

In The Works

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING FOR A MULTI-COUNTY REGION

The Triangle J Council of Governments is the regional planning agency which serves the six counties surrounding the Research Triangle Park of North Carolina. Since 1974, the Council has had a standing committee on land use. In 1982, the Land Use Committee was empowered to design a comprehensive plan for the undeveloped areas between Durham and Raleigh -- including the Research Triangle Park.

To elicit public input, the committee planned a series of public forums. The series was named "Horizons UNlimited." The first forum was held in March, 1983. It was attended by 250 people representing a broad cross-section of the population -- environmentalists, developers, state and local elected officials and staff, and other special interests. Participants were assigned to discussion groups, each with a "facilitator" and a reporter. The groups were asked to identify the primary issues confronting the region.

The council's staff drafted a work program from the various issue statements. A twelve month regional program was developed and adopted at the second Horizons UNlimited conference in April, 1983. Although most elements of the work program were assigned to the Council of Governments, there were some specific responsibilities appropriated to the local governments.

Concern for the poor quality of development around the Research Park inspired a planning design described as a "Ring District" proposal. This development plan was presented at the third Horizons UNlimited conference in October 1983. Under the proposal, an overlay zoning district with a one mile radius would be drawn around the park boundaries. Development standards within the park and the "ring" were suggested to be equivalent. Due to the former's protective development standards, the "ring lands" would incur a significant increase in regulation.

Independent of the Land Use Committee's action, the Durham County Board of Commissioners amended their zoning ordinance with the addition of a Major Transportation Corridor District (an overlay zone along Interstate Highway 40) and

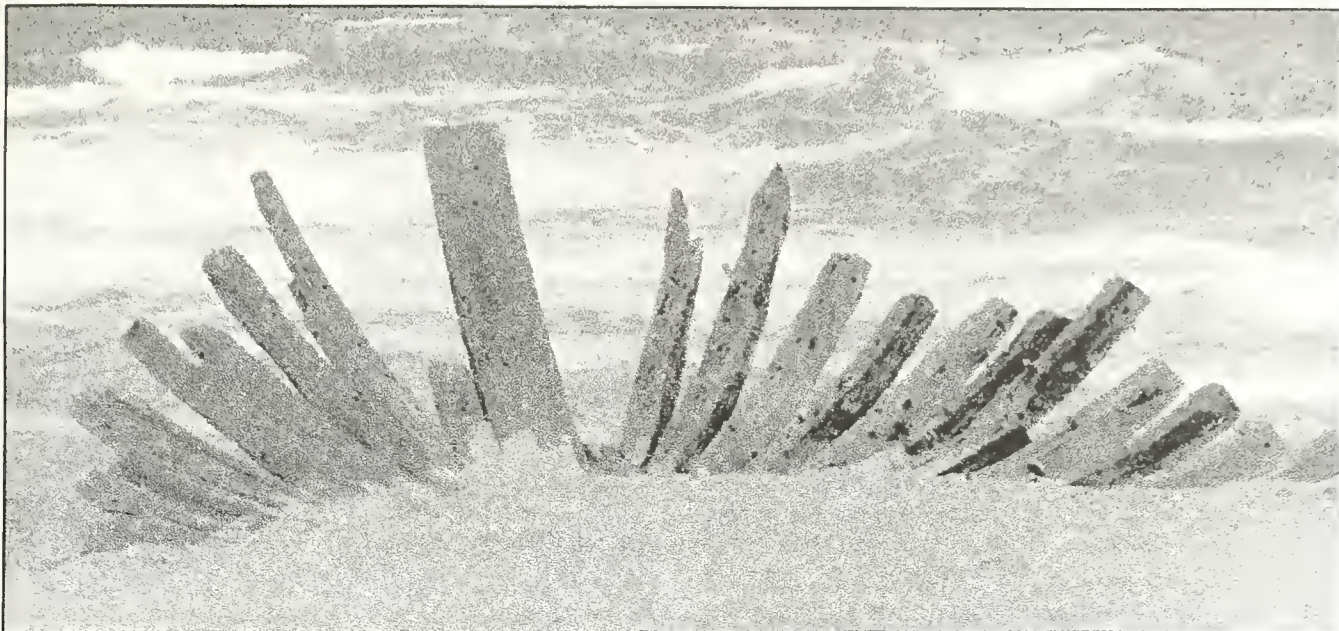
changes in the Highway Commercial District. These three actions, the Ring District, the Major Transportation Corridor and the revised Highway Commercial District, became a single issue in the minds of developers, small business people and property owners in the vicinity of the Park. The issue became heated, new pressure groups formed and rumors flew!

To sort out rumor from fact, the Triangle J Council of Governments formed an ad hoc committee called The Study Group for the Research Triangle Park Environs to derive a more satisfactory alternative. The Study Group is comprised of 30 people, including representatives of property owners' associations in the park, firms within the park, developers, engineers,



landscape architects and city and county elected officials. The group functions as a subcommittee of the Land Use Committee. It is chaired by Rebecca Heron, a member of the Durham County Board of Commissioners and a delegate to the Triangle J Council of Governments. The council provides staff support.

Beginning in late January, 1984, the Study Group met throughout February, March and early April. The first meetings were devoted to small-group discussion of the perceived issues and problems. From these discussions, the staff distilled a list of 22 concerns. A questionnaire was prepared and each member of the Study Group was asked to identify the 5 most pressing issues or problems. When the results were tallied,



*One of many shipwreck reminders on
Hatteras Island, North Carolina
Outer Banks*

three major themes were identified: the need for a comprehensive land use plan for the Research Triangle Park environs; the need for a water and sewer plan; and the need to amend the Durham County Zoning Ordinance.

