

THE PEIRCE REPORT

# Shaping a shared future



MARK B. SLUDER/Staff

**Region's signature:** Anchored by the NationsBank and First Union towers, Charlotte's fast-changing skyline symbolizes banking clout and boasts big new projects. In the last decade much has been added: office towers, hotels, a new convention center, Carolinas Stadium, the North Carolina Blumenthal Performing Arts Center and I-277. For a 1984 view of the same area, see page 15.

## Who will lead? And to where?

By NEAL PEIRCE and CURTIS JOHNSON  
Special to The Observer

**H**as Charlotte's leadership revolution happened, with scarcely a shot fired?

This region is a place where people perennially assume a powerful bunch of bank presidents and other men (always men) call the shots. As the big oaks of business and civic leadership have fallen across America, Charlotte has seemed a case of arrested development. The mysterious group of business folks called "The Vault" (they met at a bank) has long faded in Boston. The once-powerful Citizens Council has turned warm, fuzzy and conciliatory in Dallas. The immodestly named "Phoenix Forty" has retreated from dominant leadership.

**A generation ago it would have seemed absurd to list Charlotte with Atlanta, Miami, Denver, Dallas, Seattle. No longer. Now, as the Carolinas' undisputed economic capital, where is the Charlotte region headed in the 21st century?**

But change in Charlotte? Never, it seemed. The legend has been constantly renewed by the activism of the bank chieftains — remarkable financial buccaneers, ranging America in search of banks, capturing one big fiscal house after another and dragging the prize back uptown — much like the hunters of old returning home with the bounty.

The triumphs of Ed Crutchfield, Hugh McColl Jr. and their colleagues have made a huge difference: Look at all those new bank jobs in the region, at Charlotte's soaring reputation.

Even so, a leadership revolution is under way in the Charlotte region. The leadership clique, led by the bank CEOs and other corporate chieftains, has not disappeared. But it is less cohesive, and rebellions against it more serious. Residents of Charlotte-Mecklenburg and neighboring counties, from York to Cabarrus, Gaston to Union, err when they glance up at those soaring bank towers and assume power is as centralized as it was.

Consider the rebellions:  
■ Populist conservatives, saying government power is at the root of much evil and highly suspicious of "uptown power," have swept to power themselves in recent local elections. Yellow dog Democrats are cowering in confusion. ("We were the party of the people; what's this revolt from the right all about?")

Tom Bush, a Mecklenburg County commissioner elected last fall, told us, "Elected officials used to operate at the beck and call of the big banks and corporations. The business leaders had a close relationship with a powerful Chamber of Commerce that could both help local government and dictate to local government. Now many of us have been elected whom the economic powers in Mecklenburg didn't know or weren't interested in. Obvi-



MARK B. SLUDER/Staff

**Building on the past:** Rock Hill's Gateway Plaza incorporates two 60-foot columns (from uptown Charlotte's old Masonic Temple) with four gold-colored statues called "Civitas." Each Civitas sister — the work of N.Y. sculptor

Audrey Flack — holds symbols representing culture, education, industry and function. A fifth Civitas sister — holding lightning bolts and representing the city's energy — graces the rotunda at Rock Hill's new city hall.

ously there's nervousness on the part of the chamber, the major banks, that they may be losing some of the control they previously had. My attitude's not to do just uptown's will, but also what University Park, southeast Charlotte and all the other areas need."

■ Years of harmonious approval of major school bonds came to a surprising, discordant end last spring, as Mecklenburg voters defeated a megabond issue, more than \$300 million, despite its strong support in the corporate community.

■ A gaggle of organizations has emerged across the multicounty, bistate Charlotte citistate. The object of each: regional consensus or cooperation. Why? It's becoming obvious no jurisdiction or power group has the power to carry the day by itself.

Examples: The Carolinas Partnership tries to catalyze economic development on a regional basis, consciously including development interests from the counties. Such groups as the Carolinas Trans-

portation Compact and the Committee of 100 have looked at issues from highways to rails. After years of being trounced by rural and small-town politicians from other N.C. regions, a Southern Piedmont Legislative Caucus organized to get a better deal in Raleigh.

A whole array of programs are training potentially more independent future leaders, including the three-year-old Carolinas Leadership Program.

New citizen groups are emerging. One, in its infancy, is the Queen City Congress, under which a group of neighborhoods, both affluent and poor, recently signed a "Declaration of Interdependence."

There's a plausible argument that with a rough brush of the arm, big business leadership could neutralize any of those groups. Some of them, the

Please see **Region**/page 4

### Challenges to the region

- Accept that the bank CEOs and their friends no longer control the region. Future leadership becomes everyone's job.
- Focus on the big problems for the region's future: Quality work force, traffic, crime, equity.
- Celebrate Charlotte's ascension among the ranks of America's leading cities.
- Cultivate and protect the region's special, open, "can-do" culture. Work to accumulate more "civic capital."
- Integrate the thousands of newcomers into the region's life.
- Think about regional services beyond Mecklenburg borders.
- The public — not developers — should plan streets, roads and neighborhoods.
- Recognize the age of the citistate has dawned. Reduce attitudinal splits between Mecklenburg and outlying counties. Focus on a common future.
- As the old power brokers die or retire, the region's leadership must come from its people — city and suburban — working together. Tap citizens, youth, universities. Build trust, and expect the media to help.
- Recognize uptown is the region's signature piece to the world. Make it as welcoming for people as for big buildings.
- Support the region's other uptowns — Concord, Monroe, Rock Hill, Davidson and Gastonia, for example — where the real character of town life is preserved. Use local zoning and other powers to make sure the downtowns become a focus of development.

— Neal Peirce, Curtis Johnson

### THE PEIRCE REPORT

Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson, nationally known writers on cities and city growth, have taken an in-depth look at the Charlotte region, as they have done previously in 10 other cities. This is a reprint of their four-part series.

**Leadership:**

The old-style, patriarchal business leadership is fading. It's time for the region's citizens to take charge.

Pages 1, 2, 3, 4

**Growth:**

Who's leading the region's growth? Developers, financiers and highway engineers, that's who. Is that what citizens want?

Pages 5, 6, 7, 8

**Workforce:**

The grim underside of the region's prosperity: too many low-skilled people.

Pages 12, 13, 16

**Neighborhoods:**

Few cities in America are as impressive as Charlotte in their efforts to fight crime and poverty. But what's the next step?

Pages 9, 10, 11

# THE PEIRCE REPORT: Shaping a shared future

## Uptown: Symbol of the region

By NEAL PEIRCE  
And CURTIS JOHNSON  
Special to The Observer

When "Nell" appeared at theaters last winter, the origin of the rural scenes was a mystery to most moviegoers. Not until the credits did they learn those stunning mountain scenes came from Western North Carolina.

But in a theater as far away as Minneapolis, when a city skyline loomed, there were audible whispers: "That's Charlotte."

Charlotte's skyline has become the region's signature.

Anchored by the NationsBank and First Union towers, the skyline symbolizes banking clout. It signals Charlotte is now an "instant recognition" city. Goodbye to confusion with the South's other "Ch's."

Charlotte needs its uptown to keep emphasizing its newly won status. A depressed or abandoned uptown would be a disaster for the entire Charlotte citistate.

Right now, uptown shows lots of big-project dynamism: the new convention center, the huge Carolinas Stadium, Discovery Place, Spirit Square, the Afro-American Cultural Center and the North Carolina Blumenthal Performing Arts Center.

But what about *people*? Will uptown be a place for them, too? Will the streets be fun to walk on, with restaurants and galleries and little shops? Will uptown warmly welcome an entire region? Will it stop looking like a stage set for a ghost town after 5 p.m.? Can a human, *real* city be built?

**What's missing is glaringly obvious. We discovered it one evening, in search of a good meal. Unless you know where the restaurants are hidden, you're in trouble.**

We stood at Trade and Tryon, unthreatened by cars or buses, watching stoplights flash green, then red again, regulating unseen traffic. A few human figures wandered about, reminding us of the hotel concierge's warning to be wary of street people.

We found Bistro 100, deep in an indoor retail complex, and enjoyed a fine meal. As we paid, we were advised to call a cab, since it wouldn't be a good idea to walk around at night.

The next evening we found an excellent restaurant, Carpe Diem. Wonder of wonders, it actually had a *street* entrance on South Tryon.

The chances for a more vibrant uptown rest heavily with NationsBank, through its Transamerica Square project and Chairman Hugh McColl Jr.'s personal, active interest in a major sweep of development through uptown's entire northern end.

McColl talks both of investment and his personal legacy to Charlotte when he discusses plans for an urban village of offices, townhomes, apartments and stores stretching eventually to the Brookshire Freeway, filling the gaps from Third and Fourth Wards to Earle Village to the new transportation center on East Trade Street. A huge chunk of it would be residential development.

That has major promise. Double the 7,500 people living uptown, and just watch the gathering parade of restaurants, as well as places to buy groceries, get hardware and have your suits cleaned.

Developing a strong residential base is key to everything else.

**One worries that all this development could be hurried forward without full public participation.**

When citizens are involved from the start, they become stakeholders, defenders of the new. Ideas emerge: What about a day-care center at the new transportation stop? What about special arts and music fairs to celebrate Charlotte's ring cities — a Rock Hill or Gastonia or Monroe day? Will uptown have housing for *every* income group (the goal successful cities such as Portland, Ore., have set)?

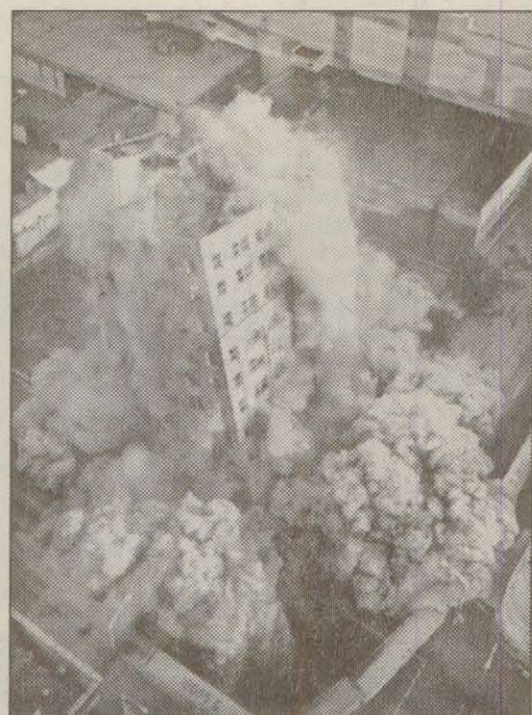
Let's fast-forward five years. Is this

**Hollywood on Tryon:** During the filming of "Nell," uptown Charlotte locations were used in several scenes — including shots of the city skyline.



MARK B. SLUDER/Staff

### Charlotte then... and now



MARK B. SLUDER/Staff

An aerial view of The Square on Sept. 27, 1981, shows North Carolina's first "skyscraper" — the 14-story Independence Building — being imploded to make way for new development. The bottom photo is a current view of The Square and uptown, looking south down Tryon Street. The triangular structure in the right foreground is the Independence Center, which replaced the Independence Building. At left is the 60-story NationsBank Corporate Center, which opened in 1992.



MARK B. SLUDER/Staff



MARK B. SLUDER/Staff

**Uptown lunch crowd:** From 9 to 5, uptown Charlotte bustles with people, most of whom work in office towers lining Tryon and College streets. But after quitting time, there's little in the way of street-level businesses and restaurants to keep people uptown.

**Afro-American center:** One of uptown's attractions — the Afro-American Cultural Center — saved a portion of Charlotte's fast-fading history in the form of two of the city's last shotgun houses — a reminder of neighborhoods swept away by urban renewal.



T. ORTEGA GAINES/Staff

what visitors will see as Charlotte turns the century?

■ Fifteen thousand uptown workers awaken to the smug reminder that their commute is a pleasant walk. No congestion. No extra car to keep up, no parking fee. A quick breakfast is easy to find, whether it's coffee and muffins at St. Ruby's Java Joint II at CityFair, or biscuits and livermush at the New New Big Village on North Tryon.

