

Statement on Future Plans

Durham County Commissioner Ellen Reckhow

November 12, 2019

It has been my honor to serve as a Durham County Commissioner the past thirty one years. I want to thank the citizens of Durham County for supporting me in twenty-four primary and general elections allowing me to serve eight two-year terms and four four-year terms. It has been a real privilege and I am very grateful. After much reflection, I have decided not to run again in 2020.

When I was elected, my children were the ages of two of my four grandchildren – four and eight years old. Now, after a generation of service, it is time to focus more on family and special interests. As a founder of the East Durham Children’s Initiative, helping all our children succeed in life is a passion for me.

Much has been accomplished by this Board working together for the past three decades. I am proud to say that I have served in leadership for 18 years – six years as chair of the board and 12 years as vice-chair.

The growth and change in Durham County since 1988 have been dramatic with the most impressive transformation in downtown. Due to the loss of tobacco and textiles, we had large warehouses and factories that were empty. Accessing government services was the major reason to come downtown. Through the City and County collaborating with the private sector, we have helped to write a new chapter and create a vibrant hub for our community. We also supported the development of the Treyburn Corporate Park and are investing in infrastructure in Research Triangle Park to position it for the 21st century. The power of public/private partnerships has been key to our economic success.

Even as we focused on growth, I am proud to say we also focused on preserving environmental quality for future generations. We adopted stringent water supply protection regulations, initiated conservation of environmentally sensitive natural areas, started a farmland protection program, and adopted zoning regulations to protect our streams, floodplains and wetlands.

Education has been a top priority for this Board. We were one of the first counties to pass a ¼ cent sales tax dedicated to creating a strong educational continuum by funding Pre-K expansion, K – 12 support, and providing funds for scholarships at Durham

Technical Community College for any high school graduate in Durham County. I am proud that this board has committed to universal high quality pre-kindergarten services. That was a big step. Now, we need to stitch together a strong cradle to career continuum of support so more of our children succeed in school and life. Hopefully, with the hiring of an early childhood coordinator, we can make some meaningful progress in the upcoming year.

Durham County has also been a leader in promoting racial equity. In the early 1990's, this Board led the effort to merge the City and County schools in order to address financial inequities and provide equal opportunity for all Durham County children. For over two decades, we have commissioned disparity studies at regular intervals to assess evidence of racial and gender discrimination and develop plans to address it through county purchases and contracting. During the past few years, the Public Health Department has conducted extensive racial equity training for county officials and staff along with many of our citizens. With this Board authorizing the hiring of a racial equity coordinator this year, the expectation is that racial equity principles will be operationalized in our policies, programs and practices.

In closing, public service is in my blood. My Dad, a doctor, visited three elementary schools every morning to take care of sick children and my Mom, a teacher, served on the library board and town council for many years in my home town. Campaigning has always been a family affair with my husband Ken and children helping out in a variety of ways. Without their strong encouragement and support, I would not have lasted this long.

I feel strongly that public service is noble and important work. Even after I leave this board, I hope to find ways to contribute to this Durham community that I love.