



PRESS RELEASE

Date: February 1, 2012  
For Immediate Release

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**Chatham Fosters Business-Friendly Environment with New Permitting Process**

PITTSBORO –Since April, Chatham County has been striving to develop its reputation as a business-friendly community with a new streamlined permitting process.

This effort began in January 2011, when the Chatham County Economic Development Corporation (EDC) hosted three business roundtables to get feedback on the start-up process from new and existing small business owners. The most commonly cited frustrations were a lack of communication between county departments and a confusing permitting process, said Dianne Reid, president of the EDC.

As a result of these roundtables, the county initiated new weekly pre-application meetings where business owners can troubleshoot with county staff prior to beginning the application process. Staff from the Planning, Zoning, Central Permitting, Building and Fire Inspections, Solid Waste, Environmental Health, Erosion Control, Water Quality, Water Utility, and Tax Departments attend meetings, giving business owners access to all of the resources the county has to offer in one room, at one time.

Representatives from the EDC, the Pittsboro/Siler City Convention and Visitor's Bureau and the Town of Pittsboro also attend, when necessary. Meetings conclude with a recap of next steps as a guide for the businesses.

To date, 54 businesses have taken advantage of the meetings. If all current plans move forward, these projects could create over 250 permanent jobs. The proposed businesses cover a wide range of commercial enterprises in retail and service industries, manufacturing, and residential developments. Specific examples include an outdoor adventure park, a Spanish immersion program, upscale restaurants, wedding and event venues, alternative childcare, and bed and breakfast accommodations.

Individuals can schedule meetings when they have identified a potential business location, or to get guidance on factors to consider in further developing their business idea prior to site selection.

The response to the pre-application meetings has been overwhelmingly positive, according to Sybil Tate, community and economic development coordinator. Staff members also are more aware of how their departments interact and affect business development decisions; businesses save time and money by finding out how to proceed from the start.

“I think this new system is great. What the county has basically done is formalize an informal process that I always go through on projects,” said Taylor Hobbs, a local architect. “I used to just request individual meetings with various departments, but having all relevant departments in the same room at the same time is great.”

Courtney Hopper, who co-owns a wedding planning business in Raleigh, attended a pre-application meeting to expand her business with a reception venue in rural Chatham. She said, “The pre-application process with Chatham County was invaluable. It helped lead many of our decisions right down to which piece of property to select. The meeting allowed us to make a realistic timeline for our project and steered us to the right departments to get the process started. We are definitely grateful that the county offers this service. “

Another customer, Lisa Piper, said, “The meeting we attended was great and so helpful. We love the process.” She and her husband, Dave Clark, scheduled a pre-application meeting during the renovation of the newly opened Small Café and Bed and Breakfast. “It worked for us and we think it would only help those looking to set up a business here in the county.”

Donna Bianco, owner of Bella Donna restaurant in Pittsboro, has been through the development process twice, once with and once without the pre-application meeting. “Going through the new process for my restaurant expansion was completely different from when I first started my business,” she said.

Bianco said, “A complete team from both the Town of Pittsboro and the Chatham County were there to answer my questions as well as to listen to my hopes and dreams for the future. They had a photo of the proposed site up on a screen, which helped everyone understand the location and determined possible parking issues and other important concerns.”

She concluded, “It is comforting to know that the ‘powers that be’ are familiar and supportive of my project and I can call on any one of them for assistance.”

The county continues to research opportunities to improve its permitting process for customers. If you have suggestions for improvements, please complete our customer service [survey](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/V53ZXN7) (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/V53ZXN7>).

Interested business owners can schedule a pre-application meeting by contacting Sybil Tate, community and economic development coordinator, at 919-545-8365 or [sybil.tate@chathamnc.org](mailto:sybil.tate@chathamnc.org). Meetings are held on Wednesdays from 1-4 p.m. in the Dunlap Building at 80 East St. in Pittsboro.

For more information, contact the Chatham Economic Development Corporation at 919-542-8274.

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