■ A second awakening comes later, as dozens of restaurants on Tryon and Church streets fill with people headed to the Performing Arts Center to hear the Carolinas Symphony, formerly the Charlotte Symphony, conducted by Christoph von Dohnanyi, recently lured from the Cleveland Orchestra.

■ The south end of uptown goes seismic several times a month with suburbanites, Dilworthites riding the trolley up South Boulevard from Dilworth, and conventiongoers heading for concerts in the new Hornets Nest, a basketball arena near the Carolinas Stadium. The older Charlotte Coliseum continues to be booked solid, as well, with tractor pulls, Amway meetings and Ice Capades.

After the concert, the crowd spills into a nearby complex of movies, bars and restaurants developed in the late '90s. Residential life is also returning to this end of town. The pioneer was developer Jim Gross, who followed his successful Ivey's project on North Tryon by converting the old Lance fac-

tory into condos.

■ The transportation center works so well that last year nearly half of all commute trips to uptown were by transit. There are buses, van shuttles, even a jitney lane of specially marked cars to make short trips around uptown. Uptown residents use the transit center for van rides to Lake Norman, University City or shopping malls.

■ Meanwhile, work is getting under way to convert one transit way to the first line of light rail, linking uptown to the airport.

■ Instead of steering around it, Charlotteans proudly include Earle Village as they show guests around. The public housing project, developed in 1967, was almost completely rebuilt with \$41 million from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (just a year before HUD itself was replaced). And NationsBank, despite its earnings hitting a rough patch after it swallowed the Bank of Boston in 1996, kept its promise to hire 100 Earle Village residents.

■ CityFair bursts with higher education offered by UNC Charlotte and Central Piedmont Community College. They opened a job and training information clearinghouse, which offers a package of interest- and aptitude-testing and computer-based searches for the best matches in jobs.

■ After years of debate over the old convention center building, the city — over some local retailers' objections —

courageously struck a deal with Nordstrom to buy the facility for \$1 and turn it into a department store.

Don't believe it's possible? Fifteen years ago, no one would have believed uptown Charlotte would look the way it does now.

**One thing is certain: The roaring growth of the past decade will slow. Executives such as First Union CEO Ed Crutchfield warn that the region's financial services job gains won't be anything like what they were in recent years.**

The attractions of the suburbs won't fade. Crutchfield makes a strong case for the communications ease and less-expensive parking at his bank's massive, Pentagon-style building in University Research Park.

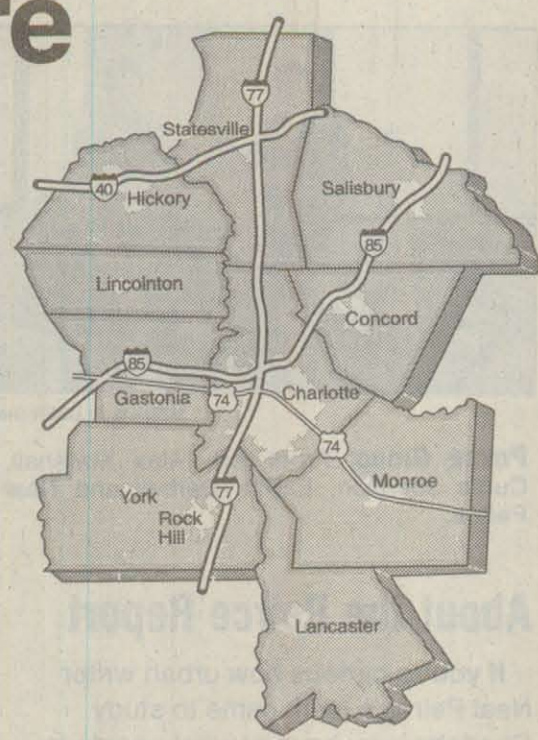
Still, a diverse, well-planned uptown can strengthen and give focus to an entire region — as the business center and symbol of the citistate, as its entertainment and arts and culture center, and as the area's lived-in, welcoming heart.

In the chase to outpace Atlanta and Dallas, building a vibrant uptown could be the go-ahead move.

### More than a million and growing (Current populations and projections in thousands)



# THE PEIRCE REPORT: Shaping a shared future



**Small-town character:** Architect Andres Duany (right) of Miami tours Davidson. Duany, nationally known for advocating a type of development called "new urbanism," praised Davidson's small-town character and the draft of its long-range land plan during a visit in March. At left is Belmont town planner Demetri Baches; at center is architect Tom Low, who this month opened a branch of Duany's firm in Charlotte.



DIEDRA LAIRD/Staff

suffer from lack of use, despite a booming regional economy. Even Rock Hill, a star of the group, needs more downtown activity.

The public sector — a government the people elect — must insist zoning and taxes and other regulatory powers be exerted more strongly, to make sure downtowns remain centers, the jewels of their counties, and that new development fits and creates a livable, balanced community.

We don't intend to say growth is bad. Quite the contrary. It's a necessity for prospering communities. It means jobs, prosperity. But *how* development is done — whether it relates to established growth centers, supports a city or county plan, or simply devours and exploits the countryside — is a decision many developers would rather keep the public out of.

**That's why each community must "be its own man," determine the growth it can absorb, then stand its ground when developers or mega-corporations seek to build on the periphery and let the town center deteriorate.**

Growth itself needs to be redefined, from sheer numbers of new houses built or gross dollars spent in stores to a measure that makes a difference for ordinary people: How many adults are fruitfully employed? How are people's skills being expanded? How many youth are being adequately prepared for 21st century jobs?

One answer is to design or channel growth so it hugs tightly to the existing cores rather than heading for some cornfield 3 or 4 miles from town.

Where possible, extend the old grid of streets and build offices and homes in the so-called "new urbanist" fashion — close to the street.

If you plan a new office park, make it fit with the core city, as Rock Hill has done.

Do not encourage leapfrog development. Instead, mobilize to fight it. The farther each town sprawls from its center, the more difficult it will be to keep those centers viable.

And don't expect zoning alone to ensure a healthy city. Planners, with citizens' help, must craft how new sections of the city will appear and how they will fit together.

**Some Charlotte ring cities are taking steps in the right direction. Gaston County's Belmont has adopted a new code encouraging traditional, small-town development and restricting suburban-style sprawl.**

And consider Concord, with its old homes and charming downtown. It looks as though the consultant the city hired a few years ago did well. Fashioning growth around Concord could ultimately make all Cabarrus County more prosperous. We were told one reason Cabarrus residents are talking about controlling growth is that they don't want to become another Gwinnett, the suburban Atlanta county that lost its charm and identity in helter-skelter growth.

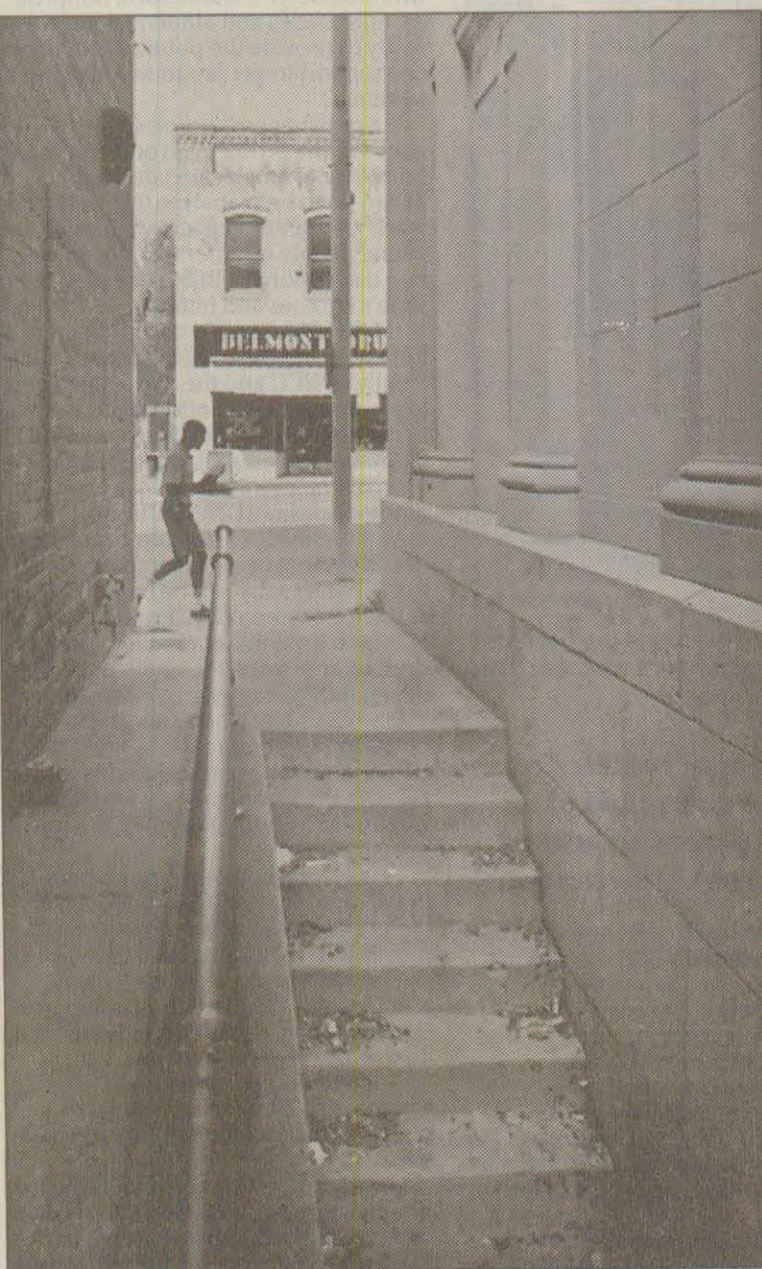
Davidson is considering a new town plan to preserve and encourage its historic core, which centers on Davidson College. But its housing prices have skyrocketed, and even some professors can't afford to live in town. That points to a pitfall: Growth must be fair. If a city simply prohibits growth, it protects "haves" at the expense of "have-nots." That sows the seeds of a phenomenon familiar to Boulder County, Colo., or Sonoma County, Calif., where the gentry live in town. Those who can't afford it have nowhere to go.

The way out is to channel development around cities so that old and new co-exist in harmony. This takes planning and discipline.

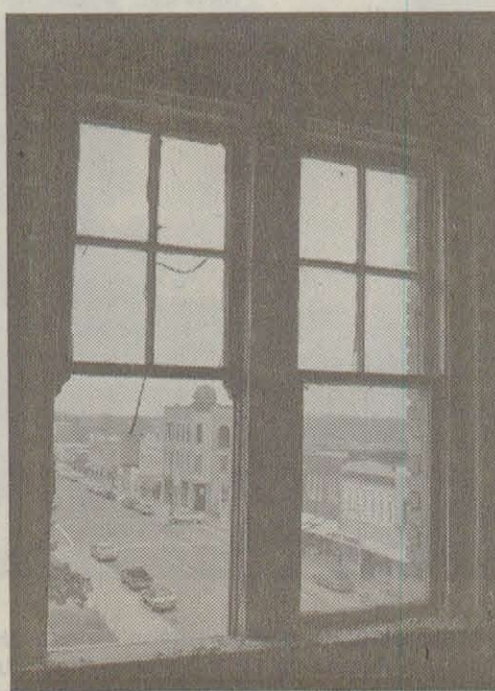
But remember the sprawling future you avoid. Think of preserving the identity that brought many of you to Gastonia or Rock Hill in the first place. You came, most likely, because it was not just another Charlotte suburb. Maybe you need to form some regional alliances to make sure it doesn't become one.

Again and again, we heard how much people in the Charlotte region love their towns, how much they want to keep their towns' identities, to avoid being lost in faceless suburban growth.

The best way not to become Charlotte is to stand one's ground and tell fast-talking mega-developers to take a walk until they're willing to respect each place's unique history, culture and vision of its own future.



MARK B. SLUDER/Staff



DAVIE HINSHAW/Staff

**Empty storefronts:** A view of Monroe's Main Street, from the Franklin Hotel. While shopping centers and fast-food businesses boom along the U.S. 74 bypass, downtown Monroe and its historic buildings struggle to maintain a lively atmosphere.

