

Planning Boards Inclusion Report

Allen Buansi



**CENTER FOR
CIVIL RIGHTS**

Acknowledgments

The communities that the UNC Center for Civil Rights has worked alongside over the years inspired this report, including the Rogers Eubanks Neighborhood Association, Rural Empowerment Association for Community Help, Walnut Tree Community Association and many others. This report would not have come into being without the willingness of county planning directors and administrative staff across North Carolina to share information on their respective counties.

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Of course, the Center's work would not be possible without its founder, Julius Chambers.

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FOREWORD

In September of 2017, the UNC Board of Governors acted to impose an advocacy ban aimed at preventing UNC Center for Civil Rights (the “Center”) from bringing civil rights cases, thus leading to the departure of three attorneys who staffed the Center’s work and leading many in North Carolina and beyond to believe that the Center was dead. Although the Center was badly wounded, its work had not ended.

From its inception in 2001, the Center pursued a three-part mission that included (1) training law students who would become civil rights lawyers through experiential education; (2) convening scholars, lawyers, activists, and others to consider and discuss issues of race and civil rights; and (3) conducting research and publishing scholarship on issues of race and civil rights. While the advocacy ban compromised the ability of the Center to provide experiential education to UNC Law students, the Center continued the remaining parts of its mission. Allen Buansi, a UNC Law alumnus, has been central and indispensable to those efforts.

In addition to the Center’s other work, Allen developed and pursued a project, which studied county planning boards across the State of North Carolina. These boards take on important roles in carrying out duties and responsibilities of counties and their officials. These boards are often pathways to public service through elected or appointed office. The selection processes, responsibilities, composition, and other qualities of these planning boards have escaped study until now. The Planning Boards Inclusion Project is intended to suggest opportunities to strengthen these entities.

Allen Buansi has made an important contribution to our collective understanding of how our state governments function, of who serves on county boards, and of how they

serve. The Planning Boards Inclusion Report gifts the people of North Carolina with a deeper understanding of their state and provides those who serve on county boards with the ability to consider gender, racial and other forms of diversity in the entities that carry out some of its. Important functions. This report is only one of the ways in which Allen is serving his town, his community and his state. On behalf of the UNC Center for Civil Rights, I am proud of his efforts to continue the Center's work to improve our state and our communities.

Ted Shaw

Julius L. Chambers Distinguished Professor of Law and Director of the UNC Center for Civil Rights

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Planning Boards Inclusion report explores the significance and dynamic of county planning boards across North Carolina. In the past, the UNC Center for Civil Rights (“Center”) has worked with many historically disenfranchised communities that involved interactions with local elected boards and their advisory boards. County planning boards are advisory bodies, which significantly influence local elected boards across the state. They also provide input and in some instances, have decision-making authority on applications and plans that implicate residential patterns, economic development and the provision of government services. As such, they hold a unique role in being able to affect change in residential patterns and ensuring equitable job growth in historically underserved areas. Many public officeholders have come from planning boards or other advisory boards. These are important local government units, which merit close examination.

There are 100 counties in North Carolina, and 92 of those counties have planning boards. The Center was able to interview with staff from 85 of the 92 counties. This report focused on the following three aspects of county planning boards: (1) powers and duties, (2) member selection procedures; and (3) racial, ethnic and gender representation. This is the first report of its kind in North Carolina, surveying planning boards in this manner. Using North Carolina general statutes, county ordinances, interviews and Census data, the Center’s findings reveal variability in powers and duties and in the member selection procedures from county to county. Also, the racial, ethnic and gender representation of a county planning board tend not to reflect the demographics of the given county.

There are some common duties county planning boards have. State law empowers county planning boards to review any proposed zoning ordinances or zoning ordinance amendments. Over 80 percent of the counties with planning boards empower their planning board with the ability to review plats for subdivision developments, which are maps, drawn to scale, displaying the divisions of a portion of land. Depending upon the geography of a given county and other considerations, county planning boards also vary widely in their other assigned duties. For example, in a minority of counties, planning boards can revoke permits required for development. In some counties, planning boards may act in the capacity of another advisory board.

Member selection procedures also vary from county to county, though they share a key characteristic. The elected governing board has considerable discretion in appointing members of the county planning board. Some counties provide for geographical and professional diversity in the composition of their boards, while at least five counties allow their elected officials to recruit and submit their own preferred candidate for the county planning board. Only one county has an ordinance requiring its elected governing board to make considerations for the racial, ethnic and gender composition of the planning board.

Demographic study of counties and their planning boards revealed significant findings. The average number of seats on a county planning board was eight. The lowest number of seats for a planning board was five. Almost half of county planning board rosters whose staff the Center interviewed have either only men or just one woman. Two-thirds of county planning boards whose associated staff the Center interviewed are either all white or have just one nonwhite member. Forty-two percent of county planning boards

whose staff the Center interviewed are all white. The data presented on county planning boards in this report with respect to their powers and duties, member selection procedures and demographics is current, as of March 2019.

This report contains recommendations for how elected governing bodies can improve their procedures for selecting planning board members and produce more demographically balanced, representative planning boards, including the amendment of enabling ordinances to make race, ethnicity and gender a formal consideration. This report was limited to county planning boards and planning boards merged between the county and the largest municipality. The Center hopes that this work can be built upon to explore municipal planning boards and historic trends in the demographics of the counties, municipalities and their planning boards. This report promises to be a resource for local governments and citizens alike in the ongoing mission for inclusion, equality and equity.

BACKGROUND

Planning boards are the life-blood of most local governments in North Carolina. Right after the local elected bodies – boards of county commissioners and municipal boards – planning boards are often the most influential bodies in any given local jurisdiction. These are appointed local government boards, which help elected governing bodies set visions for growth and development. They make plans for entire land areas. They review land use and zoning ordinances and zoning map amendments, which affect housing, industrial and commercial patterns. In some counties, they double as watershed review boards and boards of adjustments, expanding their influence into areas such as the environment. In some counties, they have final decision-making authority on developments. County boards of commissioners tend to adopt their planning boards' recommendations most of the time.¹ Planning boards have also been de facto launching pads for a number of careers in public office and politics.

This report takes an in-depth look at county planning boards in North Carolina. It comes after a months-long exploration of the following: (1) the powers and duties of planning boards; (2) the member selection procedures and practices of planning boards; and (3) the degree to which these boards reflect and represent their respective community demographics, in terms of race, ethnicity and gender. The University of North Carolina

¹ In order to assess how often elected governing boards adopted their county planning boards' recommendations, the Center asked the appropriate staff person the following question in statement form. Then, the Center asked the staff person to choose from one of four answer choices that best captured the how often these governing boards adopted planning boards' recommendations. Below is the question that the Center posed: "I'm going to read a statement related to how often the Board of County Commissioners adopts the Planning Board's recommendations. And then I'll ask you to choose one of the four following answer choices. Here is the statement. "The Board of County Commissioners adopts the recommendation of the Planning Board: (1) Not at all, (2) Rarely, (3) About half of the time, (4) most of the time."

Center for Civil Rights (the “Center”) is breaking new ground, as this is the first survey and report on planning boards’ powers, selection procedures and demographics.

Since 2001, the Center has directly confronted issues around race, ethnicity and gender equality. Given the legacy of Jim Crow and the current state of race and gender relations, every opportunity must be taken to advance residents’ understanding of how deep-rooted these issues are in North Carolina.

