

## History of Chatham County Board Liaisons and their Roles

**Introduction:** At the September 16, 2024, meeting, the Chatham County Board of Commissioners directed staff to provide the history of BOC Liaison roles to auxiliary and advisory committees. This request aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the origins, purpose, and evolution of these roles over time. The following summary outlines the historical context and key developments related to BOC Liaisons.

### Background and Purpose:

The BOC liaison program was designed to address the need for effective oversight, communication, and coordination between the BOC and various local and regional boards and committees. Key objectives include:

- Ensuring that the Board stays informed of critical issues and developments occurring within auxiliary and advisory boards and committees.
- Providing advisory boards and committees with a clear point of contact for the Board and Chatham County leadership.
- Maintaining transparency and accessibility for residents and stakeholders.

Roles are primarily non-voting, but some assignments, such as those to regional organizations or statutory boards, include voting responsibilities.

### Chronological Developments:

- Foundations of the BOC Liaison Program (2000-2006):
  - Initial appointments were made for specific needs, such as the Orange-Chatham Justice Partnership Board in 2000.
  - By 2006, formalized BOC liaison assignments began, covering local and regional boards, reflecting the growing scope of county operations.
- Expansion and Organizational Challenges (2007-2010):
  - The number of assignments increased significantly, with some commissioners taking on multiple roles.
  - Commissioners discussed the need for transparency, including publicizing the BOC liaison list and updating the BOC website.
  - Challenges emerged around workload distribution and the role of BOC liaisons in decision-making versus communication.
  - Commissioners began emphasizing that they had heard complaints of perceived interference of Elected Officials, and the subsequent bypassing of staff and County Manager, coming directly to the board, causing administrative issues.

- Operational Adjustments and Role Clarification (2011-2013):
  - The Board emphasized that BOC liaisons should act as conduits for communication rather than decision-makers or direct participants in advisory board operations.
  - Commissioners debated the extent of involvement, with concerns raised about bypassing staff and creating administrative bottlenecks.
  - The BOC refined the BOC liaison role, making clear that requests for policy or action should go through the full Board.
- Strategic Redefinitions and Expectations (2016):
  - Clear guidelines were introduced for BOC liaisons, including reporting duties, non-involvement in board operations, and acting only under direction from the full Board.
  - Voting assignments required BOC liaisons to reflect the Board's majority position when representing Chatham County.
- Refinements and Modernization (2019-Present):
  - Adjustments to assignments continued, reflecting changes in board priorities and the evolving needs of the County.
  - Efforts to streamline the program included removing inactive or redundant boards and reevaluating the necessity of certain BOC liaison roles.

## **Key Observations**

- Evolution of BOC Liaison Roles:
  - Early iterations of the program had BOC liaisons serving as both communicators and decision-makers, creating ambiguity about their responsibilities.
  - The role has since shifted to emphasize communication, reporting, and representation, addressing concerns about overreach and administrative conflicts.
- Workload Distribution and Efficiency:
  - Commissioners often faced an uneven distribution of BOC liaison assignments, prompting recurring discussions about workload balance.
  - Proposals to reduce assignments or consolidate roles have been met with varying levels of support, highlighting the tension between engagement and capacity.
- Transparency and Accessibility:
  - Publicizing BOC liaison assignments has been a key priority, with efforts to keep the BOC website updated and accurate.
- Recurring Challenges:

- Misaligned expectations surrounding attendance and engagement have been a continual challenge.
- Role clarity is a recurring concern, with periodic debates over whether the BOC liaison role should have more direction or hands-off involvement in their assignment.
- Strategic Importance of Representation:
  - Assignments to regional and state-level organizations (e.g., Metropolitan Planning Organizations, Central Pines Regional Council) have had significant impacts on funding and planning for the county.
  - Commissioners have emphasized the importance of ensuring Chatham County's interests are represented in these advisory/decision-making bodies.