**Downtowns with character:** Last year Belmont revamped its town codes to encourage development downtown and discourage suburban sprawl. More and more towns across America are, like Belmont, choosing to build, or revert to, such older neighborhood amenities as sidewalks, parks and even alleys.

## Area cities distinctive, can choose to remain so

By ALEX MARSHALL  
Special to The Observer

Walk around the downtowns of the cities surrounding Charlotte — Monroe, Rock Hill, Concord, Davidson or Gastonia, for example — and you'll find something uptown Charlotte lacks. These cities have *character*, a sense of history, a sense of place. They have straight streets where 100-year-old buildings perch on sidewalks and storefront windows invite passersby inside. They have fine Victorian homes with wraparound porches. They offer old hardware stores. They have churches and schools as rooted in their places as old oaks.

Charlotte may have the Panthers, flashy attractions and a lot of money. But most buildings look inward, not to the street, once the river of life flowing through every town. Central Charlotte is strangely devoid of the intricate web of homes, stores, offices and churches that used to make up a city.

Charlotte's special character oozed out during postwar development. Charlotte tore down its past with scarcely a thought. Only traces remain, principally in Fourth Ward, a reconstructed hint at the Charlotte of yesteryear.

But outside Charlotte lie cities with distinct personalities. Michael Gallis, an architect and planner, can even discern separate architectural flavors: "Rock Hill is Richardsonian Romanesque, Monroe is variegated Victorian, Con-

cord is Second Empire, Davidson is Georgian or Palladian. Gastonia is neoclassic."

**The good news is that while Charlotte (like Atlanta) has been willing to destroy much of its architectural past, the Piedmont's history lingers in its smaller cities.**

That makes for a nice balance. You could go to a football game or ballet uptown; then browse for antiques or lick an ice cream cone in Concord or Davidson.

As Concord, Gastonia and all the smaller cities and towns try to shape their identity over the next half-century, leaders should keep that in mind. Those cities may covet Charlotte-style office buildings, shopping malls or subdivisions. (The Rouse Co. plans a 110-acre mall in Gaston County, which is surely stirring enthusiasm now.)

In our talks with development officials from the counties surrounding Mecklenburg, the sole melody was growth-growth-growth — even when that growth, in several counties, turned out to have been primarily in mobile homes.

In Iredell we were told, "Growth is stretching us like a rubber band," but,

"We believe in a man's unfettered right to do with his property as he pleases."

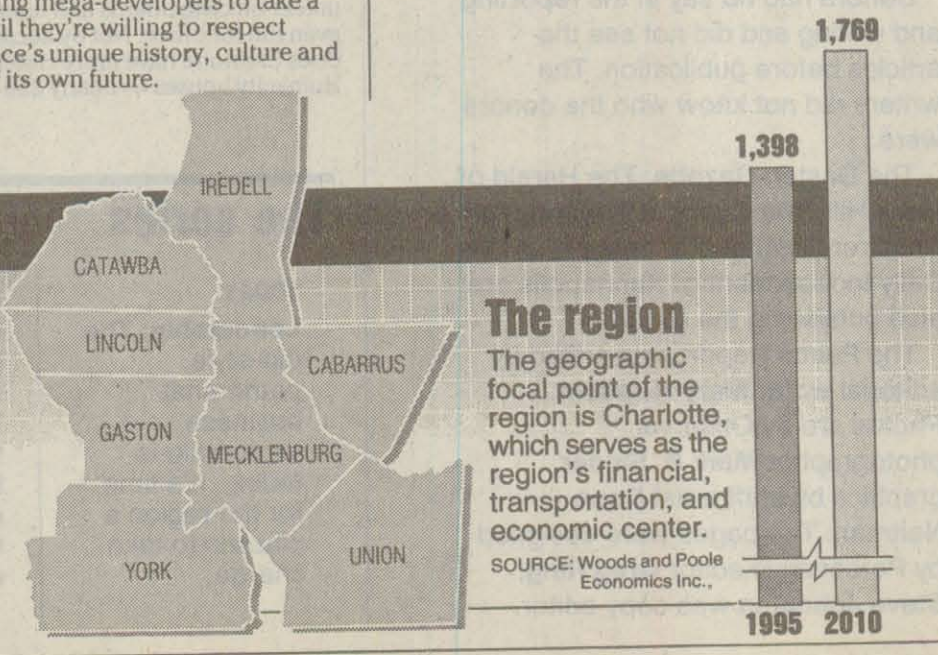
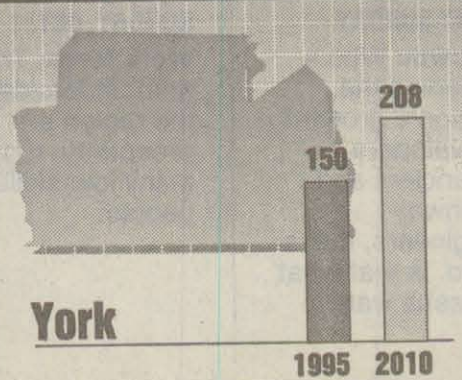
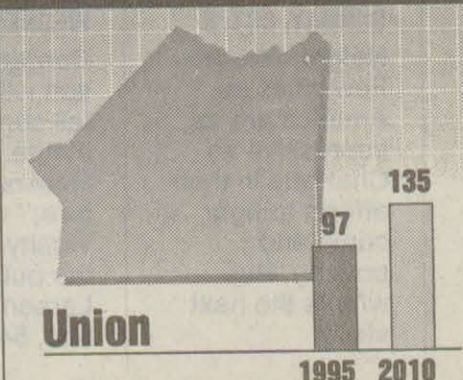
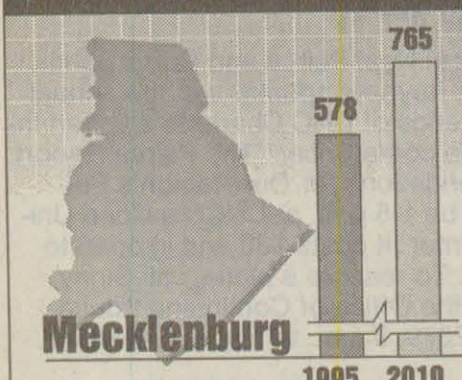
This region seems also to have a fetish for bigness — the massive convention center and stadium in Charlotte, the mega-Speedway in Cabarrus County, the soaring, pink-hued Calvary Church on N.C. 51. All are reminiscent of the big-growth boosterism that pre-occupies Charlotte proper and sometimes makes it look a tad silly to outsiders.

Our question to the ring cities and counties: If you want quality growth without overwhelming size, why not plan consciously for it? What are the realistic goals that represent *appropriate* growth, development matched to your history and traditions?

It is vital for each of the ring cities to develop, preserve and enhance their own historic identities. If a town is tempted, say, to clear away an old church or neighborhood to make way for a new office building or subdivision, it should consider what it will lose as well as what it will gain. If an industry wants to move in, does the location fit the county's own plans?

Reality check: There are big obstacles to restoring and developing older downtowns. We noted dozens of vacant storefronts, deserted streets and serious disinvestment in the cities ringing Charlotte.

Downtown Monroe, with its blocks of largely vacant storefronts, was the most tragic, but not alone. Many others



**The region**  
The geographic focal point of the region is Charlotte, which serves as the region's financial, transportation, and economic center.

SOURCE: Woods and Poole Economics Inc.

# THE PEIRCE REPORT: Shaping a shared future



MARK B. SLUDER/Staff

**Peirce Group:** From left, Alex Marshall, Curtis Johnson, LaRita Barber and Neal Peirce.

## About the Peirce Report

If you're curious how urban writer Neal Peirce's team came to study Charlotte, you have several people to thank — or, if you wish, blame.

Peirce, 63, is a nationally syndicated writer whose column appears in 50 newspapers, including *The Observer*. He studies cities; he has written 10 other Peirce Reports, including one in 1993 for *The News and Observer* of Raleigh.

He's also a sociable and curious fellow. So when he visited Charlotte more than a year ago for a speech at UNC Charlotte, he spent time talking with folks here about the region.

"There were various people saying, 'Wouldn't it be nice to have someone of his stature to come into our community — an outsider, unbiased — to look at where we are?'" remembers Bill McCoy, director of UNCC's Urban Institute.

Bill Spencer, president of the Foundation for the Carolinas, and Mark Heath, president of the Carolinas Partnership, were particularly enthusiastic. Spencer, with the Urban Institute, approached *The Observer* and several smaller daily newspapers, which agreed to publish the report.

In June, Peirce's interview team arrived. With UNCC coordinating, they began work. They talked for seven days with roughly 100 politicians, executives, neighborhood leaders and everyday people about the Charlotte region, past and future. They toured by car and helicopter. Interviewers were:

- Curtis Johnson, 52, Peirce's writing partner. He chairs the Metropolitan Council of Minneapolis-St. Paul, a planning agency. He has been chief of staff to Minnesota Gov. Arne Carlson and executive director of the Twin Cities Citizens League.

- Alex Marshall, 36, city government and urban affairs reporter for *The Virginian-Pilot* of Norfolk.

- LaRita Barber, 32, formerly community services director at the Urban Institute. She is director of internship programs at Queens College.

Peirce, who lives in Washington, was a founder of *The National Journal* and has been political editor of *Congressional Quarterly*. His books include "Citistates" and "The Book of America: Inside 50 States Today."

Funding, raised by the Foundation for the Carolinas, came from: the Carolinas Partnership, the Belk Foundation, the Duke Power Foundation, Foundation for the Carolinas, NationsBank, the Blumenthal Foundation, the Cannon Foundation, First Union National Bank, Southern Bell Telephone Co., Wachovia Bank and Trust Co., Lance Inc., Branch Banking and Trust Co. and First Charter National Bank.

Donors had no say in the reporting and writing and did not see the articles before publication. The writers did not know who the donors were.

The *Gaston Gazette*, *The Herald* of Rock Hill, *The Concord Tribune*, *The Enquirer-Journal* of Monroe and *The Daily Independent* of Kannapolis are also publishing the report.

The Peirce Report was edited by editorial writer Mary Newsom. Photos are by *Observer* photographer Mark B. Sluder, graphics by staff artist Dean Neitman. The pages were designed by Perspective editor Greg Ring; Steve Johnston was copy editor.

## Region

Continued from page 1

leadership training groups, for example, are largely establishment-financed anyway.

But as more groups and people begin to exercise leadership, commands sent down from executive suites are (1) less likely to get sent, and (2) more likely to be circumvented or ignored.

What's more, leadership naturally disperses when problems get tougher. The big guys can hardly snap their fingers and provide answers to today's pressing problems:

- How to prepare a work force that can sustain the region's stunning record of almost full employment?

- How to avoid choking on the congestion of the thousands of cars — in other words, how not to become a Houston or Los Angeles?

- How to build a society that works for all, across races, neighborhoods, counties?

- How to make sure the region has functioning schools, ample parks and that people feel safe from crime?

- How to cultivate big-city opportunities and small-town civility in the same region?

Those who doubt the power transfer in the Charlotte region should ask the man himself, NationsBank Chairman Hugh McColl Jr. We did. "Maybe the baton's already passed," McColl said. "The so-called group that people think controls everything downtown cratered about four or five years ago."

McColl and First Union Chairman Ed Crutchfield acknowledge there was a strong partnership seeking to guide Charlotte, among themselves and such leaders as former Duke Power Co. Chairman Bill Lee, developer Johnny Harris, retail leader and former mayor John Belk, *Observer* Publisher Rolfe Neill and the Dickson family, whose Ruddick Corp. owns Harris Teeter supermarkets and other companies.

But today, they say, the group mainly coalesces on charity issues. Business figures such as Crutchfield disclaim almost any contact with the local political structure.

The regional counterparts to Charlotte's power brokers are well-known — the Cannon family in Cabarrus County, the Close family of York and Lancaster counties, the Broyhills in Catawba and Caldwell, and the Stowes, Carstarphens and other textile titans in Gaston.