In the fall of 2017, the UNC Board of Governors imposed an advocacy ban on the Center, prohibiting the Center and its attorneys from engaging in litigation. However, the Center’s work continues, and a consistent, critical component of the Center’s work lies in civic engagement. Out of every level of government, local government produces arguably the most direct, acute effects on people. Over the past decade, the Center has delivered presentations across the North Carolina on registering voters and effective engagement with local government. The purpose of this work is to empower communities across North Carolina, so they can become better advocates for themselves and make their governments more inclusive, transparent and accountable to all constituents. This study and report on county planning boards follows in the Center’s tradition of training communities and students on civic engagement and local government functions.

County government is an important form of local government. A little under half of the state’s population resides outside of city and town limits² and are mostly under the jurisdiction of a county. The North Carolina General Assembly granted zoning authority to counties in 1959 and ten years later, granted counties broad ordinance making

² Estimates of the Municipal and Non-Municipal Population of North Carolina and North Carolina Counties for July 1, 2018 (Nov. 4, 2019, 3:21 PM), https://files.nc.gov/ncosbm/demog/muninonmunipop_2018.html

authority.³ This broad ordinance-making authority enabled counties to pass zoning ordinances, housing codes, regulate development in floodplains and subdivision of land, undertake community development and downtown development programs and pass other types of regulations.⁴ In order to exercise zoning authority, counties had to create planning boards.⁵

County boards of commissioners and municipal elected boards (“elected governing boards”⁶) select and appoint members of planning boards. As influential as these planning boards are, there is little statutory guidance for how these elected governing boards must select planning board members. Consequently, there is great variability from jurisdiction to jurisdiction in the member selection criteria set by the elected governing board. Ultimately, elected governing boards have broad discretion in how and whom they select as planning board members.

The Center’s findings reveal that there are no two county planning boards that are the same regarding their powers and duties. In most counties in North Carolina, people of color and women are significantly underrepresented on planning boards, relative to their respective proportions of each county’s population.

The following sections will guide the reader through the Center’s methodology, results, limitations and conclusions. The “methods” section gives a brief overview of the techniques the Center used in order to explore the three aforementioned topics of county

³ David Owens, *Local Government Authority to Implement Smart Growth Programs: Dillon’s Rule, Legislative Reform, and the Current State of Affairs in North Carolina*, 35 Wake Forest L. Rev. 671, 675-6 (2001).

⁴ *Id.* at 677.

⁵ N.C. GEN. STAT. § 153A-344 (2016).

⁶ In the context of county planning boards, elected governing boards most often refers to Boards of County Commissioners, the elected governing board for the county. There are only five planning boards that are jointly administered by an elected governing board of a county and municipality.

planning boards' (1) powers and duties; (2) member selection procedures and practices; and (3) racial, ethnic and gender demographics. Next, the Center explores the results, where the findings are assessed on the aforementioned topics, based upon statutory analysis, county ordinance reviews, surveys and interviews. The Center also compared relevant, demographic data with American Community Survey data. The limitations section explains shortcomings in the methodology and data. County planning boards are not the only boards of influence, although they tend to be powerful ones. Thus, the conclusions section includes recommended steps for improving member selection procedures to produce more diverse and balanced planning boards, which can be replicated for all local government advisory boards.

The Center hopes local governments and communities of color in North Carolina will use this work to improve advisory board member selection procedures and to advance equity in their communities.

METHODS

Overall

The exploration of county planning boards required the use of multiple tools. First, the Center conducted statutory research in order to determine a baseline for requirements of county planning boards. This stage included the analysis of two legal frameworks for the authority of local government along with relevant statutes. Second, in order to determine any requirements at the county level, the Center conducted a review of county ordinances in each county related to development and county planning boards. Lastly, to ascertain the actual practices of counties and to clarify any ambiguities, the

Center conducted interviews with or obtained completed questionnaires from county staff persons in 86 counties, which have planning boards.

North Carolina General Statutes

Exploring the North Carolina General Statutes as they pertain to county planning boards requires an understanding of two legal frameworks: Dillon’s Rule and Home Rule. These two rules represent two distinct ways of interpreting the authority of counties and municipalities within a state.⁷ In 1872, John Forest Dillon – then, a U.S. circuit judge in the Eight Circuit – wrote a renowned treatise describing the concept that “a municipal corporation possesses and can exercise the following powers and no others...those granted in express words...those necessarily or fairly implied in or incident to the powers expressly granted...[and] those essential to the accomplishment of the declared objects and purposes of the corporation.”⁸ This concept became known as Dillon’s Rule.⁹ Under this rule, local governments essentially possess only the powers explicitly given by the state legislature.¹⁰ The Home rule describes inherent authority local governments have to make their own laws and regulations concerning matters of local concern.¹¹

⁷ See Frayda Bluestein, *Is North Carolina a Dillon’s Rule State?*, Coates’ Canons: NC Local Government Law (Feb. 23, 2018, 2:16 PM), <https://canons.sog.unc.edu/is-north-carolina-a-dillons-rule-state/>.

⁸ Frayda Bluestein, *Is North Carolina a Dillon’s Rule State?*, Coates’ Canons: NC Local Government Law (Feb. 23, 2018, 2:16 PM), <https://canons.sog.unc.edu/is-north-carolina-a-dillons-rule-state/>, citing John F. Dillon, *Treatise on the Law of Municipal Corporations*, Chicago: James Cockcroft & Company, (1872).

⁹ Frayda Bluestein, *Is North Carolina a Dillon’s Rule State?*, Coates’ Canons: NC Local Government Law (Feb. 23, 2018, 2:16 PM), <https://canons.sog.unc.edu/is-north-carolina-a-dillons-rule-state/>.

¹⁰ Jesse J. Richardson, Meghan Zimmerman & Robert Puentes, Discussion Paper, *Is Home Rule the Answer? Clarifying the Influence of Dillon’s Rule on Growth Management*, Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy (Jan. 2003).

¹¹ *Id.*

North Carolina has been a Dillon's Rule state, historically, meaning that local governments have as much authority as the state legislature grants them.¹² The North Carolina Constitution does not bestow home rule unto cities and counties in North Carolina, as is the case in most states.¹³ Recent trends suggest that North Carolina remains, constitutionally, a Dillon's Rule state but has been infused with some statutorily provided Home Rule, particularly on issues related to local form of government, personnel systems and taxation.¹⁴ Since 1971, the state legislature has directed for broad interpretation of the scope of local authority.¹⁵ This broad interpretation shows up in local growth management measures pertaining to housing, recreation, economic development and infrastructure.¹⁶ The state legislature has delegated substantial local authority and discretion in land use planning and intergovernmental coordination.¹⁷

County planning boards are examples of this hybrid dynamic at play. On the one hand, the state requires counties to create county planning boards, when they exercise zoning authority.¹⁸ The state also lists duties, which county planning boards can perform.¹⁹ However, for a long time, there has been no general state mandate for comprehensive land use planning, yet counties have voluntarily taken on this process²⁰ and in some instances, delegated this responsibility to their planning boards.

¹² See Frayda Bluestein, *Is North Carolina a Dillon's Rule State?*, Coates' Canons: NC Local Government Law (Feb. 23, 2018, 2:16 PM), <https://canons.sog.unc.edu/is-north-carolina-a-dillons-rule-state/>.

¹³ David Owens, *Local Government Authority to Implement Smart Growth Programs: Dillon's Rule, Legislative Reform, and the Current State of Affairs in North Carolina*, 35 Wake Forest L. Rev. 671, 674 (2001).

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.* at 677.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 700-701.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 677.

¹⁸ N.C. GEN. STAT. § 153A-321 (2004).

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ David Owens, *Local Government Authority to Implement Smart Growth Programs: Dillon's Rule, Legislative Reform, and the Current State of Affairs in North Carolina*, 35 Wake Forest L. Rev. 671, 678 (2001).

