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## FORSYTH COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

### Summary Report of Community Listening Sessions

#### Overview

County management held community listening sessions at all ten county libraries between July 9, 2024, and August 21, 2024 to gather feedback from residents on various issues affecting Forsyth County. The sessions aimed to address concerns, gather suggestions, and evaluate the effectiveness of current county initiatives.

#### Key Themes and Feedback

##### 1. Education and Schools

- **Overcrowding:** Residents expressed concerns about overcrowded schools and the lack of new school buildings despite growing housing developments. The importance of maintaining and potentially expanding school facilities was highlighted.
- **Quality of Education:** Feedback indicated that while there are improvements, residents are concerned about the quality of education and whether it aligns with community needs. There is also interest in the relationship between the county and school board.
- **Building Utilization:** Some suggest using school facilities for additional community purposes during off-peak times to generate revenue.

##### 2. Housing and Development

- **Affordable Housing:** There is significant concern about affordable housing, particularly for those below 50% of Area Median Income (AMI). The impact of new developments on housing affordability was noted, and suggestions included more strategic use of ARPA dollars and better communication about housing initiatives.
- **Growth Management:** Residents are worried about overdevelopment and its impact on the environment, infrastructure, and community character. Suggestions include more stringent planning and sustainable development practices.

##### 3. Environmental Sustainability

- **Prioritization:** Residents are calling for greater emphasis on environmental sustainability in county planning and budgeting. Concerns include ineffective progress on previous sustainability benchmarks and the need for integrated environmental strategies.

- **Development Impact:** There is apprehension about the environmental impact of new developments, particularly regarding land use, runoff, and traffic congestion.

#### 4. Public Safety and Health

- **Safety Concerns:** Issues such as gun violence and the effectiveness of emergency services were discussed. Residents are concerned about the adequacy of the police force and response times.
- **Health Services:** The adequacy of mental health services, particularly for children and seniors, was a topic of concern. There is a need for better access and support for behavioral health services.

#### 5. Infrastructure and Transportation

- **Roads and Sidewalks:** Feedback indicates a need for better infrastructure, including roads and sidewalks, to support growing populations and improve safety.
- **Public Transportation:** Residents highlighted gaps in public transportation services and the need for better connectivity and accessibility.

#### 6. Libraries and Community Facilities

- **Library Services:** The county's library system was praised, but there are requests for improvements, such as better technology and facilities. The importance of libraries as community hubs was emphasized.
- **Community Engagement:** There were calls for more frequent and diverse community engagement methods, including better communication about county services and initiatives.

#### 7. Code Enforcement and Property Management

- **Enforcement Issues:** There are concerns about inadequate code enforcement and property management, particularly in relation to neglected properties and enforcement of residential codes.
- **Property Taxes:** Residents are frustrated with rising property taxes and the perceived inefficacy of tax use for community improvements.

#### 8. Economic Development

- **Business and Jobs:** The need for more economic development initiatives and support for local businesses was mentioned. Residents are interested in how the county is fostering economic growth and job creation.

#### 9. Community Relations

- **Commissioner Feedback:** There is a desire for more direct feedback from commissioners and better communication between city and county officials.
- **Future Engagement:** Residents appreciate the listening sessions but seek ongoing opportunities for dialogue and input.

## *Recommendations*

1. **Address School Overcrowding:** Communicate to WS/FC Schools the need to evaluate current school building utilization and prioritize construction of new schools where needed.
2. **Enhance Affordable Housing Efforts:** Increase focus on affordable housing for low-income residents and improve communication about housing programs.
3. **Strengthen Environmental Initiatives:** Develop and implement comprehensive sustainability strategies and integrate environmental considerations into all planning processes.
4. **Improve Public Safety and Health Services:** Address gaps in emergency services and mental health support.
5. **Upgrade Infrastructure:** Communicate to NCDOT & City of Winston-Salem the need to invest in road maintenance, sidewalks, and public transportation to support community growth.
6. **Enhance Library and Community Facilities:** Continue to improve library services and explore additional uses for school facilities.
7. **Reinforce Code Enforcement:** Increase efforts in property code enforcement and manage neglected properties effectively.
8. **Foster Economic Development:** Support local businesses and job creation through targeted economic development programs.
9. **Boost Community Engagement:** Increase transparency and interaction between residents and officials, and explore diverse methods of communication and engagement.

This report aims to summarize the main concerns and suggestions from the listening sessions, providing a comprehensive overview of community feedback and recommendations for future actions.

There were many items noted and recommended that are more appropriate for the City or K-12 public school system to address. A copy of this report will be provided to the City Manager and School Superintendent.