

*From DavidsonNews.net*

## Meet Davidson's Town Board candidates

Davidson has nine candidates for Town Board this fall, including two incumbents. It's the most actively contested election since 1995, when the town was in the early stages of its current rapid growth spurt.

**ELECTION  
2007**

With only two incumbents on the ballot, voters here will elect at least three new town commissioners, as well as a new mayor, ensuring that a majority of elected officials in Town Hall this winter will be new faces.

Below (in alphabetical order) are biographies of the eight active candidates. One candidate, Ian Robb, has withdrawn from active campaigning and has asked not to be included. His name will remain on the ballot.



### **Rodney Graham**

**Residence:** New Neighborhood in Old Davidson, 2 years in Davidson

**Age:** 44

**Occupation:**  
Owner of John

Marshall Custom Homes, Inc.

**Education:** bachelor of arts in political science, West Virginia University 1985; MBA, Vanderbilt, 1987

**Community activities:** Davidson Natural Assets Committee; volunteer for Habitat for Humanity and HAMMERS home repair program

**Family:** wife Melissa, children Marshall (5) and Emma Claire (3)

**Why are you running for town board? I**

want to help us manage growth in order to minimize its impact on our quality of life and environment. I would like to bring more discussion and debate to our government in order to strengthen the decisions made by the Town Board.

**Additional concerns (from his website):** If we do not conduct our government openly, with a set of rules that are applied consistently to everyone regardless of their position or connections, then we will not properly serve all of the people of Davidson. I am committed to vigorous policy discussions, and to follow our ordinances equally, for everyone.

**Website:** [www.graham2007.com](http://www.graham2007.com)



### **Brian Jenest**

**Residence:** 401 Woodland Street, 15 years in Davidson

**Age:** 50

**Occupation:** Landscape Architect and Managing Partner of Cole Jenest & Stone

**Education:** Graduate of NC State College of Design, 1979, Bachelor's Degree in Landscape Architecture

**Community activities:**

- Davidson Appearance Committee
- Davidson Land Plan Committee
- Davidson Planning Board
- Davidson Housing Coalition Board
- Davidson/Cornelius Daycare Center Board
- Urban Land Institute
- American Society of Landscape Architects

**Family:** Wife, Sarah; 2 sons, Colin (20) and

## BRIAN JENEST (cont).

Peyton (17).

### **Why are you running for Town Board?**

As Davidson continues to grow, we need leadership who has experience in dealing with a variety of issues. From managing growth to transportation, economic development, schools and affordable housing, I will work to accommodate change that doesn't diminish the small town quality of life we all enjoy.

**Additional statement (from Oct. 18 candidate forum) :** I think you'll find I'm uniquely qualified for two reasons: One I have civic experience. I've been on several boards, I've been on the Appearance Committee, I've been on the Planning Board, I've been on the Land Plan Committee and others, and I'm well grounded in how Davidson operates. Secondly, by profession I'm a land planner and a landscape architect and I deal with lots of the issues that we face, issues of growth and development and transportation.



## Bill Johnson

**Residence:** 319 Armour Street, 6 years in Davidson  
**Age:** 65  
**Occupation:** Part time facilitator for Y-USA. Executive Director of Ada

Jenkins Center (retired), hospital administration (retired)

**Education:** Bachelor of arts in psychology from the University of Minnesota; Master's in Public Health with concentration in Hospital Administration from University of Pittsburgh

**Community activities:** Current - Davidson Lions Club, Town of Davidson's Aging in

Place Task Force. Past - Habitat for Humanity, Board of Directors for United Way.

**Family:** Wife Karen, sons Scott and Greg  
**Why are you running for Town Board?** To help shape the future growth of Davidson.

**Additional statement (from Oct. 18 candidate forum):** One may say that the town of Davidson is ambivalent about many issues, such as the development at Exit 30 ... the cable purchase, affordable housing, the commuter train, and to develop or not develop. I believe the Town Commission needs to work through these differing views by having conversations with the citizens and by supporting the town's core values. .... Six years of leadership at the Ada Jenkins Center working with all aspects of the community and 30 years' leadership in the complex world of hospital administration gives me the skills to partner with you to manage Davidson's growth.