After exploring these two frameworks, the Center explored the relevant statutes regarding county planning boards in Chapters 153A and 160A of the North Carolina General Statutes.²¹ These statutes are largely silent as to how local governments must administer, select and empower their planning boards, though these statutes list the duties that boards of county commissioners may assign to their planning boards. County planning boards can perform the following duties:

1. Make studies of the county and surrounding areas;
2. Determine objectives to be sought in the development of the study area;
3. Prepare and adopt plans for achieving those objectives
4. Make and recommend policies, ordinances, administrative procedures and other means for executing plans in a coordinated, efficient manner;
5. Advise the Board of County Commissioners regarding the use and amendment of means for executing plans
6. Use any functions in the administration and enforcement of various means for executing plans that the Board of County Commissioners might direct; and
7. Perform any other related duties that the Board of County Commissioners may direct.²²

Other, supplemental powers include the following:

1. May accept, receive and disburse funds, grants and services provided by the federal government or its agencies, the state government or its agencies, any local government or its agencies and private or civic sources; and

²¹ Starting in January 2020, these statutes will be consolidated under Chapter 160D of the North Carolina General Statutes.

²² N.C. GEN. STAT. § 153A-321 (2004).

2. With approval of Board of County Commissioners, can enter into and execute contracts with the State or federal governments or any agencies of either under which financial or other planning assistance is made available to the county and may agree to and comply with reasonable conditions that are imposed upon the assistance.²³

Counties have exercised discretion in assigning any of the aforementioned duties. In effect, these statutes require virtually no duties and powers of county planning boards, outside of reviewing proposed zoning ordinances, proposed ordinance amendments and rezoning applications (zoning map amendments). State law also provides that planning boards may “[p]erform any other related duties that the board of commissioners may direct.”²⁴ At least 28 counties have authorized their planning board members to comprise and act as another advisory board. In at least six counties, members of the planning board are assigned as members to two additional advisory boards. Counties essentially have broad authority to determine the form, composition and duties of their own county planning boards.²⁵ Thus, it is even more important that planning board appointments are inclusive because, unlike elected governing boards, these are not elected positions where voters have a hand in their selection.

²³ N.C. GEN. STAT. § 153A-322 (2005).

²⁴ N.C. GEN. STAT. § 153A-321 (2004).

²⁵ See N.C. GEN. STAT. § 153A-321 (2004).

County Ordinance Review

Next, if the North Carolina General Statutes establish a floor for the minimum requirements of planning boards, then each county with a planning board sets the ceiling via county ordinance. These counties can make additional requirements of or provide additional powers to planning boards. Stemming from their ordinances, the Center explored the variability of county planning boards in their selection procedures and powers in the following results sections.

The Center examined all publicly accessible ordinances within a given county that referenced planning boards, including the following types of ordinances:

1. Unified development ordinances;
2. Zoning ordinances;
3. Subdivision ordinances;
4. Mobile home park ordinances;
5. Watershed protection ordinances;
6. Flood damage prevention ordinances; and
7. Planning board ordinance

It is important to note that any county that employs zoning must have a planning board. Any proposed zoning ordinance and its amendments must be referred to a planning board for review before the elected governing board can take action.²⁶

The Center found these ordinances on counties' official websites and in MuniCode, a tool often used by counties and municipalities to publicly post their ordinances online.

²⁶ N.C. GEN. STAT. § 153A-344 (2016).

From these ordinances, the Center generated over 30 data points for each county planning board regarding their powers, duties and requirements.

In total, the Center's review included 176 ordinances from 92 counties, since eight counties in North Carolina do not have county planning boards.

Website Survey

Outside of ordinances, the Center sought information on counties' websites about times, days and locations for regular meetings for each of the 92 county planning boards. The Center also found information on application procedures and questions on most of the counties' official websites.

Interviews

Prior to conducting these interviews, the Center obtained a review from the Institutional Review Board to ensure the integrity of the results. The Center interviewed or received questionnaires from county staff persons in 85 of the 92 counties with planning boards. The purpose of these interviews was to confirm certain information provided and ascertain information not provided on county websites and in county ordinances, regarding meeting times and days and planning boards' powers and duties. The Center also explored member selection procedures and the demographics of county planning boards, using these interviews and questionnaires. These interviews ranged from five and forty minutes, with the vast majority lasting between 15 and 20 minutes.

POWERS AND DUTIES

Again, the sources of authority for county planning boards include the North Carolina General Statutes and county ordinances. Most of the powers provided by the North Carolina General Statutes are straightforward and are listed in the previous section on pages 12-13.

There are some vaguely stated powers referenced in the statutes that interviews and questionnaires with county staff contacts helped to clarify. For example, the power to make studies of the county and surrounding areas refers to the planning board's ability to request that staff assess natural environments and the potential for development in a given area within the county's jurisdiction. Making, recommending and advising on policies, ordinances and other means for executing plans refer to a key function that all planning boards share as advisors to the county board of commissioners. In these instances, staff typically works closely with the county planning board in drafting policies, ordinances and administrative procedures.

The Center's review of county ordinances revealed that the typical ordinances granting authority to county planning boards include the zoning, subdivision and unified development ordinances. Zoning ordinances typically outline the role of planning boards in the consideration of changes to zoning or else, zoning map amendments, though Chapter 153A requires that planning boards review a zoning ordinance in the first place, before an elected governing board passes it.²⁷ Rezoning applications are essentially requests to change the zoning, which encompasses regulations for building height, land use, density and

²⁷ N.C. GEN. STAT. § 153A-344(a).

other aspects of development, for a property or piece of land.²⁸ If a rezoning application is approved, then the zoning map is amended to reflect the change.²⁹ In reviewing rezoning applications, the county planning board typically takes on an advisory role, where the planning board reviews the request (application) before the elected governing board reviews it. There are three common types of applications: (1) rezoning, (2) special use or conditional use permit and (3) conditional zoning. Chapter 153A requires that all rezoning applications be submitted to the planning board for review and comment.³⁰ Rezoning applications involve a procedure in which the advisory board and elected governing board can use its discretion in recommending or deciding the approval or denial of an application.³¹ Special use and conditional use permit applications typically involve a procedure in which the advisory board must make certain findings in a public hearing, in order to recommend approval or denial of an application.³² This procedure must be quasi-judicial in that board members are prohibited from having communications outside of the public hearing (ex-parte communications) about the application and any related matters.³³ Special use permits are limited to certain specified uses.³⁴ Like a rezoning, conditional zoning involves the board's

²⁸ Henderson County, *Rezoning*, Henderson County Official Website (Aug. 8, 2019, 10:44 AM), <https://www.hendersoncountync.gov/planning/page/rezoning>

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ N.C. GEN. STAT. § 153A-344 (2016).

³¹ N.C. GEN. STAT. § 153A-321 (2004).

³² David Owens, Special Use Permits in North Carolina Zoning, UNC School of Government (Jan. 11, 2019, 11:05 AM), https://www.sog.unc.edu/sites/www.sog.unc.edu/files/full_text_books/ss22.pdf

³³ See N.C. GEN. STAT. § 153A-340 (2017).

³⁴ N.C. GEN. STAT. § 153A-340 (2017).

discretion in recommending or deciding the approval or denial of an application.³⁵ Conditional zoning is typically limited to certain areas or districts.³⁶

Half of the counties interviewed³⁷ authorize their planning boards to review and advise on applications for conditional zoning. A little over 40 percent of counties interviewed allow their planning boards to review and make recommendations on special use permit applications. At least eight counties grant final decision-making authority on special use permit applications to their planning board.

