

2008 SPPACE Questionnaire

Neil Cooksey Mecklenburg County Commissioner Candidate – District 5

What is the number one issue facing Mecklenburg County?

Growth. The rapid population growth in Mecklenburg County will require the County to make tough choices in the next few years regarding schools, public land, environmental impact and public safety -- just to name a few pressing issues. We will need to be creative to find new ways to get more out of available resources without raising the tax burden on the citizens of Mecklenburg County.

In 2007, the North Carolina General Assembly authorized counties, subject to voter approval, the ability to impose an additional general fund revenue source (a .4% land transfer tax or a .25% sales tax). Do you support a .4% land transfer tax? Do you support a .25% sales tax?

I do not favor a .4% land transfer tax and would be loath to raise the sales tax burden on taxpayers. Mecklenburg County already has the heaviest combined property and sales tax burden in the State of North Carolina. We do not need more revenue sources; we need to spend the money we have wisely. However, I would consider supporting a .25% sales tax if it was for a specific, important public purpose and limited in duration.

How should Mecklenburg County address the region's EPA non-attainment designation for air quality?

The Board of County Commissioners took a positive step in addressing this issue through the Breathe Initiative in 2001-2. We need to build on this initiative by continuing to explore ways the county can reduce air pollution. For example, the county can take the lead by gradually replacing its vehicle fleet with cleaner burning, more fuel efficient vehicles.

What should Mecklenburg County do to protect and ensure we have an adequate supply of water to meet our current and future water demands?

The County has a limited role in the direct delivery of water to residents of Mecklenburg County. However, we can and should encourage conservation. We also need to protect the watershed under County jurisdiction to the extent feasible.

The General Assembly recently authorized Counties to participate in the building and maintenance of roads. Do you support or oppose Mecklenburg County building and maintaining roads?

Traffic congestion is certainly a major issue in this community. However, the City, State and Federal governments have the revenue sources to address these issues, not the County. Moreover, much of the road system in the County is under the jurisdiction of various municipalities and the State. Unless and until these issues are addressed, I do not think this is where the County should invest its scarce resources.

If the General Assembly authorized Mecklenburg County to hold a "Pennies for Progress" referendum similar to South Carolina's, would you support putting the measure before voters? If yes, for what infrastructure projects (i.e. roads, schools, parks, libraries, courts, jails, etc.) would you advocate using the money?

As taxes go, the Pennies for Progress program is appealing because it is a temporary tax that can fund specific projects that are desired by voters. I would consider using such funds for specific road projects, schools and public land acquisition.