



## State Office

North Carolina is moving forward and Chatham County is in a part of the state moving the fastest, meaning the County should have a clear vision for the future. That vision should include affordable/work force housing, comfortable living and mass public transit to serve all of its existing and new residents – making the county a more dynamic community for all.

As Chatham grows as part of the Durham-Chapel Hill Metropolitan Region, many new employment opportunities will touch this wonderful county and all should be given the opportunity to enjoy its growth. For far too many, especially black and brown residents, who live away from downtown and other development zones, county-wide public transit is a necessity to economic prosperity and community development.

African-Americans, who make up more than 13 percent of the county's population, have long been at the bottom of North Carolina's socio-economic ladder, with many incurring basic problems such as issues with reliable transportation and access to safe, healthy and affordable housing. In addition, with approximately 10,000 people of all races living in poverty in the county it is vital that its leadership chart a path toward prosperity that is inclusive and broad based. Ensuring a way for those not fortunate enough to live close to jobs to actually get and maintain one will not only be a boost to the African-American community, but the county as a whole.

With the county still under the employment figures for 2007, getting people trained with access to these jobs will bring in more revenues to the county, state and federal government in taxes, which will benefit the entire community as well.

Furthermore, the perception that public transit benefits just the less fortunate is false. Wake, Mecklenburg, Orange and Durham Counties have wide public transportation options, with many professionals using the services to do everything from commuting to safe nights on the town. As Chatham grows, many will see how mass transit improves the lives of people, businesses and the environment.

Affordable workforce housing is also a tremendous issue for many communities, as often-exorbitant rental prices cramp families or even push them into different jurisdictions. The cost of energy, even in lower rent homes, creates other hostile conditions for many in our community – as some must choose between heat or food.

According to recent data, there have been 98 home sales in 2015 at a median price of \$281,950, far too pricey for many residents in the county, as 52 percent of renters were unable to pay fair-market value for even a two-bedroom housing unit. In addition, there

are more than 5,000 families renting in Chatham--- a county with much higher rents than the rest of the state.

As the world moves toward energy efficiency, North Carolina should seek to be a leader and Chatham County can take the lead. Energy efficient and healthy affordable housing combined with solid mass transit options will put Chatham on a path to a prosperous and sustainable future while providing fairer playing field with open and inclusive opportunities for all of its residents.

Chatham County, the future is now.

Sincerely,

Jaymes Powell Jr.  
Vice President for Communications  
African-American Caucus of the North Carolina Democratic Party