



April 21, 2025

Ronnie Thompson
Chairman
Board of Supervisors
County of Franklin
1255 Franklin Street
Rocky Mount, VA 24151

Chairman Thompson:

I am writing to follow up on the conversations that the Town and County have had regarding the proposed Career and Technical Education (CTE) facility. Since the zoning for the proposed location (former Mod-U-Kraf property at 260 Weaver Street in the Franklin County and Rocky Mount Industrial Park) does not allow for the type of use that the County is proposing (Educational Facility, Primary or Secondary), Franklin County has requested that the Town Council consider a text amendment that would allow such use on the proposed parcel. Before the Town Council can decide how to respond to that request, I would like to briefly summarize the last two CTE discussions between the Town and County and ask a number of questions that we must have answers to before we can proceed.

In 2017, the County requested that the Town rezone the property behind Franklin County High School to allow for a CTE facility to be built. On October 9, 2017, the Town Council deliberated the matter, recognized the importance of CTE opportunities for local students and businesses, decided that there was sufficient justification to grant the request, and took action to rezone the property as requested. We do not know all of the details as to what occurred between the County and Franklin County Schools, but that project was never completed—or even started. It is our understanding that the project was not pursued due to the associated costs.

In 2022, the County entered into an agreement that would allow for the purchase of the former Mod-U-Kraf property and approached the Town about constructing a CTE facility at that location. Town representatives (Mayor Steve Angle, Council, and staff) spent a considerable amount of time and energy working with the County to determine if the proposed site would be a suitable location for a CTE facility. It was discussed at that time that, given the M1: Industrial Limited zoning classification for the property, the zoning regulations for the M1 classification would have to be amended to allow for the proposed use (Educational Facility, Primary or Secondary). No formal request was made to rezone the property at that time. It is our

understanding that the County decided not to purchase the property or proceed with the proposed project once the cost estimates came in from the County's consultant. The Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to end discussions regarding the Mod-U-Kraf property and voted unanimously to ask the School Board to find a way to build the CTE facility on the property behind the High School. It is our understanding that the idea of building the proposed CTE facility on the Mod-U-Kraf property was rejected due to the associated costs and the fact that the County had already purchased the property behind the school with the intention of building a CTE facility.

I mention those two discussions between the Town and County because we are concerned that after spending considerable time, energy, and resources (not to mention causing polarizing public discourse), this new proposal will be met with a similar outcome—the County deciding not to pursue the project due to the costs and an inability or unwillingness to raise taxes in order to finance it. Even with everyone (County, School Board, Town, residents, etc.) all in agreement regarding the need for CTE opportunities for students and the importance of an educated, skilled workforce for existing and future businesses in Franklin County and the knowledge of how much such a facility will cost, the Board of Supervisors lowered its real estate tax rate by eighteen cents last year. Just this week, the Board of Supervisors voted to not raise the meals tax rate or the real estate tax rate with several Supervisors stating that a tax increase is not an option that they are willing to consider.

I would also like to point out that the County's interpretation of the required process for a text amendment to the zoning ordinance to be considered is not correct. On several occasions, including the letter from County Administrator Chris Whitlow dated April 8, 2025, representatives from the County have stated that they believe that they can meet with the Town Zoning Administrator for a pre-application meeting and then submit an application requesting the text amendment. This is not what is stated in the Town Zoning Ordinance. The only way for a text amendment to be considered is for the process to be initiated by the Town Council. If the Town Council decides to initiate the process, the Town would then be required to publish public notices, hold a public hearing with the Planning and Zoning Commission, get a recommendation from the Planning and Zoning Commission, then have the matter go to the Town Council for another public hearing and Council deliberation. Even if the Town Council initiates the text amendment process, there is no guarantee that the text amendment will be approved as Council will have to make a decision based on many factors including input from the public, the recommendation from the Planning and Zoning Commission, and, in the end, whether or not Council believes that the uses proposed by the County are compatible with both the existing uses in the Industrial Park and adjacent areas as well as the potential future uses allowed in the area.