This Carolinas culture is wrapped in strong country-city ties. Crutchfield noted many Charlotteans (like McColl and himself) were born in small towns within 100 miles of the city, "sort of one-horse towns where some old rich guy controls the land and the buildings, and they think that's what's happening in Charlotte." Result: The symbolism of power remains, reinforced by Charlotte's soaring bank towers, even if it's less often exercised.

Whether or not McColl and Crutchfield protest too much about their modest power, no one can gainsay the achievements of Charlotte's recent leaders. By their imagination and will power, they played a catalytic role in catapulting Charlotte from the third tier of cities — the category of a Norfolk, Birmingham or Jacksonville — to a firm place in the constellation of major U.S. regional centers.

A generation ago it would have seemed absurd to list Charlotte with Atlanta, Miami, Denver, Dallas, Seattle. No longer. The big banks, the audacious skyline, the NBA and NFL franchises, the thriving airport, the city's dynamism have all seen to that. Charlotte is the Carolinas' undisputed economic capital. Savvy leadership is the obvious reason. As Belk is fond of saying, "Charlotte is a man-made town."

### But will Charlotte emerge as a trend city, with a fast-moving, urban, cosmopolitan life? We doubt it.

Here's a city and region that seems to care more for trim, green lawns than urban spice. It holds some excellent shopping centers, but you can look long and hard for an eccentric coffee-house or used bookstore. Uptown rolls up its sidewalks at 5 p.m. SouthPark is thriving, but urbane it isn't.

Even among residents, the joke is: "Charlotte's a nice place to live, but you wouldn't want to visit there." Or the perhaps apocryphal comment we heard, attributed to a Hornets player: "You can't do nothing in Charlotte except live."

Yet with its quieter style, Charlotte has an immense asset — its culture of cooperation and participation. More than in most cities, citizens are expected to take part in civic projects, volunteer on civic boards and committees, even run for office. Not by accident does Charlotte have more Habitat for Humanity houses — nearly 250 — than



BOB LEVERONE/Staff

**People power:** One of the region's most valuable resources is the "can do" attitude of its people. One example: the thousands of runners who test their endurance each year at the Charlotte *Observer* Marathon.

any other city in America.

In the same spirit, this city is quite open to outsiders. "If people come in and want to work for the community, Charlotte lets them," said Belk. "Some cities are jealous of people coming in and won't let them help. But we're different."

An outsider looks across the Charlotte region and sees a high quotient of what political scientists call "civic capital." Community-based organizations proliferate, as do an extraordinary number of churches, at least some of which support important social work. Charlotte boasts a stronger tradition of racial amity than most other Southern cities, including strong early efforts to make school desegregation work, and election of a black mayor ahead of many Southern towns.

The effort to excel continues. The city government is making a heroic try to "reinvent" itself, to become more responsive to neighborhoods and citizens. Whether or not full city-county merger is approved, the consolidation of multiple Charlotte and Mecklenburg County services stands out as a beacon of common sense among America's quarrelsome metropolitan regions.

Indeed, here's a region where it's at least possible to discuss the idea of merged regional government services. For example, the successful police merger in Charlotte-Mecklenburg could be tried in surrounding counties, where the elected sheriff is becoming an anomaly in an increasingly urban age. Think further: Wouldn't regional fire and emergency medical services make sense, too?

And consider Rock Hill's strategic planning process, begun in the early '80s, which has transformed it from a depressed, unemployment-plagued mill town to one of the nation's most economically vibrant, highly attractive suburban centers. The transformation was accomplished in part, leaders told us, by convincing firms "that if they were in Rock Hill, they were really in Charlotte." Yet Rock Hill, with its public art, quality industrial parks, restored downtown and emphasis on neighborhood revival, is anxious not to bleed into Charlotte proper.

### Perils exist, and they start with the region's success. Does Charlotte aspire to be more than a boom town? When an *Observer* columnist recently asked, "Would you challenge a bulldozer for anything in Charlotte?" only a tiny

### proportion of readers offered any examples of physical places to which they felt real attachment.

Can thousands of newcomers be integrated successfully into the region's civic life? Newcomers are arriving in such numbers that thousands are in danger of being mere "residents," not true "citizens." A number of newcomers, interviewed in shopping malls by our colleague Alex Marshall, talked of the Charlotte region as if it were a disposable commodity, not a community to which they have reciprocal obligations.

More challenges relate to development. For example: Since the 1960s, the dominant form of construction has been self-contained, single-income-group subdivisions, each with one entrance onto an arterial road and a country-club-type sign proclaiming a Quail Hollow or whatever, hinting strongly of safety, seclusion, exclusivity. Missing, as a rule, are connecting roads to the next development.

Such problems are typical. It's no accident the Charlotte region's greatest pockets of congestion turn up in areas most recently developed — exactly the opposite of what one would expect.

The developers' land-use decisions will increasingly leave the public to suffer serious inconvenience, from long driving times and congestion to worse air quality and a palpable loss of community.

Is it too heretical to suggest, in this land of free enterprise and ferocious distrust of government, that abdication so much public decision-making, and letting private developers determine a lot of the region's shape and form, may have been a very bad idea?

The region's cities and counties should return to the practice, common until the 1940s, of laying out and mapping streets. On a big wall at city hall or the county government office should be a map of how the city will grow over the next half-century. It might take 40 years before a developer paves that street and puts in lots, but when that happens, it will fit into a whole.

People will predictably reiterate that such planning smacks of socialism. Again and again, we heard that this is a region of prickly, independent, "Don't Tread on Me" folks. The Scotch-Irish pioneers who settled the banks of the Catawba River brought their deep resentment of aristocrats, government and the authorities, and those sentiments endure.

But even if government is viewed with a jaundiced eye, does it make sense to assume a mill owner, a banker or a subdivision builder knows best?

We believe there's a third route —

broader citizen participation, not just in elections but thousands of forums.

### The region's citizens need to take charge. The native intelligence of the people of this region needs a workout. The citizens of the Charlotte citistate must address the most critical challenges of the times, personally, intensively, in all kinds of formats.

Take one problem: the poverty, crime and social chaos that plague some of Charlotte's older neighborhoods. Rural areas have parallel pockets of deprivation. These problems already besmirch the region's reputation. Unattended, they could prove deeply injurious in the future. A number of constructive, neighborhood-based recovery strategies have been proposed, based on self-help, accountability and strategic public investment. But is the whole society — businesses, nonprofits, universities and affluent citizens — ready to provide the political and financial support to get progress rolling and sustain it?

If a growing proportion of the region's crime problem is rooted in youth crime, for example, are youth being called on to help analyze the problem, work with peers, suggest solutions? Are young people in general being drawn into discussions of the Charlotte citistate's choices and future?

Is UNC Charlotte, with its huge repository of brainpower, being tapped sufficiently? UNCC and the community colleges are making an effort to contribute to the region's public dialogue. UNCC has many students engaged in some form of community service. Regardless of the discipline, UNCC officials told us, the university does not hire department heads without being clear that relating to the community will be part of the job.

But the community shouldn't wait for outreach from the academics. They need to be sought out, challenged, drawn into critical public debates.

One example: North Carolinians are debating subsidies to draw industries. UNCC should be ready, perhaps working with the local press, to do cost analyses on subsidy deals as they're proposed.

Finally, consider government itself. In the new international economy, regions must be keenly competitive. That means not just wages, but a technically skilled work force, a clean environment, quality health care, arts and professional sports, parks and open space, and, especially, efficient government.

Good or bad, government makes up roughly a fifth of a local economy. If government is inefficient, so is the citistate.

Only informed citizens can hold government accountable. Services must be merged, bureaucracies thinned, performance benchmarks set. Public-private partnerships for more economical and effective local government must be devised across the region's neighborhood, county and state lines. If not, the discordant cacophony of competing governments will start driving new businesses away.

### It won't do any more just to say, "No — I don't like taxes, I don't like government, I distrust city people or minorities or whoever, so get government off my back, let free enterprise reign and everything will be fine."

Some of the Charlotte region's radical populists seem to go that far. We believe these new conservatives should be welcomed into the political debate, since they bring insights and challenge many of government's encrusted and outmoded ways of operating. But they should not go unchallenged. Because at the end of the day, real solutions to shared problems must be found, or the region will falter.

Thousands of citizens of the "can-do" Charlotte region, operating across the barriers of political persuasion, class and color, need to think through their problems and challenges and design their own collaborative answers.

The region's newspapers can enrich the process immeasurably. So can the broadcast media, broadening the debate to thousands of people who might otherwise not be engaged. Churches, Rotaries, chambers of commerce, schools — all should be facilitators and leaders.

Gather these forces and, we believe, there will be no stopping the Charlotte citistate, advancing confidently into the 21st century.

## The series

### TODAY

**Leadership:** The old-style, patriarchal business leadership is fading. It's time for the region's citizens to take charge.

### NEXT SUNDAY

**Growth:** Who's planning the region's growth? Developers, financiers and highway engineers, that's who. Is that what citizens want?

### SUNDAY, OCT. 1

**Work force:** The grim underside of the region's prosperity: too many low-skilled people.

### SUNDAY, OCT. 8

**Neighborhoods:** Few cities in America are as impressive as Charlotte in their efforts to fight crime and poverty. But what's the next step?

### WEDNESDAY, OCT. 11

**Conference:** Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson will be keynote speakers at the annual fall conference of UNC Charlotte's Urban Institute. The conference, "The Peirce Report: Recommendations for Our Region's Future," will be 1-5 p.m. at UNCC's Cone University Center. It costs \$30 and is open to the public. To reserve a place, call Ginny Larson in the Office of Continuing Education, 547-2879, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays.

PART II

# Growth

## Put people in charge of region's future

By NEAL PEIRCE  
And CURTIS JOHNSON  
Special to The Observer

**T**he Charlotte region is like a precocious teenager — fast-growing and full of promise. Population is surging. Uptown Charlotte has become a globally recognized financial center. The airport buzzes with flights to hundreds of cities. The surrounding cities boast new economic energy as they debate how to hold on to small-town ways.

A citistate of rising prominence, Charlotte anchors the mighty Carolinas economic engine. It justifiably aspires to be a crossroads of finance and commerce, an urban center with the world prominence of a Milan, Frankfurt or Hong Kong.

**Maybe the Charlotte citistate is destined to be a formless, chaotic region, growing without vision or plan.**

But, like a teen, the Charlotte region isn't sure what it really wants to be when tomorrow's opportunities arrive. Should the future just wash over the region? We think there's a better way: an infusion of democracy into the planning process.

One of Charlotte's newly elected conservative populists told us: "Anytime a planner has a vision, I get very nervous. It means taxes will go up."

Yet, great urban regions don't just happen; they are planned. They are result of vision and inspiration, just like great corporations or universities, or a Columbus sailing for the New World or Americans planning to land on the moon.

Again and again, folks told us that to plan the physical growth of the Charlotte region — especially across county or state lines — was an act of folly. The very thought of planning was belittled; people considered it futile, or socialistic, or perhaps even worse, anti-market.