Outside of the zoning ordinance, the subdivision ordinance is the most common ordinance among counties, which have county planning boards. In 89 percent of counties interviewed, planning boards review and make recommendations on preliminary or final plats for subdivisions. Planning boards, with authority under this ordinance can also make recommendations or grant approval for various aspects within the subdivision such as sidewalks, street names and restrictive covenants. At least 15 counties grant county planning boards final decision-making authority on subdivision approval.

The unified development ordinance consolidates all development regulations into one ordinance governing land use. In other words, zoning, subdivision and other regulations are contained within this kind of an ordinance, rather than in separate ordinances. This type of ordinance provides a streamlined

³⁵ David Owens, *Conditional Zoning*, UNC School of Government (Jan. 11, 2019, 11:30 AM), <https://www.sog.unc.edu/resources/legal-summaries/conditional-zoning>

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ When the percentage of counties interviewed is referenced, it means specifically, the proportion of the counties whose county staff contacts the Center interviewed or from whom the Center received a questionnaire. The Center interviewed or accepted questionnaires from 85 of the 92 counties with planning boards in North Carolina.

method for identifying any regulations relevant to a given development application or to the planning board. Only 21 percent of counties interviewed have unified development ordinances.

The ordinance review revealed the following additional powers found in various counties provided to county planning boards:

1. Hearing and deciding appeals of administrative decisions;
2. Reviewing plans for mobile home parks;
3. Preparing or maintaining comprehensive plans;
4. Reviewing applications for wireless communications facilities;
5. Revoking permits;
6. Reviewing plans for solar energy facilities;
7. Granting variances to ordinances;
8. Reviewing proposed ordinance amendments;
9. Proposing amendments to ordinances; and
10. Reviewing or approving permits besides special use and conditional use permits.

Below, Figure 2 illustrates the number of county planning boards that have the various powers described above.

Number of County Planning Boards with Various Powers & Duties

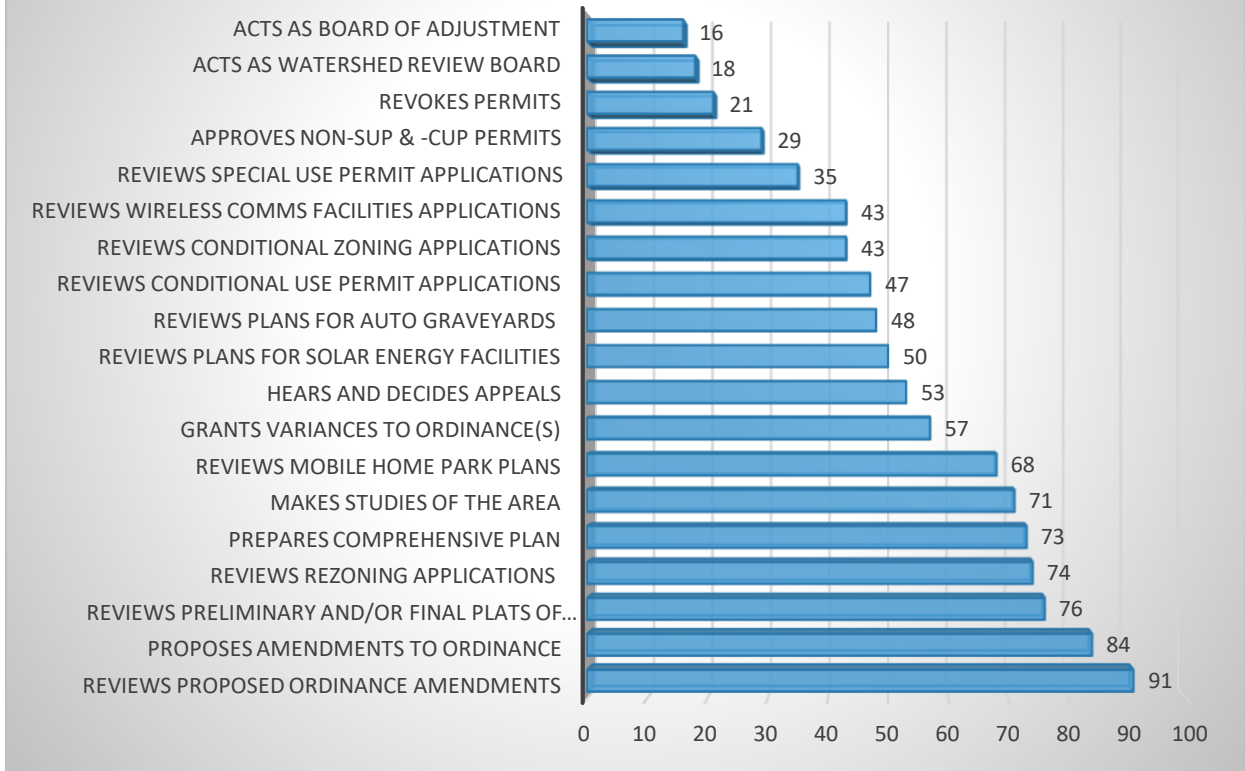


Figure 1. County Planning Boards with Powers and Duties

As seen from the figure above, the powers and duties of various county planning boards can be expansive. This highlights the need for sound, fair practices in selecting the people who exercise these broad powers. The next section evaluates the procedures used for selecting planning board members.

MEMBER SELECTION PROCEDURE EVALUATION

Statutory Review

State law is largely silent on the selection procedure of county planning board members. The only statutory requirement concerning membership is that county planning boards must have at least three members.³⁸ Planning boards may have any composition as considered appropriate by the board of county commissioners and can be “organized in any manner considered appropriate.”³⁹

County Procedures

Without statutory requirements, this leaves counties as the creators of their membership selection procedures. County ordinances are also largely silent on these procedures. Despite the variability of county planning boards, they share one key characteristic – broad discretion by their respective elected governing boards in their board appointments.

Selection in Practice

In practice, each county sets minimum criteria that an applicant must meet in order to serve on the county planning board. The minimum criteria most common among county planning boards is the county residency requirement, which exists for all of the

³⁸ N.C. GEN. STAT. § 153A-321 (2004).

³⁹ *Id.*

counties interviewed. Other criteria required in a handful of counties include residence in a particular geographic district or municipality.

Almost every county planning board member selection procedure starts with an application. Nearly 90 percent of counties offer applications to the public for membership on its advisory boards. The vast majority (88 percent) of these applications are offered online (“online applications”). Generally, deadlines are not posted for these applications, and applications are considered on a rolling basis depending upon vacancies that open up over the course of a year or at the end of a given term. Once submitted, the application is forwarded to the clerk to the elected governing boards, which tends to be the Board of County Commissioners. The clerk collects applications and presents them to the Board of County Commissioners at a later meeting. At that meeting, the Board of County Commissioners votes for and appoints their preferred applicant for the planning board vacancy. In every county with a planning board, the selection procedure is the same regardless of whether an applicant is applying for a new, full term or to fill the remainder of a term.

The application in a given county is a common application used for any advisory board that the county provides. It is not planning board-specific. All of the online applications in counties with planning boards ask for a name and address. Over 80 percent of the counties with online applications ask for a list of activities, experience and/or skills on the application. Just over half of the counties with online applications ask for a reason for interest or how the applicant would benefit the board on the application. Only 40 percent of counties with online applications provide a field for the race and ethnicity of the applicant, and 43 percent of counties with online applications, provide a

field for the gender of the applicant. Only six percent of counties with online applications ask about veteran status. Just 29 percent of counties with online applications ask about any potential conflicts of interest.

Ultimately, each County Commissioner has full discretion in her vote and aside from the residency requirement, can follow her own criteria. A planning board ordinance in Chatham County, requires that racial, ethnic and gender considerations be made in selecting members to the planning board. Other counties consider geographic representation and the representation of certain occupations, such as surveyors, developers and lawyers.