## Lenny McAllister

**Residence:** 624 Beaty St., 7 years in Davidson (also previously lived here during college)  
**Age:** 35  
**Occupation:**

Information technology/customer relationship management consultant

**Education:** bachelor's degree in history, Davidson College, 2002

**Community activities:** (listing both past membership and current membership) - United Way Advisory Board; Davidson Parks and Recreation Advisory Board; Mecklenburg County Domestic Violence Advisory Board; Community Outreach - Succession; Events Committee - Succession; Citizens' Task Force on Charlotte-

## McALLISTER (Cont.)

Mecklenburg Schools; African-American Leadership Summit; MEN At Work; Hill House Association Young Parents' Program;  
**Family:** wife Lannie; daughter Alicia, son Peace

**Why are you running for Town Board?** In order to maximize the potential of possibilities here in Davidson for all, it will take a leadership group that is able to relate to, connect with, and work for the people of Davidson in a partnership of mutual trust. Due to my background, experiences, and skill set, I believe that I am a leader that can facilitate this type of partnership. In our unique town of Davidson, it will take a unique blend of diversity to unify our town as we face a number of issues before us together. I believe that I fit that bill as a leader and, thus, I wish to infuse that into Davidson's leadership as a commissioner.

**Additional statement (from Oct. 18 forum):** I'm running because Davidson's a great town. But at the same time, we can and must do better. When I, just two weeks ago, can stand out in broad daylight with an older citizen and be solicited for a drug deal, in Davidson (Griffith Street) by outsiders, I tell you that Davidson is a great town, but we can and must do better. When we have citizens in Davidson that have certain issues that they have been faced with, among other things gunfire, I tell you that Davidson is a great town but we can and must do better. I tell you that as we go to protect historical Davidson, we face issues both traditional and new that jeopardize our small town features. And it's going to take well-rounded leadership to deal with development but also deal with the new type of issues that Davidson is facing as Charlotte is growing and Mecklenburg County is growing. I contend that I am that type of well-rounded leader

**Website:** [www.lennymcallister.com](http://www.lennymcallister.com)

## Laurie Venzon



**Residence:** Tributary Court, River Run, lived in Davidson 15 years  
**Age:** 44  
**Occupation:** Retired after 21 years as an executive at Bank

of America Corp., Charlotte

**Education:** Carnegie-Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Bachelor of science degree, industrial management, 1985

**Community activities:** Davidson Planning Board, January 2007 to present; leadership volunteer at Mosaic Church, Huntersville; former youth basketball coach.

**Family:** husband John, children Christopher, 10, and Kathryn, 9

**Why are you running for Town Board?**

I'm not a politician, per se, but I've always enjoyed serving people and have done so all my life in a variety of capacities. I've decided to run for two reasons: 1) Several people mentioned that they thought I would do a good job as commissioner given my skills and experience. 2) Having retired last year, I believe I have the time necessary to commit to the role. I enjoy finding creative solutions to problems. The bank taught me to look at issues from a variety of perspectives. I think our town is becoming more diversified in thought about how to handle issues and given my background with mergers, I have a great deal of experience in bringing different groups of people together to work to accomplish goals in a unified manner. I believe the skills I've developed over the years will be beneficial to the role of town commissioner. Plus, I have a desire to serve and help continue to make Davidson a wonderful place to work and

## VENZON (Continued)

live.

**Additional statement (from Oct. 18 candidate forum):** I believe that we need to manage growth in a responsible way, enhance transportation and solve some of our traffic issues that we keep talking about, foster more pro-active and open communication, provide parks and greenways, and support efforts to ensure that we have continued excellence in our schools.



### Fountain L. Walker

**Residence:** 221 N. Thompson St., 3 years

**Age:** 38

**Occupation:** Chief of Campus Police at Davidson College

**Education:** Intermediate Law Enforcement Certification, Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice, Gardner-Webb University; Associate Degree in Criminal Justice, Stanly Community College

**Community activities:**

- Regional Board of Managers for Lake Norman YMCA
- Chairman, Lake Norman Community Development Council
- Chairman, Lake Norman YMCA Community Outreach Campaign
- Ada Jenkins Center Board of Directors
- Life Skills Advisory Committee (Ada Jenkins)
- Charlotte-Metro YMCA Community Development Board Advisory
- Davidson Masonic Lodge #511, Secretary
- Member, Davidson United Methodist Church

- Central Piedmont Community College-North, Criminal Justice Advisory Board
- Habitat for Humanity Volunteer
- Soccer and Basketball Coach (YMCA-Lake Norman)
- North Parks Advisory Board
- Wachovia, Lake Norman Business Development Board of Directors
- North Mecklenburg Rotary Club-Vocational Director & Member
- United Way of Lake Norman Board of Directors
- Lake Norman Community Development Committee
- North-Meck Crimestoppers Committee
- North Mecklenburg Youth Soccer Association