After discussing this matter with the Town Council on April 14, 2025, the Council reiterated their support for CTE in Franklin County Public Schools because it is incredibly beneficial to students who are preparing for a career and businesses who are in need of a skilled workforce. The Council does have concerns about the proposed location for the CTE facility, so they asked me to send a letter with the following questions that we must have answers to before we can decide whether or not to initiate the text amendment process:

1. When the Summit View Business Park Master Plan was created by the County, it called for recreational and other quality of life uses in the Park that would bring children and families to the Park. I believe that ball fields, a splash park, walking trails, etc. were all included in the Master Plan. It is our understanding that in 2022, the County decided that those uses are incompatible with the other uses in the Park. If those uses are incompatible with the Summit View Business Park, how is an educational use which involves children—just like the uses originally committed to for the Business Park—compatible with the existing uses in the Industrial Park?
2. How will the addition of children to the Industrial Park be addressed in order to guarantee their safety and that of the existing businesses and their employees in the Industrial Park? Will modifications or improvements to roads in the area be required, and is the County going to cover the costs of such work?
3. We have concerns about additional traffic in the industrial park due to buses, teachers, and administrators driving to and from the site, students driving to and from the site, dispatchers going to and from work, Public Safety personnel going to and from work, Public Safety personnel responding to emergencies, etc. How much traffic will be added to State Street which is already a problem area due to Industrial Park traffic and Middle School traffic and Weaver Street which is heavily travelled by large trucks? What improvements will be necessary to deal with the additional traffic, and is the County proposing to pay for those improvements?
4. Businesses in and around the Industrial Park are concerned about the impact of the proposed uses on their operations. In addition to traffic issues, they are worried that if the proposed CTE facility were to be built, there will then be conflicts between the users of that facility and the existing and future businesses which will lead to the County and/or Franklin County Schools requesting that those businesses change their operations (noise, traffic, lighting, etc.) which will result in extra expenses and potentially the inability for the businesses to continue operation in the area. What can you tell us about the plans for the proposed CTE facility to address the concerns of those businesses?
5. It is our understanding that in addition to the proposed CTE facility, the County would also like to construct facilities for Franklin County Public Safety and the Sheriff Office's Dispatch Center on the property. In addition to those uses, what other uses or facilities are being proposed or considered for that location?
6. Given that the Town and County have overlapping jurisdiction within the town limits, we are interested in what the financial impact will be on town residents and businesses, as well as the Town itself. We are interested in the financial (tax) impact on residents and businesses. Since Rocky Mount residents and businesses pay both County and Town taxes, an increase in County property taxes adds to the total tax burden for our residents and businesses and can limit the Town's options and decisions in the future. In the aforementioned letter from County Administrator Whitlow, it was stated that the Board of Supervisors has worked with its financial advisors to determine how to pay the costs associated with building all of these facilities. There will also be significant costs

associated with operating the facilities—especially the CTE facility since it appears that the facility will essentially be a new high school campus with academic classes being offered in addition to the career and technical courses that are typically associated with CTE. The new high school campus will undoubtedly require administration, teachers, maintenance staff, cafeteria staff, security (SROs), etc. As mentioned above, we are concerned about the amount of work that will go into addressing and resolving the many issues associated with a new CTE facility and the controversy and ill will that will be stirred up in the public for no good reason, if this is not a financially viable project. County representatives have told us that the County's financial consultants have told the Board of Supervisors how to finance the project—including the required increase in property taxes. Please let us know how the capital/construction and operating costs will be paid for and what the increase in property taxes will be.

7. The proposed use of this property will have a significant impact on the Town including, but not limited to the following: loss of property tax revenue (both current and potential) since the County does not pay property taxes, loss of potential business license/franchise tax revenue, loss of potential job creation because the site will no longer be available for commercial/industrial use, loss of one of the last industrial sites in town that could be offered to bring new businesses to town, etc. How does the County plan to address these negative impacts on the Town?
8. We have been told by County representatives that the County is going to buy the property regardless of whether or not the Town amends the Town Zoning Ordinance to allow for the proposed uses. Please confirm whether or not this is correct.

I appreciate your attention to these important questions and thank you in advance for providing the answers so that the Town Council can continue their discussion and deliberation. The next regular meeting of the Town Council is on Monday, May 12th, so in order to discuss your answers with the Council, we will need to have them by April 30th, so that we can review them and distribute them to Council in advance of the meeting.

Sincerely,



C. Holland Perdue III
Mayor

cc: Chris Whitlow, County Administrator
Robert J. Wood, Town Manager