

FROM THE CHAIRMAN'S DESK: APRIL INSTALLMENT

By Carter Infinger

Bryan County Commission Chairman

Thanks to a survey we conducted late last year, Bryan County has been able to verify that our residents and our administrators are largely on the same page when it comes to priorities and plans. The survey was originally designed to help us get a better understanding of your wants and desires for our communities. We took the information gathered and used it as a guide as we moved forward with the development of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, which is slated for adoption next month.

Not surprisingly, transportation issues are one of the top challenges the county faces, according to survey takers. We couldn't agree more, which is why we've worked hard to push to the forefront any projects that will help ease traffic congestion and improve accessibility in Bryan County. As you likely already know, the 144 widening will begin later this year, and we're also eager to see work start on the I-95 interchange at Belfast Keller. And on the North end of the county, the Wilma Edwards Road intersection is being evaluated for intersection improvement options, which we believe will keep motorists safer. In addition, the Transportation Local Option Sales Tax (TSPLOST) will be on the ballot May 22, giving Bryan County residents another option to help pay for badly needed transportation projects.

We also understand residents' concerns about needing more options when it comes to shopping, restaurants and purchasing goods. We do think that alleviating the traffic problems here will draw more visitors and residents to the area. The bigger the population and visitor base, the more attractive this area becomes to retail establishments looking to open a new location. Additionally, the I-95 interchange will be very conveniently located for those traveling the interstate corridor on their way to or from Florida. We think the completion of this project will spur development, which we're determined to make convenient and well-planned for both visiting consumers and permanent residents.

One thing that will help us ensure new development comes about in a timely and organized manner is impact fees. There are a wide variety of approaches and methodologies that can be used in preparation for levying impact fees, and we're committed ensuring the process is orderly for all involved. New growth and development brings an increased need for new public capital facilities to serve the anticipated homes and businesses. Impact fees are a one-time tax imposed on the developers of new residential and commercial construction to defray the cost of growth's "impact" on vital services such as schools, parks, roads, ambulance and fire service.

Also in the survey, we asked participants to identify the reasons why they love Bryan County and the best parts of living here. Overwhelmingly, we agree with the facets they named, the first of which being the fact we live in a beautiful coastal county that is safe, poised for growth and full of actively involved citizens. Lifestyle is important to our residents, as it is to us. We know our residents work hard so they can enjoy a happy and rewarding life with their families, and we're committed to improving the quality of life our citizens need and deserve. It goes without saying that families' leisure time is often limited due to school, work, church and other commitments, but when time does permit some outdoor fun, our recreation department has plenty to offer. Soon, the rec fields in North Bryan will be undergoing some much-needed updates to better serve our young athletes and their fans.

Additionally, Bryan County residents place an emphasis on our excellent schools, which is understandable and expected. Educating the next generation of coastal residents is incredibly important, as we'll rely on them to lead us into the future and continue this county's progress. Along those lines, we've started holding joint meetings with the school board, development authority and leaders from the cities of Richmond Hill and Pembroke to ensure cooperation and a productive relationship going forward. We're ready to find solutions for future growth and infrastructure needs, which are springing up rapidly due to our county's admirable progress.

Going forward, we hope the survey respondents and many additional Bryan County residents will keep this momentum going. We want to hear more from you. Offering your input and weighing in on county matters is the only way to ensure county leaders continue to work on the matters that mean most to you.