**Achievements**

- 2002 Charlotte Jaycees Outstanding Young Charlottean Police Officer of the Year
- 2001 Lake Norman Chamber of Commerce Public Servant of the Year
- 1999 Lake Norman YMCA Volunteer of the Year (Mark Hollowell Award)
- Leadership Lake Norman Graduate
- Center for Creative Leadership Graduate
- Kappa Sigma Fraternity, 2006 Delta Gavel Award, Davidson College

**Family:** Brenton-19, Christian-11, Reagan-10, Mitchell-8

**Why are you running for Town Board?** I am vested in the Town of Davidson and committed to its citizens because through their contributions and example, my children have a home and I have seen true citizenship to wit many could learn a bit about community. I am obligated to serve as a citizen and as my duty. Most importantly, those that invest in their communities should see the product of their benevolence.

**Additional statement (from Oct. 18 forum):** *To illustrate what makes Davidson special, Mr. Walker told a story about his younger sister visiting town a couple of years ago. "What she's accustomed to is a community where folks just kind of ignore*

## WALKER (continued)

you. ... She was just used to people talking at her, instead of to her. She also brought my nephew and niece, and they had the opportunity to attend Davidson Elementary for a bit, what I thought was for them a wonderful, wonderful experience. One of the funniest things that ever happened: One day I'm sitting at work, my sister calls, she goes, 'Bro, there's this little girl at my door with brownies.' I said what, OK. 'Should I open the door?' (I said) Do the brownies look cooked? 'Yeah.' I said then well open the door. When I got home that evening she was just so astounded that somebody who was different from her, different from the family, would walk up to the door and offer that type of welcome. That's why I wanna run for commissioner in Davidson."



### Evan Webster

**Residence:** 410 Potts St., 17 years in Davidson  
**Age:** 59  
**Occupation:** Certified Public Accountant  
**Education:**

Bachelor's degree in accounting, Duke University 1969

**Community activities:**

- Commissioner - Town of Davidson
- Chair - Board of Directors MI Connection Communications System
- Chair - Davidson Planning Board (2000-2005)
- Treasurer - Our Towns Habitat for Humanity (2002-2004)

**Family:** Marcia Gibson Webster - Executive Director Davidson Housing Coalition; children Wade, Duncan, Andrew, Rachel

**Why are you running for Town Board?** I am someone who has been active in Davidson's public life for a number of years. This year, with three openings on the Town Board, it is important to retain background knowledge of where the Town has been, where it is now, and where it can go to enhance citizens' lives. My background as a CPA and business advisor for over 30 years, as well as 20 years involvement in land planning and development, give me a strong skill set to bring to the Town Board.

**Additional statement (from Oct. 18 forum):** (*speaking on his status as an incumbent*) The issues don't stop and start with the election cycle. The issues that are carrying over are important: land-use planning, controlling development and managing growth, traffic and mass transit, the cable system. Each of these issues requires technical knowledge and historical perspective that understands the interrelationship among issues. Our involvement with surrounding communities is also becoming more important. Witness the recent agreement on Lake Davidson. It takes time to develop relationships with other elected officials. ... As has happened in the past, the town staff and incumbents mentor newly elected officials. This process ensures the town provides its citizens with good, strong local government.



### Margo Williams

**Residence:** Concord Road  
**Years in Davidson?** 30  
**Age:** 58  
**Occupation:** freelance writer and owner of A Way With Words

## **WILLIAMS (continued)**

**Education:** Bachelor of arts with honors in English and Spanish from the University of Texas, 1971; Mortar Board; University Outstanding Student

### **Community activities:**

Town Committee Participation:

- Board of Commissioners (1995 - present)
- Davidson Housing Coalition, President (1996 - present)
- Public Arts Task Force (2007)
- Planning Board (1994-1995)
- Land Plan Committee (1994-1995)
- Community Relations Committee, Chair (1986-1989)
- Downtown Committee (1991-1994)
- General Plan Committee (1993-1994)

### **Past Civic Participation:**

- President, New Schoolhouse of the Arts
- Board member, Arts and Science Council
- Secretary, Children's Schoolhouse Board
- Fund-raising Chair, Davidson-Cornelius Day Care Center Board
- Secretary, Davidson Elementary PTA
- School Advisory Team - North Mecklenburg High School
- Vice President, Davidson I.B. Middle School PTA
- Vice President, Downtown Davidson Organization - six years
- Troop Committee, Boy Scouts Troop 58 - nine years
- Corporate Board, Davidson Community Players

