

2010 SPPACE Questionnaire

VIRGINIA SPYKERMAN

Candidate for the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners
District 4

1. What are the top three issues facing Mecklenburg County and how do you propose to address them?

The top three issues are: fiscal responsibility, job creation, and quality education. If the BOCC will address the first issue, then the other two will benefit.

Fiscal Responsibility: My main reason for running is to bring common sense to the budgeting process. This includes making reasonable revenue projections, matching revenues and expenses, and planning beyond the next year so that we can have new programs and services when needed.

Job Creation: The BOCC can partner with the Chamber of Commerce and other economic agencies such as the Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority to attract new investments in the area. Given that businesses look for a stable and properly managed local government when deciding on investing in the area, I would work to bring financial stability to the county by improving the budget process at the County Commission level and by improving communication between the Commission and the other local governing bodies, specifically the Board of Education and the City Council. Additionally, corporations and individuals want to move here if the schools are good, crime is low and cost of living is affordable. Thus the Commission should focus on funding schools and public safety by cutting expenses elsewhere rather than raising property or sales taxes

Quality Education: The County Commission's role in providing a quality education is to provide adequate funding for the schools. I would work hard on the front end to come up with a real achievable budget, so that the county is not asking CMS for money back in the middle of the fiscal year. Additionally, I would volunteer to serve as a liaison between the County Commission and the Board of Education to understand better the goals, successes and challenges of CMS. With roughly half of the County's available funds going to CMS, it is vital that we improve communication and accountability between the two governing bodies.

- 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.**

No and no. I think a transfer tax unfairly penalizes home owners, especially first time home buyers. An increase in the sales tax at this time would only serve to stress our local economy further, by discouraging local spending.

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

If elected it would be too late to address this shortfall, but I certainly would work to ensure that it doesn't happen again

Here is an example of how our current process is broken. In March of this year, County Manager Harry Jones told the library board that a drop in tax dollars had forced the county to ask for money back from this year's budget. Three months later, the current County Commissioners voted to create an extra \$9.5 million in new revenue by revising upward the estimate of sales tax collections for the upcoming year. Voting to raise revenue projections in the budget does not mean the county will actually collect those revenues, and in fact it only sets the county up for the same failure next year. I sincerely believe that with better financial planning the county can and will provide better services

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

Yes I do, to the extent that using the private sector to construct public buildings can save the county money. My understanding is that the current legislation passed in 2006 by the NC General Assembly to allow for the use of Public-Private Partnerships in constructing schools does not make it cost effective for private developers to bid, thus no one has completed a project under this law to date.

- 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?**

Yes. What I like about the Pennies for Progress is that voters decide if they are able to afford a new tax, and the money is only spent on a prioritized list of projects that voters approved. I would use it for schools (getting students out of

trailers) and for updating the court's computer system but am open to other suggestions.

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

Yes. I would look for ways to incentivize developers and builders to make environmentally friendly decisions. For example, I would set up a fast track approval process for those investing in green projects, thus allowing developers to recoup their costs with a shorter development timeline.