Executive summary

Welcome to the Green Guilford plan. This document is intended to be used as a road map to chart a course toward a more sustainable county. It follows the basic tenets laid out by the National Association of Counties (NACo) Green Government Program and is adapted to Guilford County’s needs and opportunities. The plan is the result of months of discussion between green plan team members about what each County department is currently doing to reduce environmental impacts. The Green Plan team also received input from community sustainability leaders and we are grateful for their assistance.

This plan encompasses many of the best practices that were found during extensive research in plan development. The green arena is growing exponentially and new books, articles, plans and best practices are being developed daily. Recognizing that, this plan needs to be reviewed, evaluated, and updated at least twice a year. Plan implementation will be further developed and finalized after the base plan and components are adopted.

The main goals of the plan are to:

• Carry out County business in the most sustainable ways possible, consistent with practical budget application.

• Cut costs or reduce the rate of increase in costs by increasing efficiency in county operations.

• Assist the public in its efforts to live more sustainably, through advocacy and education.

Because the County and its partners provide a wide variety of services, the plan was written in sections by category. Sections covering county services are under the heading “Within Government”. Efforts to encourage green practices among citizens are listed under “In the Community”.

“Within Government”

The County governance section covers the built environment, open space protection, soil and water conservation, watershed protection, purchasing and county operations, vehicle management, internal county and intergovernmental solid waste and recycling, mobility, and connectivity with various partners and the citizens. The plan also documents many of the sustainability efforts undertaken by the Guilford County School system.

In writing this plan there are some action items that are easily accomplished or already completed but others will take some time. Of all objectives listed, the following are highlighted as important first steps to building a sustainable county:

1) In becoming a more sustainable county it is difficult to know exactly what steps to take; knowing which conservation measures will yield the best cost savings is not always
easy. For this reason, joining with other local governments who are trying to become more sustainable is important. ICLEI is an organization that partners with local governments to offer expertise and measuring tools so energy and emissions baselines can be established and reasonable efficiency goals set. It is the plan’s strong recommendation that Guilford County become the second North Carolina county (and fifth local government) to join ICLEI and benefit from their guidance.

2) Another similar recommendation is that Guilford County become a “Cool County” much like Greensboro has become a “Cool City.” NACo, the Sierra Club and a number of counties founded the Cool Counties program in 2007 to provide support to counties who are trying to lessen environmental impact and mitigate rising energy prices. If Guilford County were to join the cool counties initiative, it would join 33 other counties who are trying to do their part to increase efficiency and decrease waste by using tools from ICLEI. The list of counties signed on is diverse in terms of geography and population size. Guilford County would gain distinction by becoming one of the first North Carolina counties to have the “Cool County” designation.

3) In the County Operations/ Purchasing section, goal 3, objective 1, Strategy 1 urges the county to adopt the State building codes according to Session Law 546. As the basis for this law, “the General Assembly finds that public buildings can be built and renovated using sustainable, energy efficient methods that save money, reduce negative environmental impacts, improve employee and student performance, and make employees and students more productive (Session Law 2007-546, Senate Bill 668). This law also puts a priority on using North Carolina labor and materials to drive economic development. The action items under this strategy in the plan outline how the County would adopt this law as its new building and building upfit guide and what steps need to be taken to accomplish the wider goal.

4) Another first step would be writing an office operations management policy encouraging county employees to practice conservation measures that will cut costs and promote efficiency. The plan will outline how each employee can do his or her part to conserve water, paper and energy with simple actions. This plan will be provided to all current and new employees.

5) The vehicle management section is conservative by the standards of many plans reviewed by the green plan team. Many technological developments are happening with vehicles and it seems the real promise of alternative fuels is out on the horizon. Currently, the consensus is that many of these new green vehicles and fuels are prohibitively expensive for municipal purchase. The County intends to stay informed of new advances in vehicles and fuels in order to take advantage of new technology. While this plan does not call for an overhaul of the current fleet, it does call for linking vehicle purchase to vehicle purpose. This simply means that each vehicle should be able to handle the task at hand while also being the most efficient choice for the job.
"In the Community"

The most significant action item of the “In the Community” section calls for a Sustainability Advisory Board (SAB) to be created. This board will be composed of community leaders who will encourage the public to live more sustainably, doing so through advocacy, events, and providing sustainability leadership. The SAB will educate residents about water and energy conservation, waste reduction, and recycling.

In conjunction with the SAB, a Green Guilford website has been developed to publicize the Green Plan, SAB activities, sustainability tips, green events and links to other green sites. Publicizing the passage of the green plan with updates on our progress will allow greater buy-in from county residents.

If the following objectives are carried out, Guilford will become a more sustainable county, yielding tangible benefits including decreased energy costs and better air quality. If properly implemented, this plan will place Guilford County among the leaders in sustainability in the country.

I want to thank the members of the green government committee who spent many hours developing the Green Guilford plan:

Alex Ashton
Betty Garrett
Bonnie Stellfox
Brenda Morris
Bridgett Lindsay
Fred Jones
Greg Niles
Ken Carter
Mark Kirstner
Melissa Johnson
Randy Zimmerman
Roger Bardsley
Susan Heim
Warren Simmons

I also want to thank two wonderful interns, Kristina Millhiser and Liz Trosper from the UNCG MPA program, who provided invaluable assistance in the development of this plan.

Respectfully submitted,

Rob Bencini
August 12, 2008