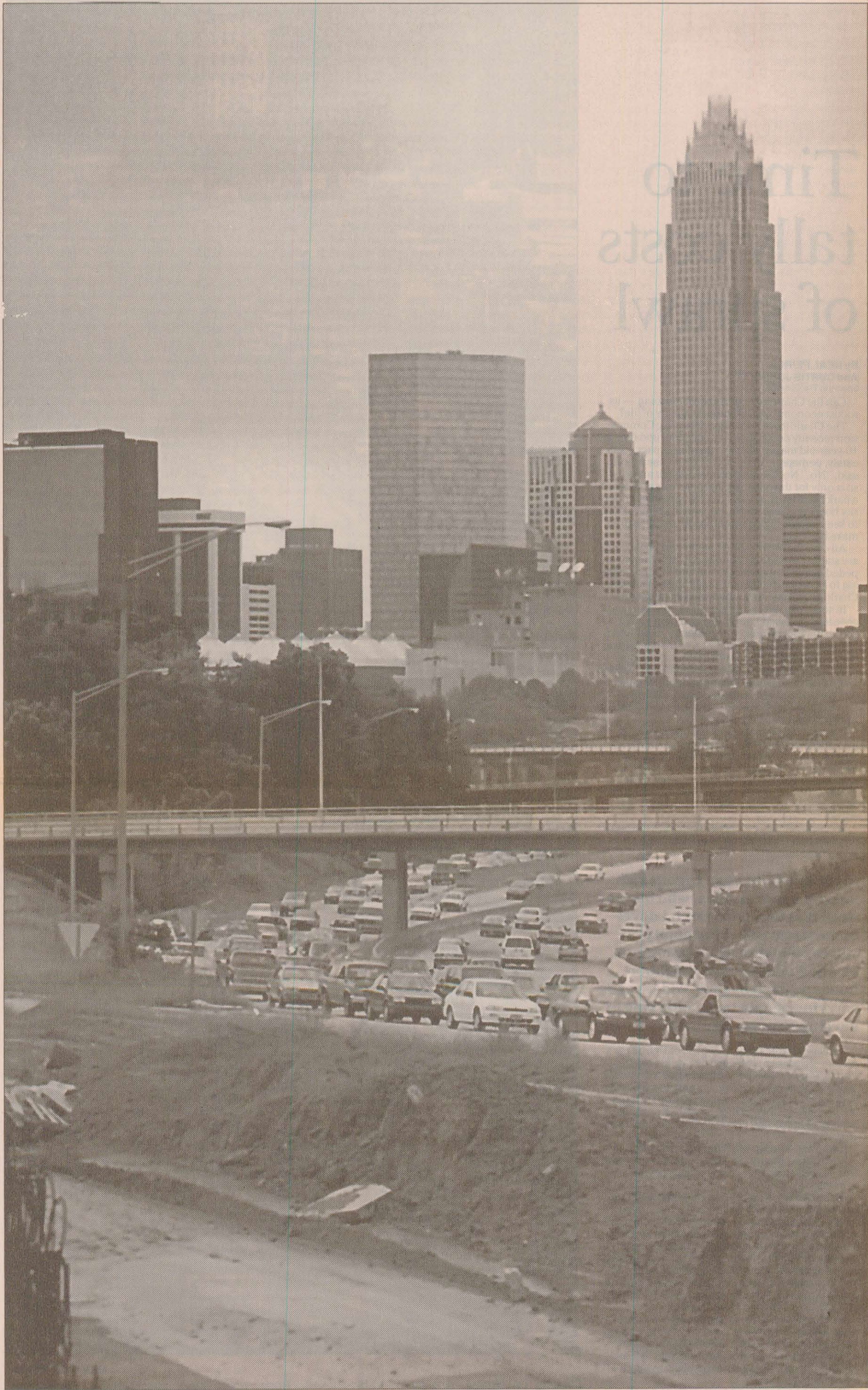
We encountered some unconventional developers, such as Jim Gross and Tony Pressley, building uptown condos or South Boulevard lofts. And Charlotte has no monopoly on excellent town planners; Belmont's Demetri Baches and Davidson's Tim Keane illustrate that.

But they're a tiny band, a thin voice against people who say typical suburbia is cheaper, its houses bigger and new subdivisions a "safe" place where toddlers can run carefree across wide grassy lawns.

One developer even admitted: "Charlotte's prospered from cheap labor and cheap land. And it can be done a little bit longer. Today it's still cheaper to go out by the speedway and slam in another development."

For some of the new conservative populists winning office, even zoning —

Please see **Growth**/page 8



MARK B. SLUDER/Staff

**Crossroads to the future:** Traffic pours out of uptown Charlotte along Independence Boulevard, even as bulldozers prepare the way for the new limited-access Independence Freeway. As Independence pushes east, it is reminiscent of America's ugliest, jumbled commercial strips.

## Challenges to the Charlotte region

■ The region's people — not just highway engineers, private subdivision builders or shopping center impresarios — should take control of how the region grows.

■ UNCC should open a special center to let citizens use sophisticated computer projection and simulation technology, to illustrate choices on how roads will be built, town centers constructed, residential areas filled out. Developers would have to take their proposals here first. Computers could analyze effects on traffic, jobs, the environment. The media should publicize

the studies, so the whole region can take part in the debate.

■ Heed architect-planner Michael Gallis. He says decision time is now for the region to grow coherently, not sprawl shapelessly. Tie the ring cities to Charlotte with strong growth corridors and protect the land in between.

■ Hear warning signals from elsewhere — from Denver, Little Rock, Idaho, New Jersey, and a ringing manifesto from the Bank of America in California — about the staggering costs of unchanneled, unformed sprawl. Emulate the Portland,

Ore., regional planning process, in which thousands of citizens get a chance to make clear choices among growth alternatives.

■ End the region's constant bickering over road and transit planning. Insist the four metropolitan planning organizations get their act together.

■ Build transitways along major highway corridors for exclusive use by buses, vans, jitneys — any legitimate, multipassenger service. Encourage private transit providers. Try a regional gas tax to pay for improvements.

## THE PEIRCE REPORT

Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson, nationally known writers on cities and city growth, have taken an in-depth look at the Charlotte region, as they have done previously in 10 other cities. This is the second in their four-part series.

### Inside

Will the Charlotte region repeat the traffic and air pollution nightmares of Los Angeles and Houston?

Too few people recognize the need for planning and acting to sustain the region's best qualities.

# Shaping a shared future

## Time to tally costs of sprawl

By NEAL PEIRCE  
And CURTIS JOHNSON  
Special to The Observer

Can the Charlotte region keep it all going — its robust economy and its enviable quality of life? The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission recently posed that very question, updating a 10-year-old master plan. On page after page, delicately, perhaps anxious not to offend, the report said, "No." No, because people assume mass transit is only for the poor. No, because voters crushed a park bond issue in 1992. No, because higher-density housing is reviled. No, because it seems easier to keep adding highways and wider roads than to make hard land-use decisions.

All over the nation, cities, banks and consultants are starting to dissect the hidden costs of unimpeded, sprawling development, and they are learning to listen to what people really want. But in the Charlotte citistate, is anybody paying attention?

In some places, yes. In Matthews, business and civic leaders asked Lawrimore Communication Inc. to find out residents' priorities for downtown.

A phone survey, followed by a more intense survey of a third of the respondents, followed by a mail survey to businesses and other groups, yielded surprisingly widespread support for better parks, bicycle trails, stores, restaurants and a library — plus support for downtown Matthews as the center of a family-oriented community.

It's clear the people of this region like where they are. Whether new or longtime residents, they're proud of the relaxing environment, the healthy economy and their choices for working and rearing families. In the most recent Charlotte Observer/WSOC-TV Carolinas Poll, most respondents saw growth and quality of life as well-balanced.

We fear that too few people recognize the need for planning — and acting — to sustain the region's best qualities.

**In the headlong rush to consume today's opportunities, who has noticed that new commercial development leaves behind empty stores, abandoned shopping centers and middle-class neighborhoods scarred by ever-wider roads carrying people to the next ring of development farther out?**

It's easy to write off early signals of Detroit- or Atlanta-style inner-city social decay. It's easy to stop looking closely at neighborhoods where only marginal businesses survive. It's easy to get used to bulldozers scraping off another pasture for large houses on large lots, as though we had only big families to house and nearly no limits to land or energy.

It won't be so easy when the bill comes due. Across the country, a wake-up call has sounded. People are demanding, and getting, a fuller accounting.

In New Jersey, Rutgers University compared the cost to the state for 20-year futures on alternative tracks — one by today's trends of sprawl development, a second channeling employment and residential development more selectively, especially in and around existing towns and cities. The numbers were staggering. The sprawl alternative added \$1.3 billion in capital costs — roads, sewers, schools — and \$400 million in operating expenses (in today's dollars). So much for a "free" market.

When a Denver-area citizens group analyzed what unchecked growth costs, they found an average tax hit of \$7,000 per household to build new schools while other schools closed, plus at least \$30,000 per new house for extra highways and road improvements.

There's no reason long-term costs of development should be a mystery. Computer models can lay it all out. Consulting firms are changing the old formulas of showing simple growth in value per capita to complex comparisons of the value of new growth and the cost to the public of supporting it.

One such firm, Tischler and Associates, studied a large-scale new development for Little Rock, Ark. They found that, indeed, the revenue from new development would exceed the capital and operating expenses necessary for new services. But they also showed the economic impact on other parts of the



Choking on sprawl: A view of traffic-choked Independence Boulevard near Sharon Amity Road, where block after block of commercial establishments can be reached only by car.

city. They showed a pattern of "disinvestment" costs: more police, housing to be torn down, arson investigators, bigger judicial loads. When those costs were considered, they overwhelmed gains from new development. Result: Little Rock isn't rejecting new growth but is focusing on revitalizing its core neighborhoods.

Post Falls, Idaho, a low-tax haven outside Spokane, Wash., had thought it was smart to let devel-

opers whip up malls and big-box stores. But when they applied this new analysis to their growth plan a few years back, folks were shocked to learn they were nearly guaranteeing soaring tax loads or municipal bankruptcy in less than 10 years.

Last winter, the nation's second largest bank (so far), Bank of America, sent seismic tremors across California by jointly releasing a major report that said sprawl development was crippling California's

**CALL US** 

■ What's your opinion of the conclusions in the Peirce report?

In Charlotte: 377-4444 and enter 1006

Outside Charlotte: 1-800-432-1802 and enter 1006

We'll print a sampling of comments.

economic future. Having loaned millions to finance a generation of sprawl, the bank's move seemed as much confession as call to action. It set off a fierce — and overdue — debate.

The manifesto, produced with a couple of non-profits and a state agency, said sprawl had fueled California's "unparalleled economic and population boom" of past decades. But, it said, "Unchecked sprawl has shifted from an engine of California's growth to a force that threatens to inhibit growth and degrade our quality of life."

Among the costs to California: businesses and workers caught in long commutes, America's worst air quality, severe farmland loss and "abandonment of people and investments in older communities."

New home buyers or growing businesses on the urban fringe may find sprawl inexpensive, said the Bank of America, but "the ultimate cost — to those homeowners, to the government and society at large — is potentially crippling."

Will Charlotte's mega-banks face the same realities several years from now? Why not use bank influence, now, to curb sprawl development before the worst occurs?

**Curbing sprawl and creating higher density — more people living in less space — are imperative if you want to live in an attractive, energy-saving, land-conserving region.**

No one, including us, wants ugly blocks of apartment buildings. But you can build attractive, pleasant neighborhoods with higher densities. We think this market is ready for alternatives to sprawl — and we're not alone in that opinion.

York County's Close family, descendants of Springs Mills founder Leroy Springs, has drawn up a master plan for developing 5,500 acres outside Fort Mill that offers radical change.

The plan envisions compact villages designed to encourage walking, and mixes stores, offices, apartments and houses. It clearly limits development outside each village. The family has already set aside 2,025 acres to create a greenway that will link the villages.

If the project is successful, it should encourage others in the region to think more creatively. Not everyone years for, or can afford, that large home on that large suburban lot.

The people of Portland, Ore., 1.6 million strong, have a more compact growth pattern because they planned for it and believe in it and demand it. They are creating density and more open spaces, places where you can walk easily and have little need for cars. Their quality of life is envied and admired across the country. The region is so desirable that 1 million new inhabitants are expected in the next years.

**Folks in the Portland region are not remarkably different from those in Charlotte, Cramerton, Marshville, Mooresville or Kannapolis. But they don't think some anonymous "they" controls the physical face of their region.**

Citizens play a major part in decision-making. Major public hearings and participation have been routine since Oregon adopted a state land use law in the '70s and gave the Portland area power to create an urban growth boundary around itself.

Recently, in the Portland region's "2040" planning process, 500,000 questionnaires were mailed, posing choices for citizens. Hundreds of meetings and dozens of interactive radio and television programs followed. Residents were asked whether: they wanted more development on transit lines (83% said yes), to encourage growth in Portland and other city centers of the region (77% yes), to reduce new lot sizes for more compact development (58% yes), and to reduce commercial space parking (55%).

Poll Charlotte-area residents today, and you wouldn't get those results. But let the public into decision-making, develop and debate alternative visions, and we bet some different models would win converts.

The problem is that the Charlotte citistate isn't even having the debate.

