

Editorial:

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Loud and clear ...

Raleigh voters said it simply: It's time for more guidance for growth, and a more taut rein on development interests

Mayor Charles Meeker was smiling yesterday and shaking hands as he entered the Mecca restaurant in downtown Raleigh at high noon. The mayor's not one for champagne with lunch, but he probably felt like it. Local voters on Tuesday secured for Meeker a solid progressive majority on the City Council, one that should enable him to move forward with developing stronger guidelines for growth. For growth, and all the issues that are attached to it, seemed to be by far the most important factors in voters' choices.

And speaking of high noon, two incumbent council members, Tommy Craven of north Raleigh's District A, and Jesse Taliaferro of northeast Raleigh's District B, had unexpected outcomes.

Craven, strongly supported by developers as was Taliaferro, was soundly beaten by newcomer Nancy McFarlane, a neighborhood activist. Taliaferro ran second to Rodger Koopman, a businessman and retired Air Force officer who like McFarlane favors a council that will take a stronger hand in curbs on sprawl and haphazard growth. Taliaferro wants a runoff -- but even if she wins, the message from voters is clear: it's time for the city to take more specific action to control growth, whether that be stronger zoning limits, more careful planning standards or raising impact fees on new development.

Both Koopman and McFarlane campaigned as Meeker allies, and in favor of substantial increases in development fees in order to finance roads and parks. They're also opposed to a proposal from North Hills developer John Kane that Raleigh and Wake County help finance parking decks at his North Hills East project.

Incumbent Russ Stephenson, a Meeker ally, retained his at-large seat, and elected to the other at-large spot was Mary-Ann Baldwin, marketing director for an engineering firm. Baldwin also was supported by those connected to real estate and development firms, but seems to be open-minded in her views. Certainly she shouldn't have any trouble understanding what voters on Tuesday were saying.

Growth can't be stopped, and stopping it is not the point. But developers and those who are part of that industry in some tangential way have reaped tremendous benefit from growth in Raleigh and the Triangle, and they haven't paid their fair share of the expenses that result from it. They say that higher impact fees will be passed on to home-buyers and thus hurt ordinary people -- but they're also concerned that in a competitive market, they'll have to absorb some of the costs of impact fees themselves.

It also was gratifying, and perhaps part of the same quality-of-life message as in the council election, that bonds for Wake Technical College, county public libraries, money for open space preservation for the county and for Raleigh parks improvements passed overwhelmingly. Voters (sadly, turnout was small) clearly want this community to get better, not just larger. And they are willing to do their part.

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