The diagram below illustrates the typical path for applicants for every county planning board in North Carolina.

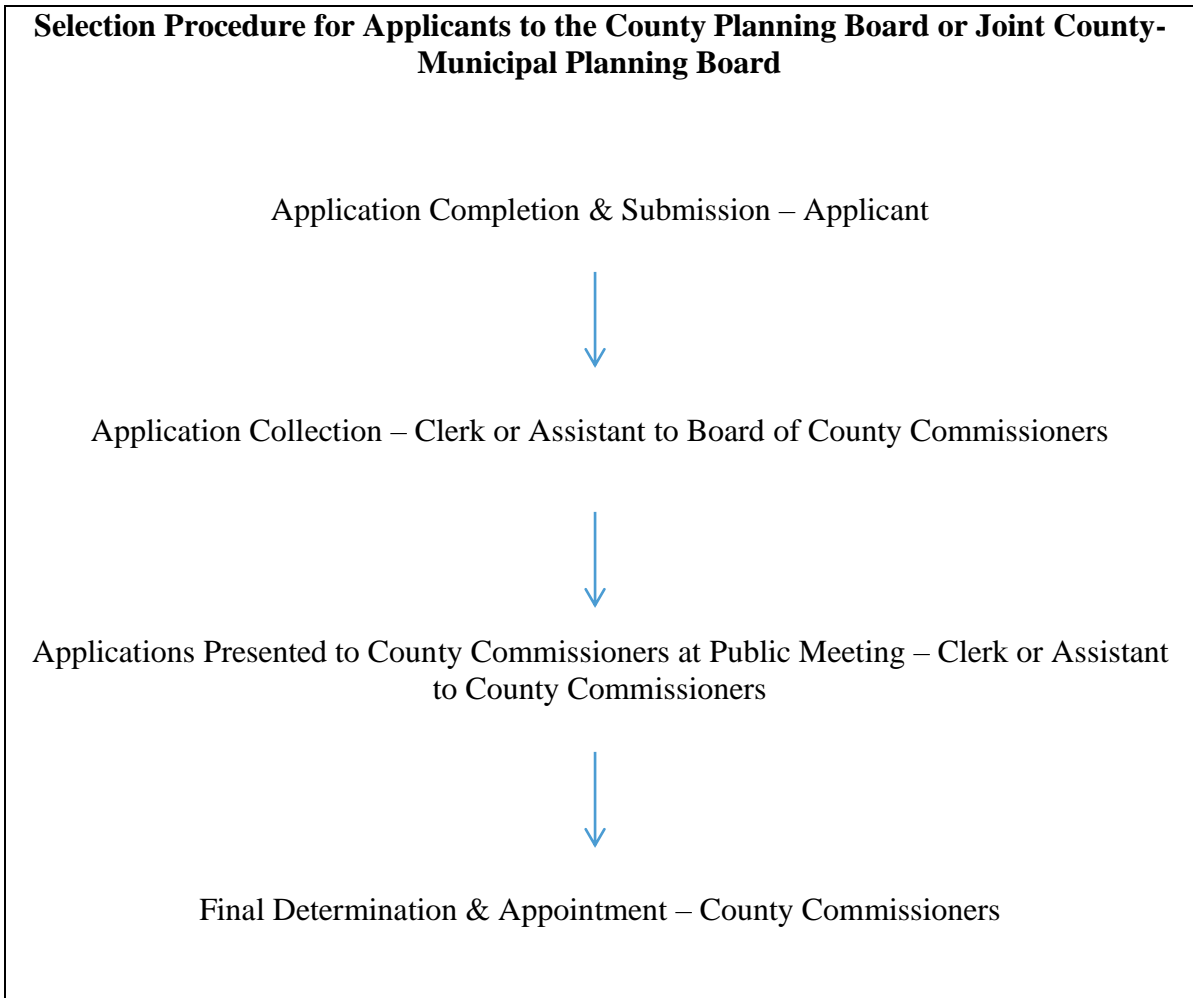


Figure 2. Typical Member Selection Procedure for County Planning Board

There are a few exceptions to the procedure outlined above. At least eight counties do not offer applications and either rely on the submission of names of interested individuals or the County Commissioners, themselves, to recruit and select county planning board members. The next section contains results of demographic surveys conducted with county staff contacts.

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY RESULTS

Background

Though North Carolina ranks currently as the ninth-most populous state in the country, the growth is concentrated in just a few counties. During the first half of the 2010s, 53 percent of the state's growth occurred in just three counties – Wake, Durham and Mecklenburg – out of 100 counties.⁴⁰ Since 2015, the growth has been a little more evenly distributed as, in 2016-17, Wake, Durham and Mecklenburg counties accounted for 40 percent of the growth.⁴¹ This still suggests that counties in North Carolina vary in demographic patterns and composition and so should be evaluated accordingly.⁴²

In order to use accurate demographic information, the Center conducted a demographic analysis of each county and compared county demographic data with the demographic information of that county's planning board. The Center obtained the county demographic data from the American Community Survey Estimates from the five-year selected population tables, from 2011 to 2015.

In assessing the demographics of county planning boards, it is important to note the number of members county planning boards typically have. County planning boards have, at minimum, five seats and on average, eight members. Since these boards are relatively small and one or two members can vastly shift demographic proportions of the planning board, the Center concentrated on broad demographic patterns within a planning

⁴⁰ Rebecca Tippett, *Are NC county growth patterns shifting?*, Carolina Population Center (Jan. 14, 2019, 11:05 AM), <https://demography.cpc.unc.edu/2018/03/22/are-nc-county-growth-patterns-shifting/>.

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² *Id.*

board, such as “all-men” or two or more nonwhites denoted by the “2+” figure in the charts displayed later in this section.

Gender

Overall, in North Carolina, women outnumber men at 51 to 49 percent.⁴³ This proportion is reflected in the vast majority of counties interviewed. Seventy-seven of these counties (91%) have majority-women populations. Yet, only five percent of the counties interviewed have majority-women planning boards.

The Center assessed the percentage of county planning boards that are all-men and boards that have just one woman on the planning board. Almost half of the counties interviewed have only men or just one woman on the county planning boards. The pie chart below illustrates this proportion.

⁴³ U.S. Census Bureau: American FactFinder, *2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Table S03101* (Sept. 24, 2019, 2:02 PM), https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_17_5YR_S0101&prodType=table.

