

Jon Berger Questionnaire Responses

1) If elected, from a state level, what if anything, would you do to address and solve the issues noted above?

We need to have a comprehensive and strategic plan to address rapid growth and development in our region, so that the necessary improvements to infrastructure and the appropriate services are in-place to support that growth. That plan must address green spaces - we need more parks, especially in our urban areas, and we need to absolutely stop the complete clear cutting of land when developers take hold of a project. For our area specifically, this plan must ensure that our wetlands are protected and restored and that all future development is banned in our flood zones. If elected, I will bring together political and civic leaders from the State, county and municipal levels to develop a sensible plan for growth and development. I will also ensure that once drafted, this plan is presented to the community to not only inform, but to obtain inputs so that this plan serves our entire community.

2) When making a decision at the state level, what information will you use to gauge the impacts (and long-term financial costs to NHC taxpayers) on the entirety of the county's systems including roadways, schools, health and the environment? How will you include NHC citizens in your decision-making process?

I will look to all available resources to inform my decision including state, local and municipal governments, civic groups and businesses - all of them are stakeholders and impacted by these decisions. I am a proponent of Town Halls to both share information and to hear directly from constituents on issues of concern to them.

By relying on robust data and ensuring that citizens are active participants in the decision-making process, the state can make well-informed, transparent, and responsible choices that minimize long-term financial costs and maximize benefits for NHC residents.

3) What specific steps will you take at a state level to address NHC's population growth's impact on our overcrowded schools and congested, unsafe roadways as funding for both is a matter of political will?

There is no question we need additional resources for our public school system, as well as our infrastructure. There is already something called the Leandro Plan, which mandates that the State Legislature must release approximately \$6 billion set aside for the purposes of education: this would include increased pay for teachers, other incentives to retain good teachers, and upgrades to facilities and technology. The Legislature has so far refused to fully fund this plan. Through the Federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Act, NHC also has the ability to apply for grants to help improve our roadways, bridges and other critical infrastructure.

4) We need a different mindset than development and economic growth as the main driver for general assembly decisions. State laws are being influenced by retail, chamber of commerce and realtor associations that are impacting our local environment. What specific steps will you take to bring this into transparency and balance to preserve and protect New Hanover County's character and livability?

We need to absolutely protect NHC's character and livability, that is why it is such an attractive place to live for so many people (and why they keep coming!)! We can do that by achieving balance - bringing all the relevant stakeholders into the conversation about development, and being completely transparent about the process. We must also restore transparency in our Legislature so that all constituents may be fully aware of the deals and negotiations being transacted.

5) Do you believe the pace and scale of residential development in SE NC is in alignment with the wishes of current citizens? If not, what would you do to address this from a state level?

I don't believe the pace and scale aligns with how most citizens view it should be. Right now we see a lot of high end development, tearing up our green spaces, and not matching it with the right infrastructure, services and retail so that we can cut down on traffic. The State can play a role in working with local officials and civic/community groups to plan what's best for the region - and not allow one group, like the developers, to take the lead.

6) The NC General Assembly has removed wetland protections on the SE coast assumingly so developers can fill them in and build. Please elaborate on and estimate the negative overall and financial impacts from their removal in NHC. List the steps you will take to restore and conserve New Hanover County's wetlands that protect our coastal community and neighborhoods against the full impact of storm surges, floods, and resiliency against sea level rise?

We need to protect our wetlands because they are 1) an environmental gem, and 2) they provide resiliency during storms. With over development, especially in former wetlands areas, we will be susceptible to increased flooding and other damage that we can not afford to repair.

7) What will you do to identify available funds for cultural, land and environmental resource preservation in the northern part of the county? Will you advocate for and implement funding for parcel purchases in the creation of conservation/open space acquisitions to protect loss of habitats/ecosystems/endangered species?

I will absolutely advocate for additional funding to purchase land for conservation purposes. We know a lot of people are moving down here, but we can achieve a balanced plan that allows for building housing (especially affordable housing!) while preserving our open spaces.

8) In closing, many states and counties are getting it right, bringing balance to how they allow development to look and feel. How would you improve the way growth and development is occurring in North Carolina and New Hanover County?

As I mentioned previously, the only way to bring balance to development (and enact "smart development"), is to bring all stakeholders into the conversation: local leaders, civic and community groups, business, and the area's residents. Through that open and transparent process and conversation we can achieve what we all want: places for everyone to live while preserving our beautiful environment for everyone now and for future generations to enjoy.