

Citizen Comments
April 5, 2021 – Work Session

Comment 1:

Larry Crane

Received via email 4/2/21 at 3:47pm

For the official record, I write to support the continued employment of Wendell Davis by Durham County.

He has a proven record of competence and fairness showing he represents all citizens of Durham and not a small political faction. His professional leadership and management has been instrumental in Durham's development. If his contract is not renewed, it will send a message to businesses that either want to locate or expand here that our County is not fiscally stable. Business relies on stability for forward strategic thinking.

It is Davis's very fiscal conservatism that has allowed Durham to move forward on major projects benefitting the community. The reason that Durham is one of the top-rated Counties in NC for Management and Fiscal responsibility, reflected in our AAA Bond rating, is solely due to the continuum of institutional knowledge in County Management. If the County budget was not well managed we would not be able to sell bonds at ultra-low rates. For example we had the foresight to borrow money when rates were low 10 years ago, allowing the County to put together a deal to build hundreds of affordable apartments on East Main Street – a project with which some Commissioners may be familiar. For those of us who support similar projects, this is essential for the entire community. We need this to establish housing and jobs for Durham.

The People's Alliance, in support of three commissioners, has publicized a position that the County should hire a manager that aligns with their "progressive" views. I am a progressive and view that statement as highly unethical and undemocratic. What if leaders with a different political point were elected in the future? Would the Board consider the election of a conservative or racist justify the patronage firing of whoever held the chief administrative position of the county or city? This logical reversal shows the paucity of the PA position logic.

In fact, if Mr. Davis did not practice fiscal conservancy and advise the elected commissioners about his position on their policies, he would not be doing his job and representing all citizens of the county. That is part of his job. The review of any national description of the job would underline the necessary tension between professional administrators who have been highly trained for the position and the elected amateurs who provide oversight and direction. The County Manager is the professional trained to manage, communicate, and budget. The Commissioners are amateurs elected to provide oversight and suggest direction. They are to work in tandem, combining their skills sets.

The issue of race has been interjected into the decision making. The Commissioners need to understand racial and ethnic views can cloud proper thinking. The majority of the black community that I'm friends with deplores the firing of a competent black man due to racial misunderstandings and due to the normal tension expected with the County manager job. Not

renewing his contract will stain the current Commissioners and the People's Alliance that supports them in future elections.

I urge the Commissioners to renew his contract.

Larry M. Crane
3905 Darby Road
Durham, NC 27707

Comment 2:

Anthony Jones
Received via email on 4/4/21 at 11:33am

(Letter attached to be read)

Comments Received After the April 4th 12pm Deadline

Comment 1:

DeWarren Langley
Received via email on 4/4/21 at 2:20pm

Eight months ago, on September 7, 2020, I emailed the Durham Board of County Commissioners recommending the creation of a MBK Durham Advisory Board to ensure stakeholder engagement and accountability in identifying innovative solutions to eliminate gaps and increase achievement opportunities for boys and young men of color in Durham County. In addition, I recommended a revised Boys & Young Men of Color Local Action Plan created by a cross section of stakeholders to improve coordination, strengthen collaboration & share responsibility, and systemic reforms with clear goals and measurable outcomes to inform our service delivery.

Since the submission of the recommendation, the Durham Board of County Commissioners have received presentations on the Durham County Early Childhood Action Plan and Durham Master Aging Plan which heightens my interest and renew my advocacy for a revised Boys & Young Men of Color Plan for Durham.

With COVID-19 and the consistent rise in gun violence having a disproportionate impact on communities of color, we can only expect the academic, opportunity and professional gaps facing young men of color to grow unless we are proactive in our data assessment, collaboration and strategy development and execution.

The MBK Durham Advisory Board should consist of government, community, philanthropic and youth representatives with a history of and commitment to eliminating the gaps in opportunity and achievement and work toward improving the lives of young boys and men of color through violence prevention, education, health and education aligned with the local action plan. In addition, the Board should create a local action plan with annual reports submitted to the Durham

Board of County Commissioners on yearly activities, progress toward goals and outcomes accomplished.

The economic landscape in Durham is changing rapidly and we must ensure we have a vision, plan, strategy and capacity to provide the needed leadership, services and support to position our young boys and men of color for long-term competitive advantage in the classroom and workplace or we risk them opting for alternatives such as gangs and drugs.

We can stop the violence in Durham by equipping our young black boys and men with the education, skills and experience necessary to obtain high paying employment opportunities or to lead their own entrepreneurial ventures. We have the capability and resources to create a new reality if we make the proper investments in providing pathways to viable opportunities for socioeconomic success.

In order for stakeholders who are working to advance black male success and achievement in Durham to learn, think and act strategically, we must first have a transparent and accurate evaluation of data as it relates to the entire population of black males ages 11 to 24 in Durham County.

We must focus on addressing these gaps from cradle to career, using evidence-based interventions from the community, private, public, and social enterprise sectors. The singular work of individual organizations working with boys and young men of color is insufficient without system change through collective strategy and impact.

Moreover, the COVID Relief funding Durham County Government has received should be appropriated for the creation of the Local Action Plan in addition to funding job training for young boys and young men of color to compete for the opportunities relocating and expanding to Durham thereby diminishing the appeal of the gang and drug enterprise that often entice boys and young men of color which leads to justice involvement or death.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am excited to engage further and look forward to hearing from you soon regarding the recommendation for the creation of the MBK Durham Advisory Council and revision of the Local Action Plan. We need action now!