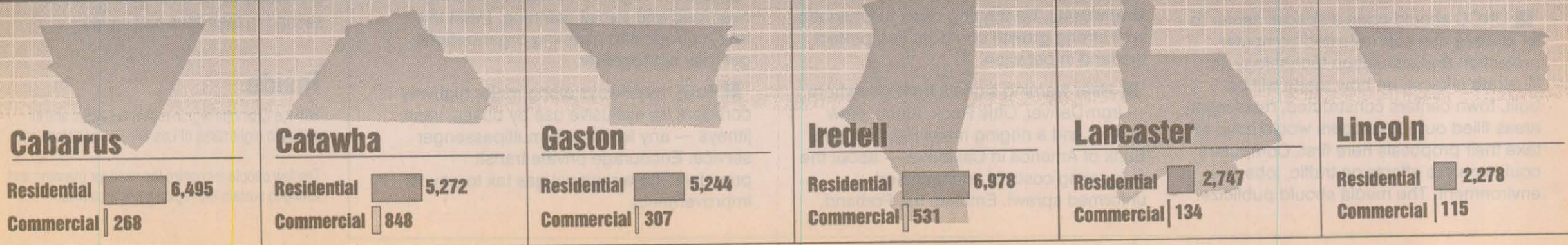
Forty-seven times, Charlotte Chamber delegations have visited other cities to look and learn. This year, they went to Portland. Reactions ranged from envy to writing off Portland as "too different."

We humbly suggest that's not good enough.

An appropriate response would be positive action to engage the citistate's people in debate over the growth patterns of their region, now and into the 21st century.

As one seasoned civic activist put it: "Charlotte invented inter-city trips. It's time to use one."

### Building permits in the region (Residential and commercial permits issued between 1990-94)



# On the road to a nightmare

To avoid it: Plan, use your corridors and be creative

By NEAL PEIRCE  
And CURTIS JOHNSON  
Special to The Observer

Transportation in the Charlotte region is a mess. Four separate metropolitan planning organizations try to decide which major roads get built and when. Why four? No one could tell us.

When more people ride buses or carpool, every driver benefits. But what happened in the past 10 years in the Charlotte area? The percentage of people commuting alone to work rose from 71% to 84%. Transit use dropped from about 5% to less than 2%. Fewer than 8% of commuters carpool. The number of persons per car keeps falling. Soon, statistically, the trend would be less than one person per car.

So in 1993 a Committee of 100 was convened, headed by Bill Simms, president of Transamerica Reinsurance. Its report urged that major corridors, especially those from Charlotte to the ring cities, should carry most of the traffic. Build roads where needed, it said, expand bus service and put aside money for future rail systems.

The problem? All that costs money. The Committee of 100 studied alternatives and proposed a 1% regional sales tax. People howled, and the whole plan died.

**As outsiders, we say: Folks, you can't keep pretending you can get what you want for nothing. Getting a reputation for bad air is bad news. You're off and on the list of air quality "non-attainment" areas, as the feds so politely put it. Imagine regular TV clips of cars trapped in choking traffic, crawling along Providence Road or N.C. 51.**

Will this region repeat the traffic and air pollution nightmares of Los Angeles and Houston?

Union County commissioner Clayton Loflin warns that transportation could "become the speed bump" slowing the region's economic progress.

Perhaps someone should round up officials of the four MPOs, put them in a room and tell them to create a coherent plan for the whole Charlotte region. Would it be politically difficult? Yes. But this isn't Bosnia. They should work together.

Planning regionally would make it less easy to ignore the five obvious transportation corridors, radiating from Charlotte to the smaller cities some 20 miles out. Four run along I-85 and I-77; the other is U.S. 74 to Monroe.

U.S. 74 is so congested that residents in southeast Mecklenburg drive miles to avoid it.

**The so-called outer loop, under construction about 10 miles from uptown Charlotte, will surely spread development to multiple locations. It may well produce traffic loads and tax implications — for more roads, sewer lines and other infrastructure — voters will find outrageous.**

Countermeasures, to concentrate growth instead of spreading it, are imperative. Corridors to the ring cities are the most logical answer. But how do you focus growth there?

Most of the land between corridors should be preserved for desperately needed parks and open space, and select industries that need exceptionally large spaces.

What incentives would work? There's no need to invent a thing.

Americans know how to take sig-



MARK S. SLUDER/Staff

**Home-grown prophet:** Charlotte planner Michael Gallis at the intersection of I-77 and I-485 south of Charlotte, a key juncture for natural corridors that radiate out to the region's historic ring cities

## The Gospel according to Michael Gallis

■ 'No basketball team wins with five centers or five guards,' says Gallis. All the region's cities make the team, bringing different assets.

In an office walk-up on South Tryon Street is an architect whose walls and shelves burst with visions of the region's future. Michael Gallis with slides and booklets of computer-generated maps and nonstop explanations of how economy, land use and transportation are linked, tells anyone who'll listen that decision-time is now.

With the enthusiasm of a Billy Graham, Gallis shows the choices still available, if citizens act. He explains the inevitability of \$2 billion or \$3 billion of public investment in transportation over the next 15 or 20 years. The real question is how, and what results to expect.

The Gallis Gospel is straightforward: Capitalize on the natural corridors radiating from Charlotte and the centers the region's historic cities represent. Gallis recalls consulting for Rock Hill, helping it sort out where to fit in, and stumbling onto

the corridors and rings of the entire region. Growth was moving out from Charlotte, while it was also growing inward in ring cities such as Rock Hill.

**Rock Hill has since shown dramatically how powerfully positioned these smaller cities are — capable of building excellent lifestyles as well as tying their economic fortunes to the Charlotte citistate.**

"No basketball team wins with five centers or five guards," Gallis says. All the region's cities make the team, bringing different assets.

Gallis emphasizes the new reality — people live where they want and work all over the region. Getting industry to the region, not to a particular town, is the real achievement.

But it's equally critical to see the region's form. Unlike unplanned Houston or out-of-control Atlanta, the Charlotte region has five natural corridors stretching to its historic ring cities: U.S. 74 to Monroe, I-85 north to Concord and Kannapolis and southwest to Gastonia, and I-77 south to Rock Hill and north toward Statesville.

Gallis tirelessly urges high-quality development along the corridors and, especially, near the ring cities, rather than a few million more pounds of concrete roads crisscrossing the region.

Few American regions have a home-grown prophet with such a clear and practical vision. Gallis' concept may be the only means of giving manageable form and long-term affordability to the growth of the Charlotte citistate.

— Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson

nals from the tax code. The region could offer a lower rate of commercial property taxes for firms that locate within a quarter-mile of the corridors. The Minnesota Legislature enacted such a policy last spring, to encourage better land-use decisions.

Put something in the corridors that gives people a transportation choice. It's clear that Charlotteans' overwhelming preference is for the personal auto. We won't argue that rails will get people out of cars. As NationsBank Chairman Hugh McColl Jr. put it succinctly, "It's hard to get Southerners on a train."

Instead, some transportation improvement money should go toward providing two dedicated lanes in each corridor to link major employment and activity centers. For example, the Arwood industrial area, the airport, SouthPark, University City and uptown would be linked to the ring cities. These dedicated lanes would be Super-HOV (high-occupancy vehicle) lanes, requiring, let's say, public transit vehicles or those carrying four or more passengers.

The Charlotte bus system might schedule express service in these lanes. So could others. If not smothered by protectionist regulations, a variety of private services might show up: shuttle vans, taxis, maybe even jitney autos, which could carry passengers within certain areas, cheaper than taxis.

The overriding theme should be competition, no monopolies. Committee member Bayles Mack of Fort Mill, is an S.C. Department of

Transportation commissioner and sees positives in private opportunity. He pointed out a private service taking people to work in beach areas from the Florence-Pee Dee community. Affordable fares, about \$3, plus good management make the service attractive and profitable.

■ "Transitway" stations, starting perhaps with simple, covered waiting areas, should be built at logical gathering points — park-and-ride lots, shopping centers, major intersections. They could become magnets for such commuter-oriented services as dry cleaning and day care centers.

■ Why not a public-private partnership in which a government-run computer tells drivers where passengers need rides? The private sector supplies the drivers, wheels, fuel and insurance. You zip to your job, sip coffee and digest the morning paper on the way. Maybe it's \$5, but you'd pay that much to park uptown. The service is door-to-door and customized to your hours. Technology is producing pinpoint

dispatching software. Entrepreneurial transit operators should find it easy to direct drivers to multiple addresses, keeping most seats full while delivering a timely trip to each passenger.

By building the infrastructure for a flexible transit system and avoiding regulatory barriers, the Charlotte region could lead, rather than follow, on transportation — without soaring public costs.

The logical source for building stations and transitways should be regular highway money. If more is needed, what about a regionwide surcharge on auto licenses or gasoline? Auto owners in this country generally pay no more than 60% of the costs of providing highways, streets, bridges and traffic maintenance. Paying a few extra cents more a gallon seems a fair bargain for cutting the overall cost of keeping up with ever more traffic.

What's vital is an open mind. What about creative ways to make bicycles available for people hurrying around uptown or around Gastonia, Concord or Rock Hill? Can you justify restored trolley service up South Boulevard? Can a resourceful campaign make carpooling work better (again)?

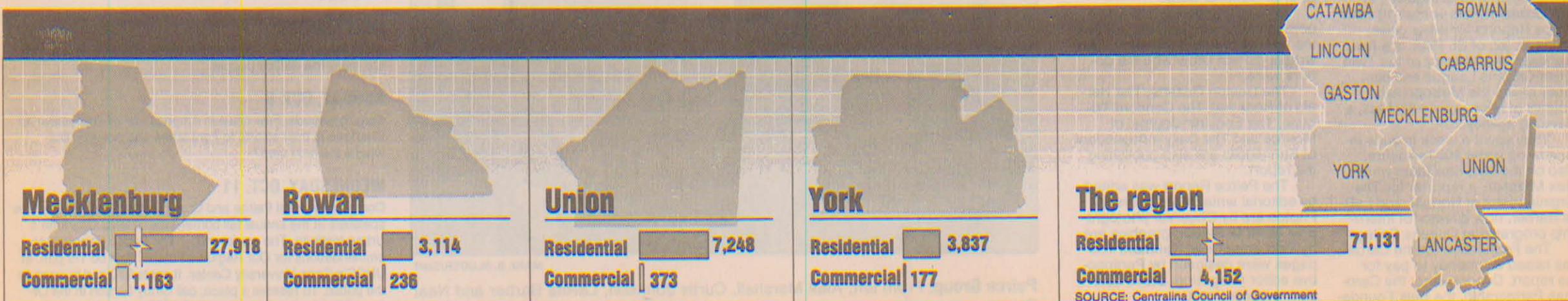
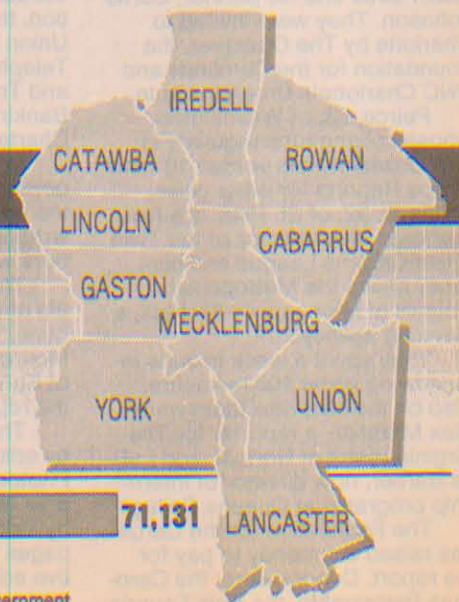
The region's people seem to think they must either continue overwhelming automobile use or build expensive rail systems, in a place where densities appear too light for such a system.

That's a false choice. Superior choices can be made, avoiding congestion and pollution and not costing a fortune.



Associated Press

**Where Charlotte may be headed:** Could the smog-filled skies and freeway-fractured landscape of Los Angeles be in Charlotte's future? Consider: In the past 10 years, people commuting alone to work rose from 71% to 84%, while transit use dropped from 5% to less than 2%.



