

2010 SPPACE Questionnaire

KAREN BENTLEY

Candidates for the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners District 1

- 1. What are the top three issues facing Mecklenburg County and how do you propose to address them? 1) spending restraint and downsizing of local government, 2) property tax reductions for our citizens, 3) job creation (private sector).**

All three are interdependent. The BOCC has direct impact on the first two through our budget process. We determine the tax rate and the size of the County budget. We have approximately \$750 million in operating funds to manage and I believe that independent (outside) audits of each department is warranted and I would work to accomplish that.

Job creation is dependent on several factors. However, I believe that if Mecklenburg County is a "low tax" county instead of a "high tax" county, private sector investment will return at a faster rate than otherwise would occur.

- 2. 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? Please explain your answer.**

I support neither.

The land transfer tax will further exacerbate the poor real estate market. This tax will have negative consequences even when the market returns to normal by altering prices and choices made by the consumer.

An increase in the sales tax will further drain the local economy by taking money out of the private sector and putting in the non-productive public sector. Mecklenburg County is the highest taxed county in the state and we do not need to further burden our residents with an increase in the local sales tax.

- 3. It has recently been reported in the local media that Mecklenburg County faces an estimated budget shortfall of \$16 to \$60 million dollars in FY 2010-2011. How do you plan to address this issue?**

Our County Manager will be presenting the Board with his recommended budget for FY2011 in the coming weeks. It is likely that many departments will face significant cuts. I do not support taking money out of "pay go" (our savings account) to help balance the budget. I will focus on the effectiveness of what the department is delivering and will not be opposed to reductions in force if warranted. Mecklenburg County employs approximately 5000 employees and compared to like-sized Wake County we are

significantly overstaffed. I will make department-level decisions once I have reviewed the Manager's proposed budget.

4. Do you support Public-Private Partnerships for the construction of schools? Please explain your answer.

I think this concept has merit. Depending on how the deal is structured it is a win all the way around. We likely will not have the latitude to engage in any capital spending for at least this coming fiscal year so any proposals brought forward must take this into consideration.

5. 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?

I believe the "Pennies for Progress" program has been very successful in South Carolina. If Gov. Perdue had not raised the sales tax to help balance the State budget last year and Mecklenburg's overall tax rate were lower, I would most definitely support this type of referendum. However, until the current sales tax is lowered I will not support any additional tax burden on our citizens.

6. Are you in favor of the Mecklenburg County playing a role in incentivizing environmentally sustainable development? Please explain your answer.

I believe the private sector is, in general, on board with sustainable development. If County regulations require a certain level of "green building" then I think we should be willing to provide incentives to the private sector to comply with local government regulations. However, absent building code requirements for "green building" I am opposed to taxpayer support for the private sector in this manner.