The next phase of the Study Group's work consisted of issue-oriented discussions. The members voluntarily joined groups focusing on one of the three issues stated above. Each group was asked to list the actions which could be taken to solve the short and long-range problems associated with the various issues.

The staff drafted reports detailing each discussions group's recommendations. An edited composite report was drafted and mailed to every member of the Study Group for his or her review and comment. When ratified, and after endorsement by the Triangle J Council of Governments' Board of Delegates, the report will be distributed to the local governments.

Regardless of the outcome, the land use process has produced a number of important benefits. It has brought a number of people in contact with the Council of Governments, who had never before entered the forum of regional decision-making. For the council, the experience dramatized the importance and contribution of public participation in the region's land use decisions and policies.

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CARRYING CAPACITY STUDIES FOR NORTH CAROLINA'S OUTER BANKS

In the Spring of 1983, the Currituck County Board of Commissioners contracted thirteen graduate students from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Department of City and Regional Planning to study the carrying capacity of Currituck's Outer Banks. This study measured the extent to which existing natural and man-made systems could absorb new structural development, hurricane impacts, road expansions, new wastewater treatment and water supply demands. The study is intended to serve as a framework for Currituck County's growth management strategy.

Dare County, North Carolina is undertaking a similar contract with a new group of graduate planning students. These students will study the carrying capacity of Hatteras Island, a region well known for its recent and rapid growth. This study will incorporate additional factors which pertain largely to man-made systems. These factors include the institutional character of the community, its aesthetics, and recreation potential.

The institutional analysis will evaluate the capacity of existing and potential public services in the county. Fire and police protection, health, and education agencies will receive particular attention. Each agency is being measured relative to its perceived maximum service level, given the available resources. The government's capacity to develop growth management techniques is also being explored. Incorporating Hatteras Island's villages or implementing new zoning legislation are examples of possible public management changes in the region's land use process.

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The aesthetics component will test several hypotheses relating to the residents' and visitors' cognitive perceptions of development on Hatteras Island. A recently-distributed survey was prepared in an effort to measure respondents' tolerance for density. Preferences for development types were determined through a comparison of photos and drawings of community designs. The hypotheses will be supported, qualified, or rejected by a regression analysis. This analysis of regional carrying capacity will, theoretically, have strong credibility in the community as a function of the islanders' participation.

Recreation demand is included in the study due to the National Park Service's ownership interest (63 percent) in the island. The recreation use threshold is important in order to protect the physical environment and to ensure visitor enjoyment of the area. This section of the study will involve visitor attitude surveys, assessed management objectives of the Park Service, and environmental impacts of recreation on the island's ecosystem.

Physical systems will also be studied in this carrying capacity project. Land availability measures will provide an estimate for build-out ceilings for Hatteras Island. The development floor will assume single-family construction throughout the area while the ceiling measures multi-family and condominium development. A mid-range estimate of capacity will assume a mix of both single and multi-family units. Water supply capacity will be examined relative to existing supplies and service needs. In order to protect the current water supplies, a moratorium has been placed on new subdivision approvals until the existing water system is expanded. Wastewater treatment capacity will be assessed relative to island soil conditions and septic tank allowances.

The implications of a carrying capacity study are radically different than those of classroom-oriented projects; most notably, the complexity of threshold analysis requires a thorough review of very technical environmental and social conditions associated with the Hatteras community. For the students, the exercise has been an important practicum. It has forced the development of a reasonable and manageable guidance system for a community of particularly delicate proportions.

The findings from each group will be reported to Dare County officials this summer. Copies of the Currituck or Hatteras Island Carrying Capacity reports can be obtained by contacting the Center for Urban and Regional Studies, Hickerson House 067A, UNC-CH, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514.

County Planner, *Continued from page 9*

Second, Scott believes that planning boards should consist of anyone with an interest in planning. "Everyone should have access to the Planning Board, to sit on it and to listen and to vote. Citizen input in county government is too dadgum narrow."

Third, Scott sees a need for improvements in orientation procedures for county board members. He feels that Planning Board members should be sworn in (as are Board of Adjustment members)

"CITIZEN INPUT IN COUNTY GOVERNMENT IS TOO DADGUM NARROW."

and that members of the Board of Adjustment and the Planning Board should receive training about relevant laws, powers and duties. He adds in the case of Planning Board members, "Actually, they have no powers."

In addition, "The County Commissioners should prepare a written charge to the Planning Board, outlining specifically what its duties are. It's incredible -- they have never had that."

Fourth, "The public has a right to know what its professional staff people think. Staff should be given the opportunity to express their views briefly, concisely and with proper deportment."

Finally, "More than anything else," says Scott, "I would like to see the general public recognize that planning is a managerial process and that plans and ordinances and regulations can be modified and changed as times change, but that they must be changed by following proper procedures." Pasted to the inside of the cover of Scott's copy of the county zoning ordinance is a quotation by U.S. Supreme Court justice Felix Frankfurter: "The history of liberty has largely been the history of the observance of procedural safeguards."

Scott observes with characteristic candor, "And you and I both know that rezoning procedures are for the birds, and a distinct species of birds at that -- buzzards!"

Retirement Plans

After leaving his post with Wake County, Scott plans to immerse himself in home-improvement projects and to "listen for the voice of God to tell me if there is something else He wants me to do to be useful in this world." With his usual dry wit he adds, "If it is not made known to me, I will assume that from thenceforth I may do as I damn well please!" ☹