# Put people in charge

## Growth

Continued from page 5

ineffectual as it often seems — is close to an illegal "taking" of private property.

Maybe the Charlotte citistate is destined to be a formless, chaotic region, growing without vision or plan to relate homes to workplaces, or where parks should be built, and how schools fit in. Laissez-faire, let-'er-rip development — maybe that's what people want.

Except it's largely an illusion. In a thousand small, unconnected pieces, the region is being planned. Its form is being decided by state transportation engineers or political appointees on the state Board of Transportation. They set the paths and timetables of major roads. It is being planned by subdivision developers and shopping center developers, who smell out a good land deal and build when they think the market is ripe. Toss in the daily, disjointed decisions of land use attorneys, mortgage bankers and construction firms, and you have the region's true decision-makers.

**The descendants of Charlotte's thrifty, self-sufficient pioneers missed it. In their nearly theological brand of individualism, they thought they were in charge. They weren't. They let highway engineers and developers and builders and financiers call the shots.**

Many handsome developments have been built. But the cost of zero comprehensive planning is being posted. Consider:

- Choked highways like Independence Boulevard. The worst sections, requiring an auto to go 50 feet from one store to the next, are reminiscent of some of America's ugliest, jumbled commercial strips like Denver's Colfax Avenue and San Jose's El Camino Real.

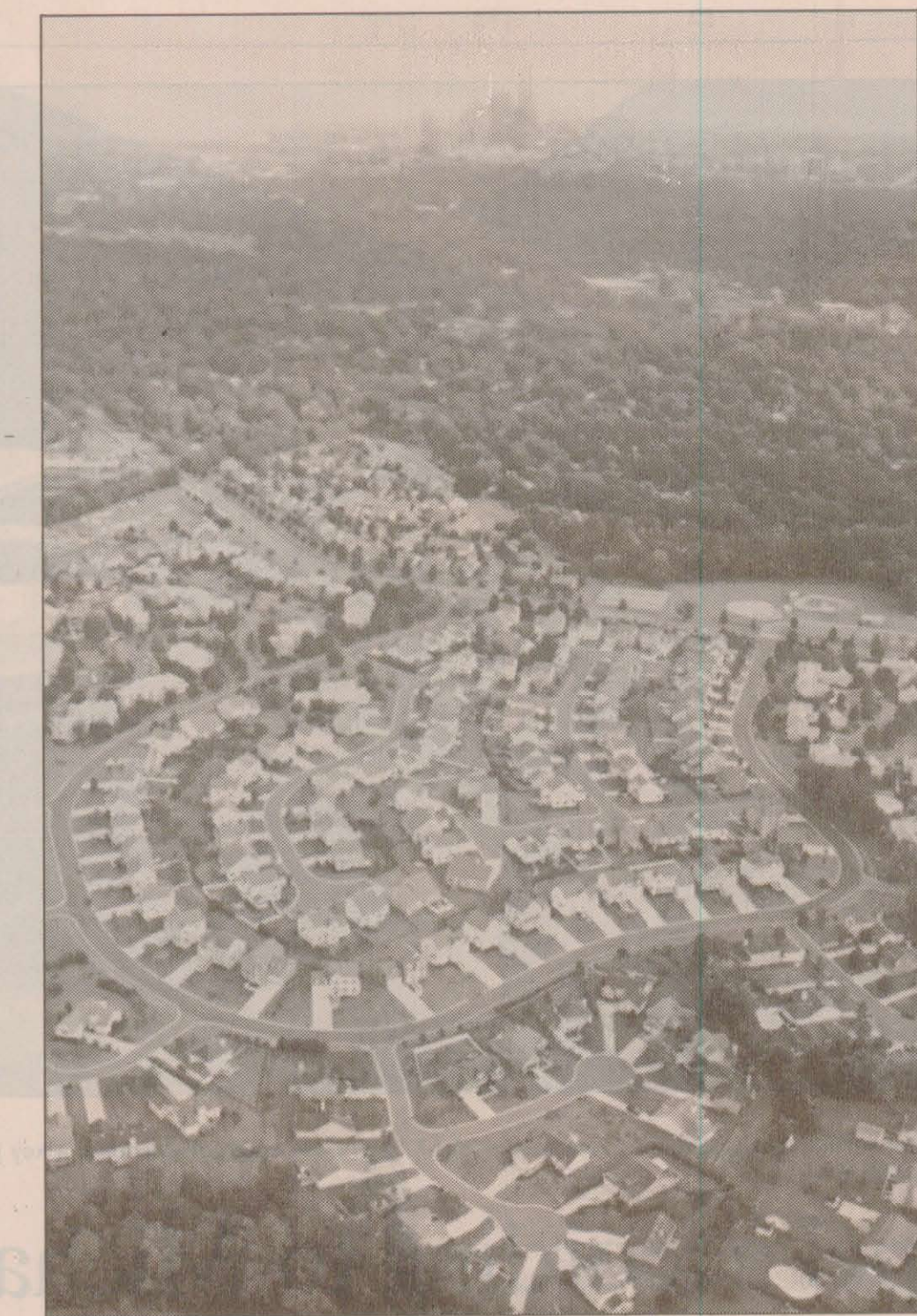
- Acres of urban devastation in and around central Charlotte.

- A cancer of abandonment creeping beyond the center city. One example: the barren commercial sites and abandoned stores along North Tryon Street. In the words of David Walters, a UNC Charlotte architecture professor, various commercial sites are "strip-mined for their brief potential and then discarded, leaving behind empty husks of dead and deadly space." Continue the pattern, and more rings of abandonment will appear, oozing deep into suburbia.

- Callousness toward place, and a lack of buildings, squares, public parks or monuments to which people feel any loyalty. Land is treated as a commodity, not much superior to pork bellies.

- Failure to set aside and nurture common community spaces, leaving the Charlotte region one of the most park-poor in all of America. This is a community in which "The Arboretum" turns out to be a shopping mall, not a park, and the shoreline of Lake Norman, a magnificent amenity, is sold off for private homes and marinas. The irony is that when Charlotte's powerful leaders see a chance to make a leap forward, even if it means small spurts of big planning, they do it. Their love for "the free market" didn't stop them from having a large airport ready when airlines built their hub system in the 1980s. They aggressively pursued big sports teams. They shrewdly took advantage of North Carolina's liberal banking laws.

The imbalance is strange, and dangerous: Too rarely has the same energy and willingness to look ahead and act smart gone into a strategy to think com-



Photos by MARK B. SLUDER/Staff

**Where are the parks?** Failure to set aside common community spaces has left the Charlotte region one of the most park-poor in America. The Marsh Road area south of uptown is an example of how most open space has been developed in recent years. The photo at right shows Selwyn Farms in 1981; today the area is a labyrinth of single family homes and condominiums.

prehensively — to assure livability, decent transportation, a logical layout of major facilities, parks and workplaces across the region. Instead of planning, the pattern is: Do what you want, get what you can get. We'll figure out how it adds up later — maybe.

**No successful enterprise would settle for operating on a hundred disjointed plans, some enforced and some not, hoping for the best. This is like throwing the "Hail Mary" pass on every down.**

Yet even today, the opportunity to plan and build a coherent and attractive Charlotte citistate is not lost. Our helicopter ride exposed some unfortunate, haphazard development. But the blanket of green, the forest cover, remains remarkably intact.

This region is so large that, with 1.3 million people, it is one of the country's least densely populated. Its lushness, its trees and grass, seems to mean a great deal to its people. They are immensely fond of the soaring trees and landscaped lawns, which they associate with their rural roots and a quieter life.

But planning? Not us. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission churns out reports urging more density, linking land use to transportation, long-range thinking about parks and open spaces. The reports attract favorable comment in national planning circles. But at home, no one seems to read them.

Too many people in the Charlotte citistate are spectators, not participants, in planning their region.

What's the cure? We nominate the people — citizens working to assure a sound, shared future.

Charlotte and Mecklenburg need a shot of democracy into their planning process. So does the entire region, counties whose destinies are irreversibly entwined with Charlotte.

Charlotte's "City Within The City" effort and The Observer's "Taking Back Our Neighborhoods" series, each fo-

cused on Charlotte's most imperiled neighborhoods, are steps in this direction. So is the recent organization of the Queen City Congress, a coalition of 30 neighborhoods near uptown Charlotte. But the next step must be much broader — to take the idea of participatory citizen planning to all neighborhoods and counties. Is there potential for a region-wide group to help people concerned with issues of quality, sprawl and sound land use?

The answer is "yes, if" — if more energy and backing can go into the Central Carolinas Citizens Forum, which evolved several years ago from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Citizens Forum. Though it has faltered in recent years, the forum has multicounty membership. It may begin working with the Queen City Congress. And it is setting up a network of citizens across the region to communicate on Charlotte's Web, a community computer network.

A prime way for the region's banks, utilities and other corporate citizens to invigorate healthy debate on the region's growth would be to put some serious dollars behind the Citizens Forum, or another group like it.

The clock is ticking, and we could detect "no other show in town" for sensitive planning advocacy.

**But how can interested citizens truly have a voice? We suggest giving them the tools planners have — statistics, projections, maps, practical information. The results may amaze you.**

Citizen input should come before a project's plans are final. Neighbors and interested others should be welcome.

Let's say the issue is a new shopping center. Using computer simulation, nearby residents could view the options. Should the buildings be one, two or three stories? Should upper floors be apartments? Should parking be at front, side or rear? Should sidewalks, rather than parking lots, connect the stores?

The citizens' answers, we strongly

suspect, will be radically different from the one-story boxes, cheap asphalt out front, that most commercial developers push.

Shown real-life examples, we predict citizens would often pick denser development, even though, when polled, they say they loathe higher density.

Computer simulations would help see if people want an alternative to standard subdivision form: wide streets and cul-de-sacs, few sidewalks, garages dominating houses, no front porches, huge lawns to maintain. The alternative might be more like a traditional small town: a denser mix, parks, front porches restored and cars pushed to alleys and back garages.

Developers say the people will buy only large lots and streets wide enough to land a plane on. Developer Gross told us, "I tried increasing the standard three or four units an acre in a project — and got the wrath of heaven visited on me by angry local residents."

A good computer simulation can show how livable a well-designed alternative to suburbia could be.

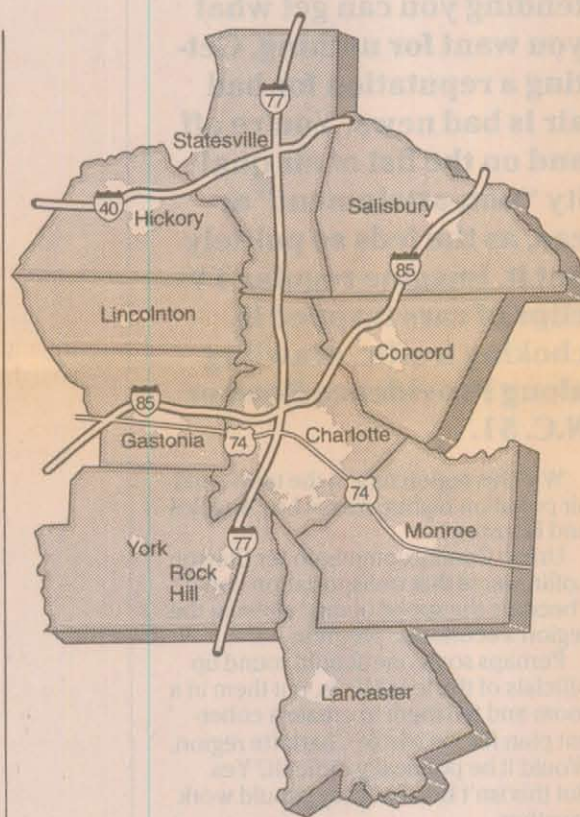
What's needed is a way to wed citizen decision-making with sophisticated computer technology. UNCC could take the lead here, through its Urban Institute, its Center for Interdisciplinary Transportation Studies and its architecture school.

"Customers" of this planning center could be citizen groups, developers, churches, schools, businesses. It could research and offer objective analysis of individual projects as well as region-wide growth. Users could even learn the software and do their own manipulations and design experiments.

