

[LKN] development

Your guide to growth, development

One of the first things newcomers notice when they move here is there's a lot of red dirt - as in upturned earth for new construction.

RED DIRT ALERT



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(The dirt is red, by the way, because the soil is red clay.) Old-timers and newcomers alike often see the pros and cons to all the new development. On the plus side, it brings new jobs and more housing, shopping and dining choices to the area. But growth inevitably leads to more crowded roads and schools and threatens the area's pastoral and historic beauty.

How area local governments deal with the challenges of growth affects residents' daily lives. Here's what you SEE GROWTH | 19



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Construction on I-77's Exit 32 at Langtree Road and Alcove Road in Mooresville is sparking development.

Growth

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need to know:

■ It all starts with **planning and zoning**. If you're interested in a rezoning or an ongoing project, the first thing to find out is which government has zoning jurisdiction. Once you know that, you'll know where to direct questions and who has relevant public documents.

Why does it matter who has zoning control? Each jurisdiction follows a slightly different planning and zoning process. That affects when and how residents can comment on new projects. It also changes the requirements for developers, which in turn affects the quality, style and type of developments that get built.

The rezoning process varies slightly by jurisdiction. But basically, planning departments review developers' requests. Public hearings are called. Sometimes an advisory planning board appointed by the town or coun-

ty board holds public hearings in addition to the town or county board, which has the final say.

■ **Get involved.** Development is a public process. Rezoning requires public hearings. Local governments must give public notice about public hearings, usually by advertising in local newspapers, displaying signs near properties to be rezoned, and sending letters to adjacent property owners. Sometimes the residents' opinion can have a big impact, such as three years ago, when intense public opposition helped foil a 17-story hotel project at Exit 33 on the lake.

Rezoning applications, site plans, and any other documents on file at planning departments are public records. That means the department has to make them available for viewing at no charge.

Even if a project is a use by right, meaning it is allowed under the existing zoning, the planning department still has information available to the public at its offices.

■ Newcomers (and old-timers) are often confused by **who handles what** when it comes to growth.

Here's the quick rundown: Counties and towns control zoning and planning, but counties pay for school construction. Counties and towns provide police protection. Some towns have professional fire departments; others subsidize volunteer ones. As for utilities, it depends on the area: Mooresville provides water and sewer, but Davidson, Cornelius and Huntersville residents are customers of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Utilities.

The big issue, roads, is handled mostly by the state. Local governments do have standards for roads built within new projects and can sometimes, in cooperation with the state, require developers to improve state roads impacted by projects.

■ A lot of the **friction caused by growth** stems from this divergence of responsibilities among different levels of government. In recent years, Lake Norman area governments have taken steps to

collaborate with each other and the state to better address the side effects of growth.

■ Historically, the area's growth has been **driven by Lake Norman**, with Interstate 77 as a dividing line between new and old. But more recently, big projects have landed east of the interstate, such as Bryton in Huntersville, Antiquity in Cornelius, and Cotton Creek in Mooresville.

■ **In the next few years**, look for growth to continue to move north up the lake and Interstate 77, as north Mecklenburg and Mooresville build out. Developers will also continue to turn to areas east of I-77 as lakefront land becomes scarcer. Also, expect more retail and mixed-use developments throughout Lake Norman to support all the homes built in recent years.

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