meantime our water, sewer, and stormwater systems are in need of upgrades, lift station #1 needs replacement, our roads and sidewalks need improvement, and the condition of our CBD continues to deteriorate, with no revitalization or master plan in sight.

If our town government continues at this pace, taxpayers will have more to worry about than height issues.

It is no secret that the last election was about change. Most elections are. But a change from what - to what? Our previous Councilmen were charged with favoring too much new development. Yet, that same development is credited for numerous town improvements and a boost in our economy and tax base.

The current Council appears to be intent on avoiding that path. Their campaign mantra was *Smart Growth*. As most people understand the term, smart growth is typically a product of responsible leadership. But, our Councilmen appear to have their own unique idea about smart growth that seems to defy the norms. In fact, their smart growth platform is often referred to as a *No Growth* policy.

In a recent recommendation by councilman Gilbert, the town is considering assessment of the one

million dollar costs to upgrade lift station #1, solely on new development projects. On its face, this may please citizens that already own their homes, but is it a wise and responsible action that represents the entire community?

Keep in mind; Council is not talking about large development projects or commercial impact fees footing the bill. How could they be? They are against large-scale development, and as a result of our current economic conditions, retailers and restaurants are closing – not opening. So, when Council speaks of *new development* funding the lift station, they are speaking of single-family, duplex, and small multifamily projects.

Given the task of deciding how to best fund the lift station upgrade, Councilmen Gilbert and Johnson felt it would be good policy to tax only future home builders. Under this scenario, everyone that currently has a home will be exempt, even those homes that directly contribute to lift station #1, which is about half of the town.

Have we missed something? Perhaps these Councilmen were absent for the lecture on fairness and responsible government? More importantly, how will new development pay for these upgrades when development has slowed, almost to a stop, due in part to the policies and actions of these very Councilmen?

Our town has always known the potential impacts on our infrastructure. It does not take a PhD to calculate required services based on the number of platted lots and allowable zoning densities. The town has

also always known that our infrastructure was inadequate based on theoretical build-out, just as we have always understood that as development progressed our infrastructure would need upgrading.

Every lot on this island, vacant or already built upon, has been contributing to our tax base since the beginning of time. Those taxes have been paid year after year without exception, and those taxpayers have every right to expect that when they are finally able to build their homes in our community, they will be afforded basic services for their tax dollar.

If this *Robin Hood* approach to government were used for every infrastructure improvement, fees related to new home construction would become so astronomical that no one could afford to join our community. In fact, by most comparisons, development fees are already at that point.

Common sense dictates that every property owner in our community should share the costs of our infrastructure improvements and lift station upgrades are no exception.

Furthermore, these Councilmen should stop viewing new development as detrimental to our community. It does not take a smart person to understand that developers do not absorb these fees; the fees are passed down to the buyers of these homes. And those buyers are none other than our future citizens and neighbors.

Moreover, where is the consistency? Taxpayers are currently paying for stormwater and road improvements in the Carolina Sands subdivision. That decision

was based on the fact that those folks have been paying property taxes for twenty five years and deserve infrastructure improvements. So why are there different rules for the lift station funding? Why is it only the responsibility of new citizens to pay the bill for a town wide benefit?

Our Town Council is charged with setting policy and making decisions that affect the viability of our community. Their decisions not only influence tourism, local businesses, and potential building and development projects, but also our economic growth and tax base resulting from such interest.

Our town leaders have a responsibility to the taxpayers to understand the economic principles of growth, and to apply those principles in a manner that will ensure the continued evolution and stability of our community. True smart growth can be a good thing, but it requires balance and thoughtful decision-making.

So, the question is, how do our three newest Councilmen define smart growth? And if acted on, will their definition create a prosperous future? Or will their interpretation drive property values down, chase away new business, and force our town economy into stagnation? Their actions on these, and similar issues, will affect us all for years to come.

The process of running our town requires creativity, fairness, and vision. One can only hope that this idea for the lift station funding is not an example of these Councilmen's best work.

*If you have interest in our organization, have any concerns you would like us to address, or would like to contribute to our effort to keep the community informed, please visit our web site or contact us at our mailing address. Thank you for your contributions to date.... CFCB*