

# Here we go again — the 'Z' word returns



**To zone or not to zone?**  
This question, long ago settled in many parts of the state, is once again facing residents of Western North Carolina. As reported in the Asheville Citizen-Times, a panel of the N.C. Court of Appeals recently ruled that Buncombe County did not follow proper procedures when it narrowly passed the 2007 county-wide zoning ordinance. This procedural snafu means that the residents of Buncombe County must re-

**Guest commentary**  
hash the well-worn debates over zoning.

As academics who live and work in the region, we have studied, public opinion on zoning in Western North Carolina dating back to 2003. Our work on zoning has led to five key observations that provide some context for the current issues facing Buncombe County.

### The key issues

First, these debates are not unique to Buncombe County. For example, The Smoky Mountain News reported that, in the 2002 Macon County Commission election, one candidate compared zoning to communism and totalitarianism. Another responded, "I'm not for zoning. I don't like anyone telling me what I can do with my property." A

third commented that he "didn't think anyone who owned property would support zoning."

Jackson County commissioners passed a construction moratorium in 2007 while hammering out subdivision and steep-slope ordinances. Amidst protest, the Jackson County Commission passed the new ordinances with a 4-1 vote. The following year, the commissioners were presented the Governor's Municipal Conservationist of the Year award.

Second, our surveys of the region's residents show that support for zoning seems to be increasing. In a 2003 survey, we found that 45 percent of residents were in favor of zoning. Four years later, in a 2007 survey, the number who supported zoning had risen to slightly more than 60 percent. This hardly represents a seismic shift, but there clearly is growing support for zoning in the region.

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than land use planning, and we urge public administrators to use the 'z' word with caution.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, our research has demonstrated the importance of trust in government. We found that a person's level of trust in local government has a substantial influence on an individual's support for zoning. We discovered that folks were more willing to cede

power to government if they trust local government.

Our findings about the importance of trust in government strike us as particularly telling in light of the recent events in Buncombe County. Now more than ever, it is important for the Buncombe County Commissioners to take public feedback seriously, learn to compromise and develop policies that have the support of the greatest number of the county's citizens.

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**Chris Cooper**  
OPINION



**Gibbs Knotts**  
OPINION

Fourth, our research has convinced us that words matter. In our 2007 survey, we asked half our sample of their opinions on "zoning" and the other half opinions on "land use planning." We found that support for land use planning was considerably higher than support for zoning. Zoning is a much more polarizing term



# Federal Reserve also carries serious blame for economic mess



**For the financial crisis that has wiped out trillions in wealth, many have felt the lash of public outrage.**

**Pat Buchanan**  
OPINION  
Fannie and Freddie. The idiot-bankers. The AIG bonus babies. The Bush Republicans

**Syndicated columnist**  
Obama is doing. Indeed, in 1932, President Franklin Roosevelt lacerated Hoover for having presided over the "greatest spending administration in peacetime in all of history." His running mate, John Nance Garner, accused Hoover of "leading the country down the path to socialism." And "Cactus Jack"