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In Commitment of Service to Boys & Young Men of Color,

DeWarren K. Langley, JD, MPA, MHFA

Visionary & Executive Director

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Comment 2:

Leigh Kopicki

Received via email on 4/4/21 at 10:04pm

I am a first-time homeowner and new resident of the Old Farm neighborhood in North Durham. I closed on my house March 12. I am recently aware of the plans to build the new Northern High School adjacent to the Old Farm neighborhood. While I do not protest the construction of the school in general, I have several concerns. I know I am not the only member of the neighborhood to want more information about the impacts of this project. For context, I live approximately 2 blocks from the dead-end portion of Old Well Street.

1. Bus Traffic / Traffic Routing - I understand that the current plans propose to open up the dead-ended portion of Old Well Street to facilitate daily bus trips, and that Seven Oaks and Old Well will become a main thoroughfare for school bus and other school related traffic. This is concerning, as the Old Farm neighborhood currently only has two access roads in and out, Seven Oaks being one of them. Seven Oaks is a simple, unmarked two-lane road. As someone who will eventually be commuting to and from work in the region, I am concerned about the traffic impacts of this plan. I feel for the residents whose homes back directly up to the area of Old Well that will be redeveloped to accommodate this.

2. Environmental Impacts - I understand that are parts of the proposed construction that may increase the neighborhood's vulnerability to flooding. I have a runoff creek from the Eno that partially runs through my property, and I am explicitly not in a flood zone (otherwise I would not have purchased the property). I am concerned about the potential impacts to mine and to other's houses as a result of the construction. I am also concerned about the increased pollution from the school buses and additional traffic in the neighborhood.

3. Construction Noise - In the near term, I am concerned about the noise of construction and what the rules and regulations will be to manage, mitigate and monitor the presumably significant noise this large construction project will generate.

4. Light and Noise Pollution - This campus is estimated and planned to cover more than 200 acres, including some amount of sports complexes. These types of facilities often have flood lights that obstruct the night sky, even when no students are present. If there are sports complexes constructed, there will likely be significant noise from events on the campus that will be audible even from where I live. How is this being addressed?

5. Traffic Disruption on Roxboro Road - Again, the Old Farm neighborhood only has two arterials which route traffic in and out of the neighborhood and both connect to Roxboro Road. We do not have an alternate point of access or exit while construction is ongoing. What is the traffic flow plan, and how will we be able to address any concerns?

I am sure I will have other concerns as this project progresses, but these are top of mind right now. My understanding is that initially only people who lived within 600 feet of the proposed project were notified about related public hearings, but the impact of a construction project of this size is substantive and will impact many more people in a larger radius. **What is the plan to communicate adjustments, timelines, updates and other information about this project to the neighborhood and its residents who will be directly impacted?**

I grew up near a middle school and high school complex and know that the community and the school will be intertwined. Growth is necessary, and there needs to be a new Northern High School. However, I share some of the concerns of my neighbors and hope you will respond with additional information, next steps and a plan to proactively inform residents and bring them into the development phase.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

Leigh Kopicki
5212 Whippoorwill Street
Durham, NC 27704
phone: 828-301-1665

Comment 3:

Minnie Forte-Brown

(Comment Submitted to an incorrect email address – mtoomer@dconc.com on 4/3/21 at 1:39pm. It was later forwarded to the correct address on 4/5/21 at 9:15am)

Wendell Davis is an excellent County Manager. The residents of Durham know this. As a former member of the Durham Public Schools Board of Education for 16 years, Wendell provided more monetary support than any other county manager.

Of the ten largest school districts in the state, Durham Public Schools received the MOST funding per pupil. Yes, more than Wake, more than Charlotte, Winston Salem and Guildford.(\$3376 per pupil. \$867 more than Wake or CMS). We received \$34 million dollars more. And our proficiency scores were lower. Check the facts! Despite our low rank in the state, the county funding remained high for the needs we have. Wendell asked for accountability. Is that unreasonable? No!!

We certainly have benefited from the generosity of the Commissioners and the County Manager's persistence regarding g accountability. Durham has remained Triple A Rated. Our children are moving forward, our classified staff will receive \$15 an hour finally and our teachers are well compensated. We have broken ground for our two long overdue schools. Lyons Farm and Northern

Durham County has handled the vaccinations for school personnel vet well

The state is watching us.... More importantly, our community is watching us. Do the right thing... KEEP WENDELL DAVIS as County Manager. He's done/ is doing a great job.

Minnie Forte-Brown
Durham Native
Durham Public Schools BOE 2004-2020
NCSBA Past President
NSBA Southern Regional Director

Comment 3:

Alice Sharpe

Received via email on 4/5/21 at 10:23am

I do realize that my email arrived too late for today's work session but please do include it in any appropriate and permitted ways possible.

The recent actions of 3 County Commissioners to replace our current County Manager with a candidate who reflects the political leanings of one Durham PAC is not only a disservice to Durham County residents but also puts the County on a very dangerous path for the future. Politicizing this important position (and other senior County staff positions) means that each election cycle will present an opportunity for the prevailing party to dismiss the County employees in these important positions for people who reflect the "new flavor of the day". Constant disruptions of this nature will wreak havoc in County Departments and ultimately, will not be in the best interest of Durham County residents plus hurt our financial and growth status. Businesses, large and small, will choose not to do business in Durham County because of the volatile nature of our County government.

History is laden with examples of how these actions can and do go horribly wrong. Please do not lead Durham County down this disastrous and dangerous path. During the next election for County Commissioners, the residents of Durham County should clearly know which candidates support this terrible position.