

Durham Deserves Better

A continuation of inequitable and non-inclusive economic development

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Last night, the people of Durham were failed once again by the Durham County Commissioners, County Manager, and County Economic Development Team. In a vote of 5-0, the Board voted to award Eli Lilly and Company \$2.55M in economic development funds in exchange for the company bringing a new state of the art pharmaceutical manufacturing facility to Durham County, creating 462 jobs and investing \$440M.

What's wrong with this deal, you ask?

A Lack of Balance! This deal is sorely missing a complimentary strategy that ensures a balanced growth strategy! In an era of rampant gentrification and a lack of affordable housing in Durham, there has been a lot of talk about equitable and inclusive economic development. However, this talk rarely matches action. Large corporations continue to receive enormous financial incentives to do business in Durham while the small and Black business ecosystems are relegated to spectators, seldom incentivized, and certainly not comparably. This is the opposite of equitable economic development but rather a continuation of an economic development policy that further enriches large corporations and marginalizes the small and historically underutilized business community.

In an effort to remediate this systemic injustice, I contacted the Durham County Commissioners, County Manager, and the economic development team during last year's budget cycle, offering the services of Greater Durham Black Chamber of Commerce (GDBCC) as a strategic partner in designing and executing a more inclusive economic development plan for Durham. This would allow the representation of the economic interests of our membership of more than 150 companies as well as the broader Black business community, just as the Durham Chamber represents its members (mostly large corporations and stakeholders) interests in economic development initiatives. In follow up meetings with one or two commissioners, I was advised that there was simply not enough money in the budget to contract with the GDBCC. "This sounds like something the City should be doing, not the County", one commissioner advised. The commissioners assured me however, that my concerns were valid and would be taken into account and future economic development deals would be evaluated for equity more carefully.

Last night's vote was an alarm at the gate, highlighting the continuation of business as usual and the inability of this commission to properly evaluate and execute inclusion and equity in economic development. The GDBCC urges this commission to immediately strengthen its approach and protect the Durham community from further harm by contracting with the GDBCC for strategic consulting on inclusive and equitable economic development.

The dangers of inequitable and non-inclusive economic development are freshly evident all over Durham. Across town, citizens are seeing their friends/neighbors lose their homes in foreclosure due to the rising property taxes, sell their homes to people moving to Durham, and being forced to relocate their families and businesses due to increasing rent prices. As this inequitable and non-inclusive economic development strategy and practice changes the makeup of our county and city, there is not

enough attention being placed on it as the root cause. Rather, we are readily discussing and trying to solve the symptoms like affordable housing. If we develop equitably, we won't need a \$100M affordable housing bond.

As Durham County continues to employ a lopsided economic development investment strategy of giving huge incentives to large corporations and barely investing in the small and minority business ecosystems, the County further exacerbates our current problems with affordable housing, gentrification, and transportation. We must balance our zeal with being the home to Fortune 500 companies with our responsibility to all of our citizens and businesses as they are all worthy of protection and incentivization. We must protect our vulnerable neighbors from speculation by balancing our investment strategy, ensuring that no one gets pushed out.

In the absence of an inclusive and equitable economic development partner and plan, there are little to no protections in place to prevent relocating high-wage employees from strategically overtaking any of Durham's blighted or marginalized communities, buying up and renovating one block at a time, pushing out all of the current homeowners and renters, and requesting police protection from these prior inhabitants. As we know better, we must now do better. Our citizens deserve better from our commissioners, county manager, and economic development team.

The GDBCC continues to make an effort to work with Durham County as a partner in inclusive and equitable economic development. With a budget of \$500M, there's no shortage of capital to engage. There is simply a shortage of political will to do the right thing. Do the right thing Durham County Commissioners, County Manager, and Economic Development Staff. You continue to say you want inclusive and equitable economic development. Well, put your money where your mouth is!