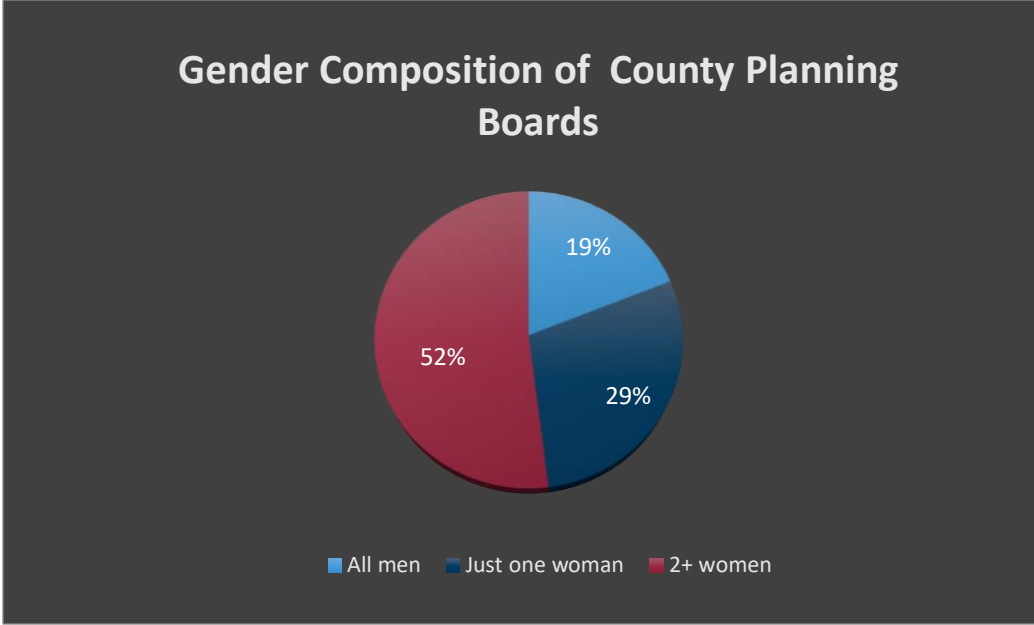


Figure 3. Pie graph illustrating gender composition of county planning boards

Twenty-four of the counties interviewed have planning boards with only men. Over 80 percent of the counties with all-men planning boards or planning boards with just one woman are located in the Piedmont and Coastal Plain regions⁴⁴ of the state. The vast majority of boards with this degree of gender imbalance are in counties with majority-women populations. Below is a table illustrating more precise gender proportions among the counties interviewed.

Percent (%) Women	Planning Boards Surveyed (#)
0% Women	26
1-20% Women	26
21-40% Women	19
41-50% Women	9
51% or more Women	4

⁴⁴ The Center relied upon NCPedia.org, a resource provided by the State Library of North Carolina, for information on the counties and the regions (Mountain, Piedmont and Coastal Plain) in which are situated.

Figure 4. Table displaying number of county planning boards at different gender proportion levels. Note: Not all counties interviewed responded to the inquiry about gender proportions on the board.

Race & Ethnicity

North Carolina's racial and ethnic dynamic has been shifting significantly over the past decade.⁴⁵ The state is increasingly diverse.⁴⁶ The Asian American and Latinx populations are the fastest-growing populations.⁴⁷ Between 2016 and 2017, the Asian American population increased by 3.1 percent nationally and by 5.1 percent in North Carolina.⁴⁸ Between 2010 and 2016, North Carolina's Latinx population grew by about 17 percent, compared to the growth of this population nationwide (14 percent).⁴⁹ African Americans continue to make up the largest minority population, at 21 percent.⁵⁰

Within North Carolina, the levels of racial and ethnic diversity vary widely across counties. Generally, counties in the western, Mountain region tend to have super-majority white populations (at least 80 percent). Meanwhile, counties in the Piedmont and Coastal Plain regions tend to have substantial minority populations, with lesser proportions of white populations.

⁴⁵ Rebecca Tippett, *NC in Focus: Fast-growing older population also growing more diverse*, *Carolina Demography* (Jan. 15, 2019, 10:06 AM), <https://www.ncdemography.org/2017/06/28/nc-in-focus-fast-growing-older-population-also-growing-more-diverse/>.

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ Rebecca Tippett, *Fast-growing Asian population highly concentrated in NC urban areas*, *Carolina Population Center* (Jan. 14, 2019, 11:10 AM), <https://demography.cpc.unc.edu/2018/11/02/fast-growing-asian-population-highly-concentrated-in-nc-urban-areas/>.

⁴⁹ Rebecca Tippett, *The Hispanic/Latino Community in North Carolina*, *Carolina Population Center* (Jan. 14, 2019, 11:20 AM), <https://demography.cpc.unc.edu/2017/10/10/the-hispaniclatino-community-in-north-carolina/>.

⁵⁰ U.S. Census Bureau: American FactFinder, *2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Table B03002* (Sept. 24, 2019, 2:10 PM), https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_17_5YR_B03002&prodType=table.

Eight counties interviewed are either majority-African American or have African Americans as the largest racial group. All of these counties span the Piedmont and Coastal Plain regions. These counties include: Edgecombe, Halifax, Hertford, Northampton, Tyrrell, Vance, Warren and Washington.

Nine counties interviewed have between two and 39 percent American Indian/Alaska Native proportions of the population and include: Bladen (2%), Columbus (3%), Halifax (4%), Hoke (8%), Jackson (8%), Robeson (39%), Sampson (2%), Scotland (11%) and Warren (5%). These counties are mainly located in the Piedmont and Mountain regions.

Seven counties have between four and eight percent Asian American proportions of the population and include: Burke (4%), Catawba (4%), Durham (5%), Guilford (5%), Mecklenburg (6%), Orange (8%) and Wake (6%). These counties are concentrated in the Piedmont region.

Twenty-four counties have 10 percent or higher proportions of Latinx populations, including: Alamance (12%), Cabarrus (10%), Chatham (13%), Cumberland (11%), Duplin (22%), Durham (14%), Forsyth (13%), Greene (15%), Harnett (12%), Henderson (10%), Hoke (13%), Johnston (13%), Lee (19%), Mecklenburg (13%), Montgomery (15%), Onslow (12%), Randolph (11%), Sampson (19%), Surry (10%), Union (11%), Wake (10%), Wayne (11%), Wilson (10%) and Yadkin (11%). These counties are concentrated in the Piedmont region.

As with gender, the Center examined racial composition in broad terms. Two-thirds of the counties interviewed have all-white planning boards or planning boards with

just one nonwhite member. Over 40 percent of the counties interviewed have all-white planning boards.

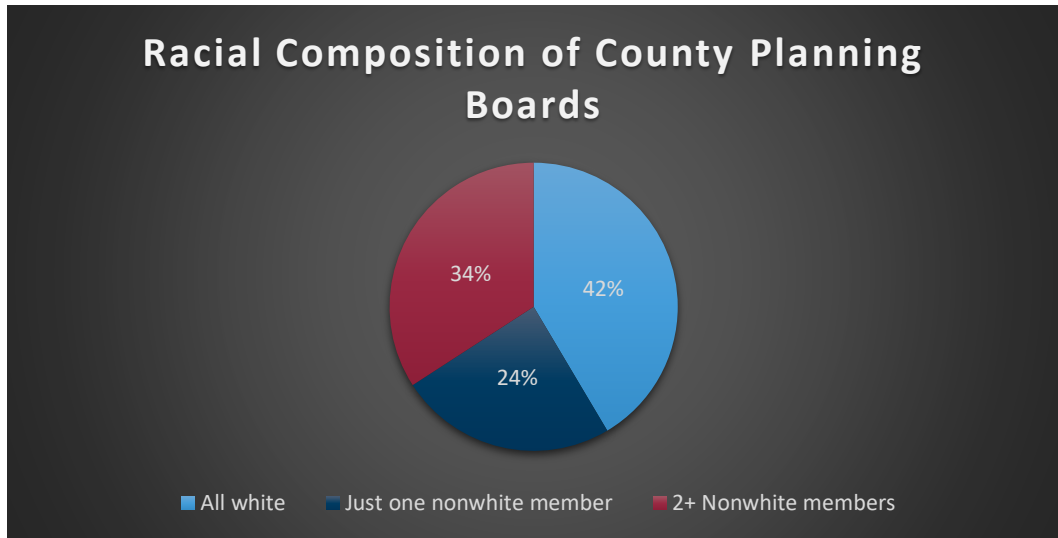


Figure 5. Racial Breakdown of County Planning Boards

Unsurprisingly given their county demographics, 93 percent of the counties interviewed in the Mountain region have all-white planning boards or planning boards with just one nonwhite member. However, 68 and 47 percent of counties interviewed in the Piedmont and Coastal Plain regions, respectively, have all-white planning boards or planning boards with just one nonwhite member, despite substantial minority populations in these counties.

