

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Healthcare Planning and Certificate of Need Section  
**FROM:** Don Kirkman, Carteret County Economic Development Director (Retired June 30)  
**DATE:** July 12, 2021  
**SUBJ:** Summary of Don Kirkman 7/12 Comments at Carteret Health Care Public Hearing

My name is Don Kirkman, and until my recent retirement on June 30 I was the Economic Development Director in Carteret County. I am speaking today in support of the special need request for a second linear accelerator in Carteret County. My comments today will focus on two important and differentiating demographic factors that underscore Carteret County's unique circumstances warranting a second linear accelerator.

First, Carteret County has a disproportionately older population, resulting from its attractiveness as a retirement destination. Carteret County's economic development strategy has emphasized the recruitment of full-time residents to mitigate the challenges of a seasonal tourism economy, and the county has been successful in attracting retirees and seniors. Carteret County has been designated a Certified Retirement Community by the State of North Carolina—the only oceanfront North Carolina county with such a designation—and Realtor.com in 2020 ranked Carteret County 6<sup>th</sup> in “retirement hot spots” in the United States.

According to the North Carolina Department of Commerce, 54.7% of Carteret County's population was over 45 in 2019, and the county's average age of 49 was one of the oldest in the state. The over-45 population breakdown was as follows: 65+ years of age-16,743 (24.2%); 55-64 years of age-11,561 (16.8%); and 45-54 years of age-9,450 (13.7%). Moreover, the senior population is one of the fastest growing demographic cohorts in the county, which trend is expected to accelerate in the future.

Second, the population of Carteret County is expected to grow at a very accelerated rate over the next decade as 4-lane U.S. 70 is upgraded to Interstate 42 from I-40 in Johnston County to Carteret County, and as more people choose to work remotely from coastal locations, including Carteret County. The U.S. 70 improvements have already catalyzed a surge in population growth, and within 4-years the Havelock Bypass and James City upgrades in Craven County will be completed, removing all stoplights between the Lenoir and Carteret County lines.

Demographers at the North Carolina Department Office of State Budget and Management are required by law to project future population projections based only on historical population rates. Consequently, they are not allowed to incorporate future events into their projection models. In the case of Carteret County, this has resulted in a dramatic underestimate of future population growth. To illustrate the impact of the new I-42 on Carteret County's future

population growth, we analyzed the impact of the completion of I-40 from Raleigh to Wilmington in 1990. In 1990, the population of Carteret County was 52,556, the City of Wilmington was 55,530, New Hanover County was 120,284, and Brunswick County was 50,985. In other words, the populations of Carteret County, the City of Wilmington, and Brunswick County were roughly equivalent, and New Hanover County was slightly more than double Carteret County's population.

In 2019, Wilmington's population had more than doubled to 123,744. Brunswick County's population had exploded to 142,820 (it is the fastest growing county in the state), and New Hanover County's population had nearly doubled to 234,473. By contrast, Carteret County's population had grown incrementally to approximately 70,000 in 2019. The explosive growth in southeastern North Carolina is largely attributable to the completion of I-40, and a similar, if not greater, impact is projected for Carteret County as I-42 is completed. The Raleigh-Durham combined statistical area is now one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the nation, and the new Interstate connection from the Triangle to Carteret County will unquestionably fuel a dramatic acceleration of Carteret County's population over the next decade.

As previously noted, the sudden shift to remote work caused by COVID-19 has contributed to the appeal of coastal destinations to remote workers, which will be a significant factor exacerbating Carteret County's growth as the Research Triangle region emerges as a global technology hub, where many professionals will be able to work remotely. Carteret County's top-ranked schools, together with Carteret Health Care's best-in-class health care system, will enhance the appeal of Carteret County to permanent residents of every age. Finally, the anticipated growth of Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, which will become the largest Marine Corps base for the new F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, with a projected investment of over \$1B in new construction and personnel, will further accelerate the population growth of Carteret County over the next decade and beyond.

In summary, Carteret County will soon become one of the fastest growing counties in North Carolina, and much of that population growth will be in an older demographic with greater cancer rates and a greater need for local oncology care. The need for a second linear accelerator is justified today due to current treatment visits at Carteret Health Care, and that need is projected to grow at a much-accelerated rate over the next decade.

Thank you very much for your consideration, and please feel free to contact me at [donaldakirkman@gmail.com](mailto:donaldakirkman@gmail.com) or 336-501-1849 if you have questions regarding my testimony.

Sincerely,

Don Kirkman