### **Church Participation**

- Current Ruling Elder and former Vice Moderator of the Session, Davidson College Presbyterian Church
- Chair, Service Committee
- Campus Ministries, Worship, Christian Education, and Day School Committees
- Junior high Sunday school teacher
- Senior Fellow, American Leadership Forum, 2004

**Family:** Married 35 years to W.T. Williams,

Jr., M.D.; grown sons, Ben and Dan

### **Why are you running for town board?**

I am running again for office because I believe deeply that Davidson should remain a sustainable small town, not just a bedroom community. We organized many meetings during the land planning of 1995 and identified those characteristics we liked about Davidson. There was almost universal agreement that Davidson should remain an historically small, Southern college town, with big, pretty trees, many different types of people, with community activities that bring us together. We should continue to attract jobs to our town, so that people can work here, and we should build a variety of housing, so that people from all walks of life can reside here. We should develop a regional transit plan with local options that help people get out of their cars, making Davidson even healthier. We should use our new cable capabilities to attract and keep businesses; we should continue to employ our ordinance to assure that a range of housing is built; and we should continue to protect our quality of life and give citizens a voice in government so that everyone enjoys living here and feels welcome to participate in making our town such a special place.

### **Additional statement (from Oct. 18**

**forum):** I'm proud of what we have accomplished in the past 12 years with our optimistic land-planning process, which promotes and enhances Davidson's balance and beauty. In addition to 12 years on the Town Board for 12 years, I have served on numerous town committees. All of this work has taught me to be a good listener. I have a love for Davidson and its people. I have a considerable investment in Davidson in terms of schools, scouts, church, family and friends. But part of a citizen's responsibility is not just to love the community, but to work for it, not just to be proud of it, but to help it grow stronger and better.

**Website:** [www.awaywithwordsUSA.com](http://www.awaywithwordsUSA.com)

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## Meet the Mayoral Candidates

With the retirement of Randy Kincaid, Davidson will elect a new mayor on Nov. 6. Davidson voters have a choice between two starkly different candidates: **William E. "Bill" Jackson Jr.** and **John Woods**. One opposes buying the cable TV system, the other says it could help economic development. One considers Exit 30 a planning disaster, the other sees it as a source of new entry-level jobs and commercial tax revenues. Both want to control growth, but have different visions for how that can be accomplished.

**ELECTION  
2007**

### **Woods: Control our future**

BY LAURIE DENNIS

**John Woods** recalls the first time he was asked to run for mayor of Davidson – it was 10 years ago, and he had never sought an elected office.



“I hate politics!” he recalls saying.

Not long after that, Mr. Woods was encouraged to run for a seat on the Town Board. That seemed a better fit, more like community service than politicking. He put his name on the ballot, won a seat in the 1997 election, and has served on the board ever since. His first election was also the

one that brought Randy Kincaid to the mayor’s seat. Now Mr. Kincaid is stepping down, and Mr. Woods has decided he is finally ready to be listed on the ballot as candidate for mayor. “Putting your name on the line is scary,” he admitted.

After five terms as a commissioner, Mr. Woods said he has a clear understanding of the role of the mayor. He also seeks to emulate the strengths of Mr. Kincaid (who, incidentally, says he intends to vote for Mr. Woods).

“The mayor is the person who sets the direction of the town,” said Mr. Woods. “The mayor works with the board on consensus and works closely with the town manager. I would hope to emulate (the outgoing mayor) in being objective and open to debate and different points of view.”

Mr. Woods has put together a ten-point plan for his goals as mayor, and can point to lessons he has learned and projects he has accomplished as a commissioner. Mr. Woods’ plan focuses on careful planning to prevent sprawl and “an over-reliance on a residential tax base” while at the same time encouraging open spaces, affordable housing and pedestrian access. He also calls for playing “a leadership role in regional initiatives” including road connections and efforts to extend commuter rail from Charlotte to Davidson and beyond.

**SLOWING GROWTH THROUGH  
'STRATEGIC HOLD'**

Perhaps the most intriguing of Mr. Woods' plans is his interest in a new role for the town board in land purchases – a role he refers to as “strategic hold.”

He noted that the town has accumulated over 350 acres of land for such parks as the new Fisher Farm on the east side of town along Shearer Road. He would like to expand that effort, but in a new direction, taking advantage of the expected revenues from commercial development now under construction along Interstate 77's Exit 30.

“I would like for us to consider committing an incremental portion of our tax revenues at Exit 30 to land acquisition over time,” he explained.

The land could be used for more open space, but could also be designated for certain types of development and then held until the right opportunity came along.