Drilling down further, no current planning board rosters have Asian-American members and across the 85 counties interviewed, only three county planning boards have at least one Latinx board member. With race and gender taken together, over 35 percent of counties interviewed have memberships of virtually all-white men on their planning boards.

Percent (%) Nonwhite	Planning Boards Surveyed (#)
0% Nonwhite	32
1-20% Nonwhite	21
21-40% Nonwhite	22
41-50% Nonwhite	4
51% or more Nonwhite	3

Figure 6. Table displaying number of county planning boards at different racial proportion levels. Note: Not all counties interviewed responded to the inquiry about racial proportions on the county planning board.

Implications

These data indicate that county planning boards generally do not reflect the racial, ethnic and gender dynamics of their counties. In assessing this dynamic, challenges that counties face must be acknowledged. Some counties reported having difficulty in recruiting any members for their planning boards, due to time commitment and travel issues. Just one county – Chatham County – has in its ordinance, that its Board must make every consideration for racial, ethnic and gender balance in appointing planning board members, yet even this county has had consistent problems with recruitment from underrepresented communities within the county.

Despite these challenges, considering the population trends in North Carolina and the role that planning boards have in guiding growth and the development of housing and the distribution of county services, these boards would be well-served to ensure fair, uniform selection procedures and to make balanced racial and gender representation a formal consideration in the selection procedure. Most of the county staff interviewed also reported that members of planning board have gone on to run for and be elected to office, including to the Board of County Commissioners and to the General Assembly. Thus,

diversifying county planning boards can also open up these elected offices to more diverse candidate pools.

That two-thirds of counties interviewed have all-white planning boards or planning boards with just one nonwhite member indicates that certain communities are not a part of the discussion when it comes to key conversations and decisions on development within a given county. When one-fifth of county planning boards have only men, a little over half of the adult population in those counties is not at the table – women. That two-thirds of counties interviewed have all-white planning boards or planning boards with just one nonwhite member means that every county has work to do, regardless of size, urban/rural status and region. No planning board has Asian American members, and there are only three Latinx members across the county planning boards the Center was able to survey.

To be clear, the Center does not necessarily believe that women and people of color are being purposefully or intentionally excluded from county planning boards. However, one of the legacies of segregation is that institutions of power maintain the same procedures for selecting and hearing stakeholders, unless intentional work is done to change those procedures and to eliminate any implicit racial and gender bias.

A few counties do better than most other counties in maintaining racial, ethnic or gender diversity as compared to their county demographics. For example, Robeson County is 26 percent white, 24 percent black and 39 percent American Indian or Alaska Native.⁵¹ Its planning board is 38 percent white, 25 percent black and 38 percent

⁵¹ U.S. Census Bureau: American FactFinder, *2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Table B03002* (Sept. 24, 2019, 4:02 PM), https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_15_5YR_B03002&prodType=table.

American Indian. Despite being in the Mountain region, Jackson County also maintains solid racial balance on its planning board as compared to its county demographics. The county's population is 81 percent white, two percent black and 8 percent American Indian or Alaska Native.⁵² Its planning board is 81 percent white, nine percent black and nine percent American Indian. Chatham, Duplin and Mecklenburg counties have a better, though not ideal, gender balance than most counties with a 60:40 male-to-female ratio on each of their planning boards. Each of these counties have 48:52 male-to-female proportions overall.⁵³ Davie County has the most balanced gender composition, considering women comprise 52 percent and men comprise 48 percent of the county population.⁵⁴ Women comprise 56 percent of the planning board membership and men comprise 44 percent. Currently, Mecklenburg County has the best balance of race, ethnicity and gender on its planning board.

The value of racial, ethnic and gender diversity cannot be understated. National professional associations such as the American Bar Association (ABA) recognize diversity is critical to building public confidence in America's judicial and legislative systems.⁵⁵ According to the ABA, "[l]awyers and judges have a unique responsibility for

⁵² U.S. Census Bureau: American FactFinder, *2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Table B03002* (Sept. 24, 2019, 3:45 PM), https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_15_5YR_B03002&prodType=table.

⁵³ U.S. Census Bureau: American FactFinder, *2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Table B03002* (Sept. 24, 2019, 3:50 PM), https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_17_5YR_S0101&prodType=table.

⁵⁴ U.S. Census Bureau: American FactFinder, *2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table S0101* (Sept. 24, 2019, 3:57 PM), https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_15_5YR_S0101&prodType=table.

⁵⁵ Presidential Diversity Initiative, *Diversity in the Legal Profession: The Next Steps*, American Bar Association, American Bar Association, 5 (October 29, 2019), https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/diversity/next_steps_2011.authcheckdam.pdf.

sustaining a political system with broad participation by all its citizens. A diverse bar and bench create greater trust in the mechanisms of government and the rule of law.” The federal Office of Personnel Management further highlights that “[d]iversity and inclusion increase an agency's capacity to serve and protect people who have different experiences or backgrounds and enhance its ability to be receptive to different traditions and ideas...simply stated, it is the right thing for a democratic government to do.”⁵⁶ In short, building and maintaining diverse workforces and government units increases public trust in government and better protects people of all backgrounds and experiences.

Exact racial/ethnic and gender representation, as compared to county demographics, is not necessarily the end-goal. Racial, ethnic and gender representation does not, in and of itself, guarantee that the voices of underrepresented communities will be heard. A planning board with all white men can conceivably reach out to, listen earnestly and incorporate feedback from underrepresented communities into their decision-making. However, better racial and gender balance significantly heightens the likelihood that voices from underrepresented communities will be heard and accounted for in decision-making. Striving to have enough representation, however many members it may mean from county to county, from all communities within the county is the key to a truly representative planning board and government.

⁵⁶ *Frequently Asked Questions: Diversity and Inclusion*, Office of Personnel Management, (October 29, 2019), <https://www.opm.gov/faqs/QA.aspx?fid=72bcd219-0b9f-4de8-b366-4817028fbc6e&pid=f2ef3151-b4f2-4f47-a319-acad8175b0b7>.

LIMITATIONS

Limitations of Interviews

The Center conducted 79 mostly structured interviews, which included interviewing, in some instances, more than one staff person in a given county. County staff contacts returned six questionnaires, when staff was unable to participate in interviews. The Center conducted most of the interviews and questionnaires with county planning directors or staff liaisons to county planning boards. These interviews were comprehensive. Each interview involved 35-45 questions, depending upon the amount of available information on a given county's website and in ordinances granting the county planning board its authority. The interviewer asked follow-up questions, when responses were unclear. Based upon consultations with professionals who have conducted surveys with planning directors, the Center was encouraged to limit interviews to 15-20 minutes. On average, these interviews actually lasted 17 minutes.

Given the relatively short time frame of these interviews, the Center purposefully and carefully selected questions to ask. As a consequence, some relevant and important questions were cut, including questions on past efforts to recruit women and people of color for the county planning board.

Answers to these questions would have given greater context to the demographic information and challenges faced by counties in ensuring diverse planning board memberships. The Center also was not able to ascertain trends over time in racial, ethnic and gender composition. Knowing these trends would involve looking at county records of planning board rosters, either through lists or planning board meeting minutes. The interviewer inquired, of each of the 85 counties interviewed, about whether their records

go back for 20 years, and the Center received varied responses. Many counties have records going back ten years, but fewer have records going back 20 or more years. The additional challenge to looking at such records for trends is that most counties did not and still do not collect racial, ethnic and gender composition information among applicants and their planning board members. It may not be feasible to determine data trends in racial, ethnic and gender composition, due to the lack of records on such information.

