

Mark Marcoplos Announces Candidacy for Orange County Commissioner

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Mark Marcoplos, a longtime advocate for rural Orange County, will run in the May 6 Democratic primary for county commissioner for District 2, a very diverse district that includes all of rural Orange County, the Town of Hillsborough, portions of Mebane, and the neighborhoods adjacent to Carrboro and Chapel Hill.

Marcoplos has cumulatively spent over a decade serving on the Orange County Economic Development Commission, the OWASA Board of Directors, including two terms as chair, and the Orange County Planning Board. He is a small business owner who runs a residential construction business (Marcoplos Construction), specializing in common-sense green building practices. He served on the board of directors of the NC Solar Energy Association (now the NC Sustainable Energy Association), was a regular columnist for two local newspapers spanning thirteen years, and coached youth athletics for twelve years. Marcoplos also helped to successfully defend his own and other rural communities from landfill sitings in the early 90's and airport relocations in 2008-9. Marcoplos says he knows what it's like to be on both sides of the governing table.

"I met Mark Marcoplos, a neighbor of mine in Bingham Township, when UNC decided that they needed a new airport after the planned closing of Horace Williams for Carolina North," said Cliff Leath, a key organizer in the effort. "Mark, myself, and others in our community banded together to have our voice heard and fight against UNC taking land by eminent domain for the airport. Mark is tenacious, and has a strong sense of what is right and wrong. Mark worked tirelessly with me and others in our eventually successful efforts to stop UNC from taking hundreds of acres of land for their airport."

After arriving at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1971 and living in and around Orange County for most of the ensuing years, Marcoplos and his family settled in Bingham Township in rural southwestern Orange County in 1990, first in a mobile home and then in a model green home that he designed and built. The home is within walking distance of the Haw River and features solar water heating, a solar electric power system, passive solar

design, and reclaimed building materials. The home has been featured on national television and in print.

Marcoplos understands that the success of the county's two school systems is centrally important to the health and future of our children and the economic health of the county. Said Marcoplos, "Our commissioners have always funded the systems to the best of their ability and our school boards have consistently instituted good school policy. I will continue in this tradition, while also looking for creative solutions to the anti-education policies that our state government is inflicting on us."

Recognizing that an essential responsibility of the county commissioners is to minimize the financial burden of government on the citizens, he said, "We can take pride that through the years our commissioners have generally been on the same page when it comes to adopting an annual budget that reflects the economic realities of the time while meeting essential needs."

As a member of the OWASA Board of Directors, Marcoplos participated in the adoption process for seven annual budgets. When a successful water conservation program predictably resulted in less revenue, Marcoplos said the board made tough, thoughtful decisions to keep costs down while also making necessary infrastructure investments that will save money in the future. Marcoplos says he is prepared to follow in the county's tradition of wise budgeting while working on economic development initiatives geared toward creating jobs and income while improving the tax base.

Marcoplos says he appreciates the efforts of the county's economic development staff to establish businesses in our Economic Development Districts, noting that the well-paying jobs and added tax revenue will have significant benefits for the county. However, he pointed to another less emphasized aspect of economic development. "The true backbone of our economy is the hundreds of independent local businesses that employ so many of our neighbors. These enterprises are vested in the success of our communities and represent a strong part of our social fabric. Particularly important is our local agricultural sector," he said. In the coming weeks, Marcoplos will outline a proposal to increase the visibility and success of local businesses.

Another key issue that Marcoplos will address is the ongoing quest to solidify a comprehensive solid waste plan. Said Marcoplos: "Any commissioner who has served for more than the last two years bears some responsibility for avoiding dealing with this failure of twenty years and counting. The commissioners haven't done enough to address this issue, continually kicked the can down the road, and now we're wasting our solid waste seed money in fuel costs to send our trash to Durham."

Marcoplos also said he is directly aware of the large number of people in the county who live in poverty amidst all the plenty in Orange County. “Many of our neighbors need employment and business opportunities, public transportation, a living wage and affordable housing,” he said, adding that his experience as a small business owner and a builder will help inform his approach to these issues.

Former Orange County Planning Board member and building scientist, Arnie Katz said, “In the 25 years I've known Mark, he has shown that he's a creative problem solver, someone with that rare combination of practical solutions, out-of-the box thinking, and highly conscious of unintended consequences. I think he'll add a very positive voice to the Board of Commissioners.

Orange County government experience:

- Economic Development Commission 1998-1999
 - Key commission accomplishment – initiated a living wage policy for employees of the County which the commissioners adopted.
 - Major issue discussed was how to create and utilize the three Economic Development Districts.
- Orange Water and Sewer Authority Board of Directors 1999-2006
 - Served two terms as chair, 2003-2005.
 - Played a key role in crafting some of the most effective water conservation measures in the state following the record drought of 2001-2002.
 - During tenure as chair, helped facilitate the agreement with UNC Chapel Hill to partner in a re-claimed water re-use program that is saving over half a million gallons of water per day and is paid for solely by the direct users of the water - (<http://www.owasa.org/whatwedo/reclaimed-water.aspx>).
- Orange County Planning Board 2009-2011
 - Supported rezoning some land along the I-85 corridor to facilitate economic development in appropriate locations.
 - A major project included reviewing the Unified Development Ordinance, an updating and modernizing of the County’s development rules.
 - Was the sole advocate for delaying adoption of the Eno Economic Development District for a few months to address important concerns of the affected community.