“I think we should study that idea because it would have the effect of slowing and managing the pace of development,” he said. “There would be a cost. We could do it without tax increases but we would likely not be able to reduce taxes.”

### **EXIT 30 BENEFITS**

This is just one of the potential pluses for Davidson that Mr. Woods sees coming from the Exit 30 construction projects, which include a Harris Teeter grocery store, two hotels, small retail and condominiums as well as a possible office tower. He thinks the commercial growth will help balance a tax base that he and other town officials consider too reliant on residential property taxes. It will also provide needed retail jobs.

“One of the goals of Exit 30 was to provide entry level and mid-level jobs for our

citizens, to make Davidson more attractive to young people,” he said.

Mr. Woods is aware of criticisms leveled at the Town Board, particularly by his opponent in the mayor's race, for allowing what his critics consider too much development and unsightly office and condo towers at Exit 30. Mr. Woods counters that the board has to respect the legal rights of property owners to develop land.

“These were two large tracts of land held out of the market for years until the time was right,” he said. “The northeast quadrant (which includes Exit 30) was designated for commercial development in the town's master plan.”

Mr. Woods considers this area an example of how the Town Board can use its leverage not to stop development, but to guide it according to the town's needs.

“I'm all for slow development,” he said. “But we cannot stop somebody from developing their land. We do not have a ‘Harry Potter’ magic wand that we can wave around.”

He said the board uses its leverage to insist on good exterior designs and traffic flow patterns that fit the needs of the rest of the town.

### **AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

The Town Board has also used its leverage to require residential development to include affordable housing. That has proven challenging in a town which, according to Carolina Multiple Listing Services, has an average single-family home price of about \$530,000.

“Affordable housing is the issue that is most on my mind these days,” Mr. Woods said.

He is a past board member of the Davidson Housing Coalition and is an active member of the local chapter of Habitat for Humanity. As a banker, he has also helped provide the financing for numerous affordable housing projects in the area.

“Our affordable housing ordinances are immensely complicated,” he said. “I would like to work to improve them. I think we’re doing a good job and can do better.”

Mr. Woods was on the board that unanimously approved a controversial exemption to the affordable housing ordinance for developer Lawrence Kimbrough, allowing the exchange of three parcels of land for an exemption to the affordable housing requirement. Mr. Woods said he voted for the land swap because it came at a critical point in completing a new greenway trail through town. The Kimbrough parcel helped the town avoid losing a \$600,000 state grant for the trail, which opened in the spring.

Looking back at the Kimbrough controversy, Mr. Woods said it taught him an important lesson in the need for open communication. “I learned that we’ve got to be very careful in making exceptions to our rules,” he said. “I would work diligently as mayor to avoid exceptions. We also have to communicate more thoroughly and make sure that people understand the circumstances of any exception.”

## **IMPROVING COMMUNICATION**

That leads to another priority for Mr. Woods as mayor. He hopes to explore new ways to open communication lines with the public.

He pointed to a “Civics 101” program that he recently helped launch which drew a larger-than-expected crowd attending classes in how the town works.

As mayor, Mr. Woods would like to continue that program and also seek new innovative communication techniques. In particular, he would like to investigate whether the town could use group phone voice-mail messaging in a manner similar to that begun recently by Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools.

“What about neighborhood meetings with the mayor? What about free internet access for the entire town?” he wondered. “We could make more use of our web communication. We’ve got to find ways to communicate better.”

## **CABLE CONSORTIUM**

Free or low-cost internet access would be easier to provide if the town board moves forward with controversial plans to form a public consortium with Mooresville offering internet and cable TV services.

Mr. Woods said he spent two years studying the risks and concept of public ownership of the high-speed communications network before voting in favor of forming the consortium. This followed the bankruptcy of the Adelpia system, the private company which had previously served the area.

“I knew this would be controversial,” he said. “Should we or should we not be in this business? Reasonable people can disagree on this. I believe, in a nutshell, that we can hit a home run for ourselves if we take the system as it exists and improve it and grow it.”

Mr. Woods thinks the consortium will help attract corporations that require high-speed communications services. As a banker, he also considers it to be a good financial opportunity for the town.

## **OUTREACH TO NEIGHBORHOODS**

Internet access or not, improving communication in Davidson is a challenge, Mr. Woods said, in part because the town includes such different types of neighborhoods.

“When I grew up here, we were predominantly a college town,” he said.

Today he noted that the college is one of two major employers in town – the other being Ingersoll-Rand – and includes diverse neighborhoods with differing needs.