While the response rate of counties was very robust at 92 percent, seven counties did not respond to inquiries for an interview. Thus, the information provided in this report on is not all-inclusive of every county planning in North Carolina. Interviewees ranged greatly in the time spent with the county and thus had varying levels of institutional knowledge of their county planning board. Six of the staff contacts responded with preferences for written questionnaires, and this yields a different dynamic than interviews. In a questionnaire format, the interviewer could not follow up as easily on ambiguous responses or non-answer responses. A handful of those interviewed did not answer all of the questions posed. As expressed before, the lack of responses to particular questions contributed to a somewhat incomplete picture of the dynamics of all county planning boards.

Limitations of Surveys

The Center did not survey the planning board members themselves and relied secondarily, on the determinations of staff and liaisons regarding the racial, ethnic and gender composition of the planning boards. Absent a form or application indicating as much, people may self-identify differently than how another individual identifies them.

Limitations of Ordinance Review

The Center explored as many of the ordinances posted online as possible pertaining to counties with county planning boards. Counties record their ordinances online by one of two methods: (1) posting to Municode and (2) posting PDF copies of ordinances to their websites. The Center found online copies of ordinances for each county with a planning board. Given this, the Center recognizes that the list of ordinances granting powers to planning boards may still be incomplete because some counties may have posted just some of ordinances to their websites or to Municode. Therefore, this may mean that there are other powers and duties possessed by county planning boards that are unaccounted for in this data set.

Additionally, there may be powers and duties unaccounted for that planning boards exercise but are not found in any of the ordinances for a given county. Lastly, on rare occasions, staff responses on certain powers and duties conflicted with provisions within a given ordinance. For purposes of data analysis, the Center relied on the staff responses over provisions within a given ordinance to resolve that conflict, since their responses reflected the practice of the planning board.

Limitations of American Community Survey

The age of eligibility for planning boards is 18 years old. The ACS information on race and ethnicity included children and adults in the county. Thus, this information is not an accurate reflection of the eligible population for county planning boards, since children are included. In addition, ACS data is based upon random sampling and is not

based upon surveying the entire county. However, data relying on random sampling may actually be more accurate than surveys associated with the United States Census. The U.S. Census routinely has problems with low response rates and missed house calls, which affect the actual numbers in demographic information.

Despite these limitations, the Center collected enough data to determine broad, revealing patterns related to powers and duties, member selection procedures and demographics. Additional studies can address most of the limitations that accompanied this study.

CONCLUSIONS

The advocacy of the UNC Center for Civil Rights has consistently included issues of local scale in order to effectuate systemic change. In North Carolina, localized issues around housing, connections to water and sewer, access to services such as police and fire reveal historic racial and gender inequality. Regardless of the intent of good, well-intentioned people, government and private practices, which have been in place since the Jim Crow era, have perpetuated a structure that excludes and disempowers women, African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans and Latinx people. For example, residential segregation persists, in part due to decisions of governmental bodies which do not have adequate racial, ethnic and gender representation and which do not consider such implications in their actions. In any meaningful decision, every North Carolinian has a responsibility to ensure the inclusion and incorporation of perspectives

of people from historically disenfranchised communities, whether the community is African American, female or poor.

This is the spirit in which the Center carries out its work and has embarked on completing a report on planning boards – a local government unit, which can significantly advance inclusion local governments across North Carolina. This report is not meant to call out counties in the important, day-to-day work that they do. It is meant to help each of our counties and our state move forward in becoming the society that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Julius Chambers, Governor Terry Sanford, Ella Baker and many others envisioned. This report is intended to be a resource for local government and residents alike in North Carolina in realizing this vision.

County planning boards are critical to the function of the vast majority of counties in North Carolina. They advise elected governing bodies on a wide range of land use and planning issues, and most of the time, these elected bodies agree to their planning boards' recommendations. Planning boards, via recommendations, can help elected governing boards negotiate for certain community benefits with developers such as affordable housing and open space. Land use and planning have significant implications for housing, industrial and commercial patterns. Planning can facilitate continued residential segregative patterns or can contribute to residential integration. Planning can lead to job creation or home accessibility in one part or another of a given county. They also can contribute to or mitigate environmental impacts and consequences for residents in particular areas of a county. Thus, the need for the fair representation of the county's population is great.

Planning boards are poised to become even more influential in the coming years. In 2019, the General Assembly passed and Governor Roy Cooper signed Session Law 2019-111, which will require the county boards of commissioners generate plans before exercising zoning authority. This will involve planning boards even more in advising and guiding land use decisions by elected governing boards.

There is a lot of work to do to ensure fair representation on every county planning board. The state provides little guidance to county governments. This leaves virtually no standards and broad discretion for the construction of county planning boards. Absent state legislative action to require considerations of diversity on county planning boards, county governments are left as the primary entities for ensuring fair representation.

County governments must improve their procedures regarding the selection of memberships. A truly open procedure starts with the broad advertisement of county planning board vacancies and well-publicized, set deadlines. Some counties publicly advertise their vacancies, in a variety of mediums, including newspaper, website and announcements at the meetings of elected governing bodies. In addition, these broad advertisements should also include announcements via social media (*e.g.*, Facebook and Twitter), direct emails and notices to organizations associated with underrepresented communities, including churches and local chapters of the League of Women Voters, the YMCA and the NAACP and other community organizations that may be unique to the county. Veterans also constitute an ideal group to draw from, since these are people who have already demonstrated their desire to serve. These modes of advertisement can be codified in advisory board by-laws and should be consistently used whenever planning

board vacancies come open and when planning board seats are near the end of their terms.

All counties should require an application be submitted in order to maintain accurate records on applicants and to improve the selection process. These applications should be made available online and by paper copy. Counties should be prepared to mail applications, upon a prospective applicant's request. On applications, every county should ask for the following:

1. A list of activities, experience and/or skills,
2. The reason for the applicant's interest,
3. Race,
4. Ethnicity,
5. Gender,
6. Veteran status, and
7. Any potential conflicts of interest.

Over the last 40 years, the United States and its institutions (colleges, educational institutions, employers, military) have embraced diversity as a core American value that strengthens the American people and the country. Thus, maintaining diverse planning boards should be a priority of the county.

As such, to the greatest extent possible, considerations of race, ethnicity and gender should be part of the selection procedures of elected governing boards and codified in ordinances granting planning board authority. Though Chatham County has not successfully diversified its planning board, its ordinance providing for the required

consideration of racial, ethnic and gender diversity in board appointments, is a step that all counties can take. This step may enhance recruitment efforts, if members of underrepresented communities, see their own counties publicly committed to having fair representation on planning boards.

Again, fair representation on county planning boards does not necessarily mean having racially and gender proportionate county planning boards. However, elected governing boards must be intentional in their selection of planning boards. Any time a seat comes open on the planning board, the elected governing board responsible for appointing members must look at its planning board holistically and look to include any missing perspectives, to the best extent possible. This consideration should not stay with one elected official or with a whole board at one moment in time. It should extend beyond any given official and be able to last the test of time in a county ordinance.

This report is limited to county planning boards. There are over 550 municipalities in North Carolina, most of which have planning boards of their own. Due to resource limitations, the Center was unable to explore municipal planning boards as well. However, exploring municipal planning boards is a logical next step in examining the accessibility and diversity of local government. After all, municipalities have their own jurisdictional boundaries, separate from the counties and represent a substantial portion of land area and population across North Carolina.

Also, this report did not explore other advisory boards that abound at the county and municipal level. Other boards including the Board of Adjustment, Board of Equalization & Review, Affordable Housing Advisory Board, and other county advisory boards merit similar study.

The Center hopes this report serves as a tool for local governments and communities alike to rally around and use in the ongoing quest for equality and equity in North Carolina.