

# **Southern Iredell County needs to pause large-scale developments to address infrastructure crisis**

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Iredell County experienced explosive growth between 2010 and 2020, gaining over 27,000 residents. This trend is projected to accelerate over the next few decades with Iredell County expected to grow from its current population of about 185,000 to 195,000 by 2025, and to 275,000 by 2050.

This growth is most pronounced in the southern portion of the county. Between 2010 and 2020, Mooreville's population surged by 53% from 32,000 to 50,000, while Troutman's population swelled by 55% from 2,400 to 3,700. According to the town's data, Mooreville has over 18,000 residential units either under construction, pending board action, or do not require board approval but are not yet under construction. Troutman has almost 6,000 residential units either under construction or approved for construction, including the massive Wakefield at Barium development, with another 1,500 residential units being proposed. It's been reported that the planning department in Troutman issued 25 residential permits during a mere three-day period in March of this year and is on track to issue over 450 permits for the year. Troutman's population will likely double, twice, at least, over the next decade.

This type of growth is simply not sustainable, and it's obvious. Look no further than the infrastructure crisis created in both towns. Traffic is routinely at a standstill on N.C. 150 in Mooreville, and the situation appears to worsen continually. Similar congestion plagues various areas in Troutman. Our state legislature contemplated challenges posed by irresponsible development, and it created a law to help deal with those challenges. In 2005, North Carolina amended its Zoning Enabling Statute (G.S. 160D-107) to expressly provide cities and counties the authority to institute a moratorium. Since its passage, according to a survey conducted by UNC's School of Government in 2009, 17% of cities/counties had reported enacting a moratorium. Those results would be higher today, as a handful of cities/counties enacted a moratorium in 2021 alone. One of those was the town of Cornelius, which voted unanimously to impose a moratorium on residential development for a period of 9 to 12 months to address rapid growth and inadequate infrastructure. The vote came immediately after four pro-growth commissioners were voted out in November 2021.

A moratorium is critically needed to pause large scale population growth so that we can address overcrowding, the traffic crisis in Mooresville, assess traffic effects from two new distribution centers in Troutman, and to assess the sufficiency of schools and infrastructure in those areas. More specifically, we need a moratorium on all residential development above 10 units for a period of 12 months in the unincorporated areas surrounding Mooresville and Troutman, and the same or similar moratorium within the municipal limits of both Mooresville and Troutman. In conjunction with the moratoriums, the Town of Mooresville should develop a task force to conduct an expedited review of the traffic problems plaguing N.C. 150 in Mooresville. The N.C. 150 road widening project has been delayed to 2025, at least, leaving Mooresville residents to suffer worsening traffic conditions until the latter part of this decade. This is entirely unacceptable. Your locally elected leaders, including State Sen. Vickie Sawyer, who ironically is co-chairman of the State Senate's Transportation Committee, have failed us on this issue. This task force should not be composed of locally elected leaders who've proven incapable of developing a solution, but with planning board members as well as private citizens qualified to contribute to a solution.

For our neighbors to the north, this type of growth will not stop with Troutman — Statesville will be next. The moratoriums I've described will hopefully have the effect of causing some developers to look north, which could provide the revitalization that many in Statesville have sought, while at the same time showing those developers that the unmitigated growth that was allowed to occur to the south will no longer be tolerated.

Make no mistake, getting this passed won't be easy. There is a well-entrenched old guard clinging to power at both the county and municipal level. They take to local radio stations or board meetings to air their grievances with anyone that has the audacity to suggest that business as usual isn't working. They offer a multitude of excuses as to why the status quo is our only option. In short, we need new leadership at all levels of local government. Ending business as usual will require voting most, if not all, of our local incumbents out over the next several election cycles. With early voting set to begin soon, ask your local candidates, from state senator to county commissioner to school board, what their position is with respect to the over development of our community. When a candidate tells you they support "smart growth", or "balanced growth", or "responsible growth", but can't tell you what that means, you then know who not to vote for. Over the next two years, there will be elections for Mooresville Commissioners, Troutman Town Council members, county commissioners, and school board members. It's time to replace the career politicians with those willing to tackle the problems we face. It's time for a moratorium.

Blake Palmer is a former candidate for county commissioner and resides in Mooresville with his family.