“I have personal contacts with the west side, historically the mill section and the African-American neighborhood, which is today seeing changing patterns of development and more integration,” he said. “I have embraced River Run (a wealthy golf-course development) as a neighborhood and attempted to bring them into the community. I have met with the new president of Davidson College and found him to be very committed to the town/college relationship.”

Mr. Woods said he would like to see Main Street evolve into a place with more services for young people, and he has long wanted to see the town open a community center offering such recreational sports as tennis and basketball.

“This would need to be centrally located,” he said. “It could involve a shared relationship with the IB Middle School site. It’s something the board would like to have

happen but it needs the right circumstances and financing.”

## **TRANSPORTATION**

The mayor of Davidson has a seat on the Metropolitan Transit Commission and is involved in both local and regional transportation issues. Mr. Woods “very positively supports” the extension of a commuter rail line from Charlotte to Mooresville and has been involved in other regional transportation planning issues.

He pointed to the board’s success at working with Cornelius and Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools to connect Bailey Road to Davidson-Concord Road. As mayor, he would like to continue to work with the Bailey Road area to prepare for a new high school that would serve Cornelius and Davidson, if voters approve the necessary bond sale. Mr. Woods said the town has negotiated an extension of Bailey Road south to connect with Barnhardt Road in conjunction with building a new high school.

“We must ensure this connection is completed,” he added.

Mr. Woods also noted the board’s work involving another large project, the extension of Shearer Road across the West Branch of the Rocky River (behind the River Run subdivision) to connect with Hwy. 73 at Ramah Church Road. Among smaller projects he would like to pursue, he listed extending Spring Street a few hundred feet to make a new connection with South Main Street.

“In general, we must always be open-minded and diligent to complete ‘good’ connections wherever the opportunity arises,” he said.

## JOHN WOODS' BACKGROUND

John Woods, 58, is the son of the late James B. and Elizabeth Woods. His parents, who served as missionaries in China, arrived in Davidson in 1942 where James began work as the town doctor. John, the youngest of four, was born seven years later and said he is still known to some in town as “the doctor’s son.” The flagpole in front of what is now the IB Middle School is dedicated to Dr. Woods by “the grateful citizens of Davidson.”

John attended the local public schools, graduating in 1967 from North Mecklenburg High, where he was a member of the football team. He holds degrees from Presbyterian College, the University of South Carolina and the LSU School of Banking of the South. He also served as a first lieutenant in the Army in the early 1970s. He has been a banker in the Carolinas for 34 years, working previously for First Charter and BB&T. Mr. Woods currently is a senior vice president at the Newton-based Peoples Bank, where he specializes in commercial lending.

He and his wife, Diana, a fourth-grade public school teacher, live around the corner from the house on Lorimer Street where John grew up. He and his wife have two adult children, a son and a daughter.

Mr. Woods describes himself as an “active but unaffiliated” voter. He dates his first civic experience to his membership on the Davidson Land Plan committee, which in 1995 established land use priorities for the community that were later incorporated into the town’s award winning planning ordinance.

On Davidson’s board of commissioners, Mr. Woods has served for his past three terms as

Mayor Pro Tem, or vice mayor, the role traditionally given to the top vote winner in board elections.

“I’ve been asked to make hard decisions from time to time,” he said. “But I have done everything I can to prevent rampant development. There are plenty of examples of how not to do things around us. We have assured that things are done our way.”

## Jackson: Time for a change

BY LAURIE DENNIS

**William E. “Bill” Jackson Jr.** did not initially intend to file for mayor.



He was concerned about several issues and how the current Town Board had handled them, such as the pace of development and public ownership of cable TV services. Mr. Jackson sought to convince “two prominent citizens” to make a run at the mayor’s seat.

“When I couldn’t get them to do it, I decided to do it myself, so that there would be a clear choice on the ballot,” said the lifelong political activist.

In his first venture at elected office on the town level, he chose not to seek a seat on the board of commissioners but to run instead for mayor.

“The mayor has a big hand in setting the agenda of town meetings,” he explained. “The mayor has ‘the bully pulpit.’ That’s what interests me. To run for the Town Board did not interest me at all.”

After spending years as an outsider trying to push the board, Mr. Jackson now wants to be an insider trying to lead it, running under the slogan, “Keep Davidson Special.”

Mr. Jackson said he would try to shake up the way things are done in Town Hall. He proposes a reevaluation of all development projects before the board, and intends to put a stop to industrial and large-scale commercial growth. He would also pursue the reversal of a recent board vote to form a cable consortium. In general, he hopes to use his mayoral bully pulpit to battle what he perceives as outside interests seeking to overrun Davidson.

