

TO PURSUE NEW BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

# Cabarrus reshuffles economic agency

## Development board forms partnership with Chamber of Commerce

By ADAM BELL  
Staff Writer

CONCORD — Cabarrus County business and government leaders voted Tuesday to overhaul the way they pursue new business and industry.

The Cabarrus Economic Development Corp. reshuffled its board and unanimously agreed to put the private, nonprofit agency

under the control of the Cabarrus Regional Chamber of Commerce. The chamber will provide management, staff, office space and other services.

Economic development board members want business and government leaders to work more closely as the county continues its efforts to recover from the economic damage it sustained last year with the demise of its largest employer, former towel-and-sheet giant Pillowtex Corp.

The chamber, its foundation and the economic development agency would operate as the Cabarrus Regional Partnership, similar to a group promoting economic growth in the Charlotte region.

Under the plan adopted Tuesday, chamber chief executive John Cox would be CEO of the economic development group.



Cox

"This is not the chamber of commerce taking over the world," Cox said. "This is about economic development."

Economic development board members also want the Cabarrus Convention and Visitors Bureau under the chamber's aegis as part of the regional partnership. Tourism board Chairman Roger Haas said the current setup (with board members appointed by the county commissioners, the chamber and the tourism board itself) works well for the bureau, but he would listen to whether a different structure would improve tourism development.

Cox led a presentation on the changes for the economic development group.

Plans include hiring a business recruiter, studying land use requirements and creating a comprehensive marketing strategy. Several economic development board members, including Lowe's Motor Speedway

President H.A. "Jimmy" Wheeler, floated the idea of a moratorium on new construction to help get a handle on the county's explosive growth.

"If we don't do something (about growth), we'll have the potential left come in here, and we'll end up like California," Wheeler said.

Also Tuesday: ■ Cox and Toby Prewitt, chairman of the economic development board and of the chamber board, initially closed the economic development meeting, saying they wanted a frank discussion of the new organization without reporters present. But after the Observer objected, and after a brief closed-door session to discuss whether to reopen the meeting, Prewitt said the agency would hold the rest of its discussions in public.

■ The economic development group's funding source so far has been \$438,000 from the Cabarrus County budget. The seven business leaders on the economic agency will provide \$15,000 each, and the agency hopes to receive a combined \$100,000 from local municipalities. Top government officials from Cabarrus County, Concord, Hartsburg and Kannapolis also sit on the economic board, as does Cox.