

Answer 1:

Smith Creek, Richland Creek, Harris Creek, and the other streams running through Wake Forest and Rolesville all drain toward the Neuse and Falls Lake, so what we do here shows up in our drinking water. To start with, I'd increase recurring appropriations to the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Clean Water Management Trust Fund to protect and preserve drinking-water sources like ours in Northern Wake County.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund alone has provided more than \$85 million dollars in local matching grants to conserve and restore our water source. These competitive grants will allow for towns to work together, jointly plan greenway corridors, and keep buffers connected across town lines. Additionally, many of our farm and forest owners would rather keep their land than sell it, so I'd back land trusts like the NC Agriculture Development and Farmland Preservation Trust to promote conservation easements and preservation that make that possible.

Answer 2:

Currently, what towns and cities can do depends heavily on what the General Assembly allows. What the state should do is pass a clear enabling statute letting any town adopt tree-canopy and low-impact-development standards. It could attach guardrails to protect affordability and property owners such as requiring public hearings and a published cost analysis.

The state can also exempt small lots and income-restricted affordable units or give them lighter standards. The state can also provide incentives and/or flexibility instead of rigid mandates by doing things like density bonuses or reduced lot sizes in exchange for preserved canopy or natural infrastructure. This could include credits for rain gardens and permeable surfaces and promote faster or streamlined permitting for projects that meet these kinds of standards to make compliance cheaper, if so. The state should also promote and create model ordinances and designs, so small towns don't pay for custom legal work. I'd like to see the NCGA let towns choose from a menu, where a town or developer selects from a list of practices which allows for more local flexibility.

Answer 3:

I'd start with tax credits. The state could extend a redevelopment credit or phased property tax relief to underused commercial sites, not just brownfields, and restore or expand the state historic rehabilitation credit.

These should include clawbacks and a "but-for" test so we're not subsidizing projects that would have happened anyway regardless of these proposed ideas and changes.

The bigger opportunity, in my opinion, is regulatory reform. I'd allow more flexibility and conversion of these sites, ease requirements on sites that are already being planned, and speed up state review of these agreements. These changes cost the state little, and they make things competitive and efficient instead of pushing for the clearing of forests at the edge of town which is the status quo these days. An added benefit of this new direction is it helps ease the affordability challenges new homebuyers face while preserving our community's beauty.

Answer 4:

I support restoring this tool for local governments to help manage growth and enact common-sense, long-term planning for our communities. House Bill 225 would fix this for us, by providing our community the tools it needs to protect land against aggressive growth. However, the bill in its latest version is retroactive to December 2024, which causes significant legal and enforceability issues. I believe we would need to re-draft the bill to make it prospective but add a short validation or re-adoption clause for ordinances adopted during the time-gap, with grandfathering for owners who obtained approvals during that period so it can apply as fairly as possible.

This isn't about stopping growth. It's about letting our towns guide it. Down-zoning is one of the few tools that local governments can use to steer and plan development. Without it, towns can only react rather than be pro-active. Our towns are best placed to judge their own needs. Every change would still go through public notice, hearings, and a recorded vote, with the opportunity for owners to be heard.