### **EXIT 30 IRE**

The single issue that most spurred Mr. Jackson to put his name on the ballot is the construction underway at I-77’s Exit 30. He views plans to build two hotels, a seven-story tower of condominiums and a proposed seven-story office/retail tower as “ill conceived” and “a disaster.” He thinks the construction will result in traffic snarls and is concerned how all the new development will fit with the recently opened private school, Davidson Day, in the same area.

More importantly, he considers it a mistake to let the entrance to a small college town be dominated by seven-story towers rather than the church steeple of Davidson College Presbyterian Church.

“This is the gateway to my alma mater,” said the Class of 1957 alum. “This is the gateway to my town.”

In other words, it’s the large scale of the development and what he considers to be its unattractive design that most concerns him.

“I think it will be a shock for prospective college students and their parents to see the development at Exit 30 and realize this is not a quaint little town after all,” he said.

### **DEVELOPMENT PHILOSOPHY**

This is not the first time Mr. Jackson has fought development in Davidson. In 1998, he helped form a committee, “Preserve Small Town Davidson,” that opposed the development now known as the New Neighborhood in Old Davidson. Though Mr. Jackson now praises the resulting mixed-use area anchored by St. Alban’s Episcopal Church, nine years ago he fought vociferously against it.

“We helped to keep large oak trees in the area and to keep the Gamble house as a residence,” Mr. Jackson said, referring to the historic Wallace Gamble home on Concord Road. He added that he also worked to prevent a convenience store from being placed at the corner of Concord Road and St. Alban’s Lane.

“It became a remarkably attractive development,” Mr. Jackson admitted, “for which I give (developer) Doug Boone the major credit, but also credit is due to the Episcopalians.”

Preserve Small Town Davidson went on to oppose plans near Main Street to realign streets for a proposed Harris Teeter grocery store on what became a two-story building housing the CVS pharmacy. “We fought Harris Teeter on that location,” Mr. Jackson said, though he is not opposed to plans for the Harris Teeter at Exit 30 today. Underlying Mr. Jackson’s opposition to development projects has been a concern to keep Davidson “a small college town.” “I’m not opposed to residential development,” he said. “I favor small

commercial development. But I'm flat against more industrial development." If elected mayor, he would seek to prevent any new industries coming to town. "And I would use any influence I could command to stop in its tracks all commercial development at Exit 30 that has not already been passed by the board," he added.

Furthermore, Mr. Jackson, who claims to be "very well connected in Raleigh" as an active member of the Democratic Party, said he would turn to the Democratic-controlled state legislature to seek authority for Mecklenburg County to impose "impact fees" on developers. The legislature has been unwilling in the past to authorize the county, much less the Town of Davidson, to have this power.

"I would ask some members of the Mecklenburg delegation in Raleigh – and perhaps the Governor – to support special legislation allowing Mecklenburg and/or Davidson to level impact fees on homebuilders," he explained, adding that he realizes such legislation would face stiff opposition from lobbyists. He said the fees could be used for a wide variety of amenities, from sidewalks to sewer lines.

Mr. Jackson's concerns about growth in Davidson affect his views on extending a commuter rail line from Charlotte to this region. While he favors commuter rail as a mode of transportation, he said he would vehemently oppose a line that ended at Davidson, as he thinks that would turn the town into a commuter parking lot.

Plus, he is concerned that the proposed line to Davidson would require an extension of Concord Road across Main Street to the railroad tracks. "That will help destroy the downtown 'skyline,'" he said. "But, in

reality, I'll be amazed if it ever comes out here."

## **TRANSPORTATION**

Mr. Jackson views congestion of local roads with concern, especially when it comes to large dump trucks and construction vehicles driving down thoroughfares.

"I would seek to ban all heavy construction vehicles from the town of Davidson," he said, though he acknowledged that Davidson is not the controlling authority of a road like Main Street, which is part of State Highway 115, or even of Concord Road. "You could do that by harassing them with tickets. You could seek a special legislative request (to decrease road weight limits)."

He views with skepticism the town board's emphasis on "connectivity," or efforts to increase road connections and avoid cul-de-sacs.

"Connectivity sometimes makes good sense to reduce congestion," Mr. Jackson conceded. However, he considers connectivity to have failed Davidson in terms of the recent connection of South Street to the covered bridge entrance to the new Antiquity subdivision in Cornelius. He considers the opening to have been timed to the convenience of Cornelius and the detriment of Davidson, and he tried unsuccessfully to rally support among neighborhood residents for a lawsuit to block the street opening.

