

To: Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners  
From: Harold Cogdell, Jr.,  
Mecklenburg County Commissioner At-Large  
Re: Upcoming Vote for Chairman of the BOCC  
Date: November 28, 2011

Dear Colleagues,

As you all are aware, during the first meeting of December of each year the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners elects a Chairman and Vice-Chairman for a one-year term. In addition, our current Chairman and Vice-Chairman, two highly experienced, well known Mecklenburg County elected officials, have both announced their intention not to seek reelection next year. I am sure I echo the sentiments of many in our community in expressing gratitude for their many years of public service to Mecklenburg County. I write each of you today to formally ask for your support of me for Chairman of the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners for the year December 2011 to December 2012. I would like to share with you my philosophy of governance and thoughts about the future of Mecklenburg County for your consideration of me for a leadership position on the Board of Commissioners.

As we all know so well, the past three years have brought our community and our entire nation nearly unprecedented economic challenges. Through working together on a local level, in most instances in a bi-partisan manner, we have been able to navigate this severe economic downturn in a responsible and sensible manner. Even though Mecklenburg County is poised to fare better than many communities, returning to business as usual is an unacceptable course of action. The recent organizational cultural change of *having to do more with less* must be a permanent and not a situational approach to the delivery of county government services. This is the culture of operations that businesses, large and small, and nonprofit organizations have had to adjust to and county government should be no exception.

It is my belief that the economic, political and, most important, individual personal decisions that will be made during the next few years will chart the course of our community and nation for generations to come. Political gridlock has been a leading cause of harmful economic uncertainty. Pragmatism, communication and willingness to make sensible compromise must be core principles of governance at all levels. Our collective course of action must be thoughtful and resolute in order to yield the dividends to future generations that we have all enjoyed.

To that end, I offer myself for consideration and seek your support to lead the BOCC for the next year. If elected Chairman, I would lead with a philosophy as follows:

1. *Long-term debt management must continue to be one of the top priorities for the BOCC.* The Board must strictly adhere to our debt policy ratios and carefully reexamine and make adjustments when warranted to ensure responsible debt management practices. I remain deeply concerned about our Overall Debt per Capita. This figure needs to be

reduced to come more in alignment with comparative counties. As you may recall, I joined with some other Commissioners in advocating for the creation of a debt service fund in early 2009 shortly after joining the Board. I applaud Mr. Jones in recommending this action to the Board last year and the entire Board for making the difficult choices necessary in our operating budget to establish this fund. The establishment of this fund begins the process of building capacity to fund future debt service cost. Our continued commitment to funding Paygo, adhering to debt borrowing limits and continuing to invest in the debt service fund will ultimately be critical in meeting our future infrastructure needs while maintaining a competitive local tax structure for years to come. Let me be clear, I believe that our current property tax rate needs a further downward adjustment. However, the prudent approach to reducing this rate should never be realized by our failure to invest in the growth and development of our most important assets, the citizens of Mecklenburg County. Future downward adjustments can be realized in a rational manner from continued cost reductions realized by vendor cost savings, operational efficiencies, further functional consolidation and elimination of funding for those services that do not comport with our Vision 2020 Plan. Assuming growth in county service demand does not outpace growth in the tax base; when the reductions in costs to deliver county services outpaces annual inflation, the opportunity to reduce the current tax rate must be seized.

2. *Communication, Transparency and Accountability must be improved with our community partners.* Our relationship with CMS, CPCC and the PLCMC must have a sound foundation that grows out of more than participation in the annual budgeting process. We need a standing Education Liaison Committee with strong leadership that works more closely with the leadership of our educational partners to gain better insight and understanding of the return that our communities derives from the our investment in these important institutions. Collectively these three entities, including debt service cost, account for more than half of the Mecklenburg County annual operating budget. I am fully aware that as Commissioners we do not have the authority or time even begin to manage the day to day operations of these entities. However, I do believe that we have a duty to have a firm understanding of the respective budgets, performance measures and goals and strategic visions of each of these organizations far better than we currently are doing. Additionally, this exchange needs to flow both ways such that our community partners have an improved appreciation for our strategic vision and the role each plays in Mecklenburg County realizing our vision. This needs to be an ongoing charge of the Education Liaison Committee and not limited to annual budget cycle presentations.
3. *Management recommendations must align with our Vision 2020 Community and Corporate Scorecard.* The 2011 Budget adoption initiated a multi-year strategic path for reshaping county government. The decisions were difficult but placed Mecklenburg County on a far more sustainable path. Some of the critical success factors of the Vision 2020 strategic path included having an affordable and sustainable community, job growth and workforce development, improve high school graduation rates and fiscal discipline. These are not mutually exclusive goals but we must be mindful of these goals in each decision made along the path to realizing our 2020 vision. The BOCC values the recommendations provided by the county manager and staff for guidance in our decision

making. However, in instances where there has been no assessment of how the recommended action is consistent with the long term vision of Mecklenburg County, we run the risk of making decision in isolation or motivated by special interest. This evaluation should occur prior to management making a recommendation to the Board on an ongoing basis and the analysis clearly stated as a part of the manager's recommended action.

4. *Committee level leadership appointments should be made based on talents, skills, experience and areas of interest and without regard to political party affiliation.* It appears to have been the long-time practice of the Chairman of the BOCC to appoint committee chairpersons exclusively within his or her own political party. It is my belief that through discussion and communication with each Commissioner that committee chairperson appointments should be made based upon subject matter knowledge, leadership skills and individual interest. I applaud Commissioner Roberts for breaking that tradition by appointing Commissioner Pendergraph Chairman of the Criminal Justice Committee. I urged her to make that change a year ago and the appointment made since.
5. *Public/Private partnership opportunities that produce sensible and prudent public benefit must continuously be explored.* We must continue to be open minded to collaboration around construction and operation of public facilities that may also yield a private benefit. These joint use/mutual benefit models can create reduced risk and cost to taxpayers while allowing county government to simultaneously improve access and quality of service to residents. Joint development and use opportunities need to be evaluated in the planning and design of every new capital project.
6. *Us against them governance in local politics makes for bad decision making.* The largest urban core in the Carolinas will either prosper together or deteriorate together. Surrounding counties offer desirable communities to live in large part because of the strength and prosperity of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. When an urban core weakens the entire region suffers. We must forge and enhance the necessary relationships to address the transportation, education, environmental and economic development challenges and opportunities that lay ahead from regional perspective regardless of the leadership at the time in Washington or Raleigh. Let us not alienate those with different perspectives but respect different viewpoints and allow shared benefit to be our focal point. Listening with an open mind and a willingness to challenge our own conventional thought are two of the most important qualities any of us bring to public service.

Tradition has its place, but like all things needs to continuously be examined to determine if it remains warranted. Commissioner Roberts has served our community admirably. She has announced her intention to not seek re-election and I have expressed to her my gratitude for her years of service. Leadership positions on any Board of Directors must be earned through working with integrity in an open and transparent manner with all board members on an ongoing basis. I have worked hard and sought to earn the respect, trust and confidence of all members of this Board.

I thank each Commissioner in advance for your consideration of me for Chairman of the BOCC. In closing, I wish to express that I have not and I will not promise or pledge my support for or against any issue in exchange for any Commissioner's support of me for Chairman. Regardless of the outcome of this decision, I will continue to do what I think is the right thing to do on a case by case basis and to work with each member of this Board in a respectful, honest and meaningful manner for the good of our community.

Please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss this or any other matter pertaining to the BOCC at any your convenience.

Sincerely,

Harold Cogdell, Jr.  
Mecklenburg County Commissioner at-Large