Somewhat contradictorily, though Mr. Jackson wants to relieve congestion in Davidson, he does not favor long-range state plans to build a Main Street bypass by extending Davidson-Concord Road around the college to a new connection with 115.

“I’m opposed to the idea of a super highway that would skirt this area,” he said.

## **CABLE CONSORTIUM**

Mr. Jackson has been an outspoken critic of the town board’s efforts to form a consortium with Mooresville to take over cable and internet service to the area. The two towns are in the final stages of planning for the purchase, which is expected in mid-December. The system is available because of the 2002 bankruptcy of Adelphia, the former private provider.

Mr. Jackson is a creditor in the bankruptcy case, as he produced the political talk show “Crosshairs” for Adelphia Cable.

“Adelphia owes me money, but I’m never going to see a cent,” he said.

Mr. Jackson testified against the consortium at a hearing before the Local Government Commission’s executive committee, where he pointed out that elections in both Davidson and Mooresville could result in boards without majority support for the cable takeover. He has suggested that if elected mayor, he would consider putting a halt to financing for the consortium.

Supporters and town officials have warned that if Davidson backs out of the cable deal, it could be liable for millions of dollars already spent, which could require a tax increase. Mr. Jackson has said it could be worth taking the loss. He opposes the purchase because he says it is too expensive and inappropriate for the board to take on.

“I object to my town increasing its debt eight times without a public referendum over buying a cable company with Mooresville,” he said. “Secondly, I don’t

think the town has any business managing a cable company that will soon be obsolete.”

## **KIMBROUGH LAND SWAP**

The cable vote is, to Mr. Jackson, an example of a highhanded attitude by the current board, an attitude he says he would change as mayor.

The other example he cites of this is the 2004 vote to swap land with developer Lawrence Kimbrough for an exemption to the town’s affordable housing requirement. Board members have said the swap gave the town, at a critical moment, the trailhead for its new greenway, but Mr. Jackson has repeatedly noted that the vote was an unscheduled item of business on the board agenda and thus “raises disturbing questions” about how the board conducts itself.

In addition, Mr. Jackson sees the Kimbrough land swap as an example of how the board has undermined its own efforts at creating affordable housing, by allowing exceptions to the requirement.

Mr. Jackson objects, in minute detail, to how board members and staff interact with private businesses and citizens who come before them. He has suggested that town planners work too closely with developers. He says if elected he would scrutinize the planning department, and would relish contesting planning department actions large and small.

## **BACKGROUND**

Mr. Jackson, 72, is a fixture at the Soda Shop on Main Street, where he can often be found sitting in the back booth, beneath a photo of himself as a Davidson College

cross country runner. It was the college that first brought him to the area.

“I care deeply about this spot on earth,” he said.

Mr. Jackson was born on a peach farm in Moore County, near Pinehurst, and still has a particular fondness for a good Piedmont peach. He chose Davidson College based on the recommendations of his high school social studies and the minister at his Presbyterian church. He was at first “a C student, by and large,” but then encountered a new professor of political science, Dr. Harold Ford. “I took everything he offered,” Mr. Jackson said. “He was terrific.” Though he graduated with a degree in economics, politics became his passion.

He earned master’s degrees from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Columbia University. He soon landed in Washington, D.C., where he worked in the administrations of John F. Kennedy and Jimmy Carter, specializing in relations with the Soviet Union and arms control.

During that era, he spent a second stint in Davidson, teaching political science classes at the college in 1968-73. He later served as a scholar at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. and a senior fellow at the J.W. Fulbright Institute of International Relations in Fayetteville, Arkansas. He also worked for several prominent legislators, including Sen. Alan Cranston (D-Calif.) and Sen. Ed Muskie (D-Maine).

In 1991, Mr. Jackson moved back to the Davidson area to be near family. He initially taught political science as an adjunct professor at UNC-Charlotte but now works primarily as a freelance writer on national and international issues, writing primarily for the Huffington Post and Editor &

Publisher. He and his wife, Judith, the former manager of the college guest house, live on South Downing Street. They have two adult children, a daughter (who was born in Davidson) and a son.

This is the second time that Mr. Jackson has sought elected office. In 1996, he ran unsuccessfully to challenge incumbent Sue Myrick in the 9<sup>th</sup> Congressional District. He sees himself as the underdog in the mayor’s race, facing a candidate (John Woods) who has served five terms as a commissioner.

“I’m an antidote to Mr. Woods,” he said, “not in terms of character, because he’s a decent guy, but in terms of public policy.”