When a major commercial development is proposed, the computers could measure effects on traffic, nearby residential areas or jobs.

What a contrast to the region's current pattern, in which "Developer A" decides where land is cheap or customers can be drawn, buys land, gets permits and off he goes — no matter what the project's impact may be. Or one in which highway builders make key decisions in effective secrecy.

However late it seems, the Charlotte citistate's citizens need to say: "This region is our home. We want to be part of the basic decisions."



### What is a 'citistate'?

This Peirce Report is based on the following premise: Charlotte and its surrounding communities are one region, one economy, one environmental area, one society. It fits well our definition of "citistate": A region consisting of one or more historic central cities surrounded by cities and towns which have a shared identification, function as a single zone for trade, commerce and communication, and are characterized by social, economic and environmental interdependence.

— Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson

## About the Peirce Report

The Peirce Report is written by nationally syndicated urban writer Neal Peirce and his partner, Curtis Johnson. They were invited to Charlotte by The Observer, the Foundation for the Carolinas and UNC Charlotte's Urban Institute. Peirce, 63, of Washington, whose column runs regularly in The Observer, has written 10 other Peirce Reports for other cities. Johnson, 52, of St. Paul, is a former executive director of the Twin Cities Citizens League and currently chairs the Metropolitan Council of Minneapolis-St. Paul, a planning agency.

They spent a week in June interviewing some 100 residents. Also on the interview team were Alex Marshall, a reporter for The Virginian-Pilot of Norfolk, and LaRita Barber, now director of internship programs at Queens College.

The Foundation for the Carolinas raised the money to pay for the report. Donors were: the Carolinas Partnership, the Belk Founda-

tion, the Duke Power Foundation, Foundation for the Carolinas, NationsBank, the Blumenthal Foundation, the Cannon Foundation, First Union National Bank, Southern Bell Telephone Co., Wachovia Bank and Trust Co., Lance Inc., Branch Banking and Trust Co. and First Charter National Bank.

Donors had no say in the reporting and writing and did not see the articles before publication. The writers did not know who the donors were.

The Gaston Gazette, The Herald of Rock Hill, The Concord Tribune, The Enquirer-Journal of Monroe and The Daily Independent of Kannapolis are also publishing the report.

The Peirce Report was edited by editorial writer Mary Newsom. Photos are by Observer photographer Mark B. Sluder; graphics are by staff artist Dean Neitman. The pages were designed by Perspective editor Greg Ring; Steve Johnston was copy editor.



MARK B. SLUDER/Staff

**Peirce Group:** From left, Alex Marshall, Curtis Johnson, LaRita Barber and Neal Peirce.

## The series

### SEPT. 17

**Leadership:** The old-style, patriarchal business leadership is fading. It's time for the region's citizens to take charge.

### TODAY

**Growth:** Who's planning the region's growth? Developers, financiers and highway engineers, that's who. Is that what citizens want?

### NEXT SUNDAY:

**Work force:** The grim underside of the region's prosperity: too many low-skilled people.

### SUNDAY, OCT. 8

**Neighborhoods:** Few cities in America are as impressive as Charlotte in their efforts to fight crime and poverty. But what's the next step?

### WEDNESDAY, OCT. 11

**Conference:** Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson will be keynote speakers at the annual fall conference of UNC Charlotte's Urban Institute. The conference, "The Peirce Report: Recommendations for Our Region's Future," will be 1-5 p.m. at UNCC's Cone University Center. It costs \$30 and is open to the public. To reserve a place, call Ginny Larson in the Office of Continuing Education, 547-2879.



PART IV

# Neighborhoods

## Build on success, and come together



T. ORTEGA GAINES/Staff

**A welcome presence:** Community police officer M.A. Harris pauses from his bicycle rounds in Charlotte's Lakewood neighborhood to chat with residents like Chris Davis.

By NEAL PEIRCE and CURTIS JOHNSON  
Special to The Observer

**P**icture this: A beeper sounds as a drug deal goes down in Charlotte's Belmont neighborhood. But the beeper isn't the dealer's. It's from a neighborhood leader to the officer on the beat a block away. The officer has freely given local leaders his beeper number. They are allies. He arrives almost at once and makes an arrest.

In another neighborhood, a city hall "team" — a person each from the police, sanitation, neighborhood development and planning departments —

sits talking with neighbors in a coordinated effort to stop code violations, curb family violence, improve street lights and police services. The level of coordination may be the best of any comparably-sized community in America. Everyone there agrees that attention given the neighborhood's problems by The Observer's "Taking Back Our Neighborhoods" effort has been a catalyst of action.

Across town, folks from some of Charlotte's poorest neighborhoods are at a meeting of the newly formed Queen City Congress. They're rubbing shoulders with people from such well-off neighborhoods as Dilworth and Myers Park. The less affluent neighborhoods seek more attention and a greater voice. The Dilworth-Myers Park crowd wants allies to help it fight off such threats as X-rated video stores and fast-food restaurants muscling onto historic streets. A potentially significant alliance has been born.

At a church hall, a dozen African-American teens sit at computers with their mentors, plotting careers, learning connections for getting into the work world, with promotion potential for a lifetime.

And at the Children's Services Network offices,

**The Charlotte region has a long way to go in fighting crime and poverty. But it is on the right track — something few other American cities can say.**

### THE PEIRCE REPORT

#### Shaping a shared future

Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson, nationally known writers on cities and city growth, have taken an in-depth look at the Charlotte region, as they have done previously in 10 other cities. This is the fourth in their four-part series. Reprints of the series will be available beginning Wednesday. Send \$1.50 for shipping and handling to: **Editorial Dept., The Charlotte Observer, Box 30308, Charlotte, N.C. 28230-0308.**

analysts pore over charts to determine whether community health clinics could relieve the rush of marginal cases burdening hospital emergency rooms. What would the hospitals save? Could the money go to the clinics and their prevention-oriented care? Can you assign a value on a child abuse case averted, an early pregnancy prevented? Huge sums are being spent on health care for low-income people. The question is how to spend it more effectively.

We know this picture is overdrawn. The police don't yet work smoothly with residents in all neighborhoods. City hall's highly touted neighborhood teams are focusing, so far, on a narrow band of the most troubled parts of town.

The Queen City Congress is an experiment that could fail. Far too many churches ignore deep social problems at their doorsteps. There's no evidence politicians will listen to the Children's Services Network's hardheaded analyses.

But the totality of effort in Charlotte-Mecklenburg is stunning. It is equalled in few cities around the nation. Such places as Seattle, San Antonio, Pittsburgh and Cleveland have been focusing on neighborhoods for more years but not on so many fronts. The effort, we suggest, is critically important to every resident of every town in the Charlotte tristate.

The region has a long ways to go in fighting crime and poverty. But it is on the right track — something few other American cities can say.

Some evidence:  
**Community policing.** Charlotte was relatively late among major U.S. police departments to put more officers back on the streets, where they get to know neighborhoods. But since 1991 it has made immense gains. The department's mission statement now focuses on preventing crime.

Clear results will take years. But in some neighborhoods, serious crime seems to be slackening.

The demand for community-oriented policing comes from many neighborhoods that don't yet have it. Many have heard the story of Genesis Park, once home to a notorious heroin and cocaine market. The police did sweeps to suppress the crimes, and got some results. But then they enlisted new partners — the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Housing Partnership, code enforcement teams, churches, businesses and banks, working the neighborhood home by home, enlisting renters to be owners after rehabbing.

"If we could replicate this everywhere, we'd solve a lot of problems," says Police Chief Dennis Nowicki. "The police didn't take the lead, but were part of a team — contrary to our usual tendency to have to be in charge."

**City Within A City.** Worried about decline in the 73 neighborhoods of historic central Charlotte,

Please see **What's next?**/page 10

### Challenges to the region

- Recognize that few cities in America have as much going for their troubled neighborhoods as Charlotte. From community policing to targeted neighborhood services, from media's "Taking Back Our Neighborhoods" to the Queen City Congress and other grass-roots groups, the record is one of achievement — and worth building on.

- Support growing, indigenous neighborhood leadership to make low-income neighborhoods more self-sustaining.

- Provide leadership training for neighborhood leaders, like the model program of the St. Paul Companies.

- Mobilize banks and other corporations to help poor neighborhoods capitalize on their proximity to uptown by creating new businesses, from cleaning and catering to computer data entry services.

- Use tools such as the Children's Services Network to see what is really working and what is not, and insist funding go to the proven, effective models.

- Expect government and churches to be powerful allies.

- Introduce such ideas as all-day schooling to help "latchkey" kids stay out of trouble.

- Announce a no-tolerance policy on crime.

- Keep broadening community policing, until it is regionwide.

- Introduce computers into low-income neighborhoods with "supernavigators" to help amateurs. Use computers to educate and to show young people the real-life jobs awaiting them if they finish high school with a good mastery of the basics.

- Expect the news media to help. Television stations should moderate their excessive use of crime news. Regional newspapers should design civic journalism experiments to improve the lives of low-income citizens in their counties.

- Recognize the power of churches, and support the good they do. Each congregation in the region should develop a program for long-term social reconstruction.

— Neal Peirce, Curtis Johnson



T. ORTEGA GAINES/Staff

**Pitching in:** Workers renovate a house on Katonah Avenue in Charlotte's Seversville community. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Housing Partnership will spend \$400,000 this year to fix up 10 houses in the troubled neighborhood.



CHRISTOPHER A. RECORD/Staff

**Stop the killing:** At a vigil to remember 1994 murder victims, Robin Morris and her son, Jerrell, hold lighted candles at Fairview Homes in Charlotte. Jerrell's father, Jerry Lanier, was one of 83 murder victims last year. The vigil was organized by the Rev. James Barnett, founder of Stop the Killing.

# THE PEIRCE REPORT

Shaping a shared future

## If every congregation put its faith on the line...

By NEAL PEIRCE  
And CURTIS JOHNSON  
Special to The Observer

With its hundreds of congregations, its temples of worship ranging from storefronts to massive edifices, the Charlotte region's churches and synagogues could be at the center of the struggle to banish poverty and violence.

But it is no secret many congregations emphasize personal spiritual life at the expense of any social mission, and not only in affluent neighborhoods and suburbs. Our interview team was shocked to hear the vivid disappointment from leaders in a number of poor neighborhoods over how unwilling local ministers and congregations were to reach out to the community.

However, a positive story must be told, as well. The Charlotte region has hundreds of caring church and synagogue members running a battery of generous programs for the poor.

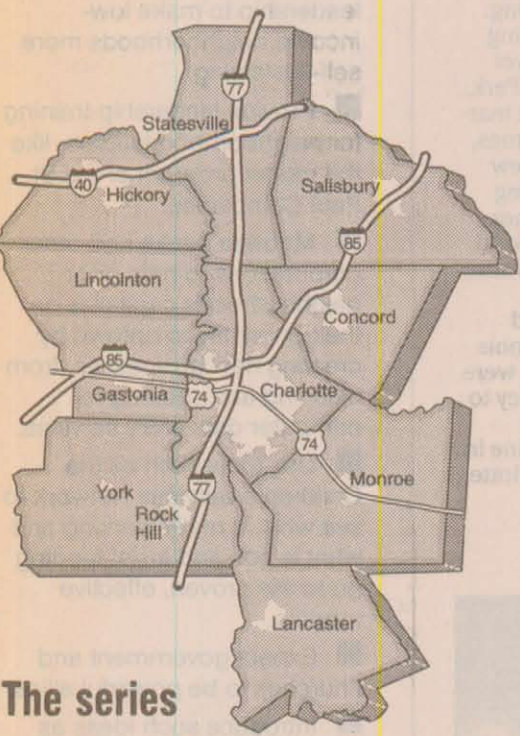
Churches and synagogues can bring a depth of workers and commitment that neighborhood organizations often can't match.

The efforts range from Rachel House at Temple Israel to the Presbyterians' transitional classroom for homeless children, to the Baptists' Jackson Park Community Ministries, to Christian Services in Lancaster, S.C., to the Emergency Shelter Fifth Street Ministries in Statesville, to Pilgrims' Inn in Rock Hill. Some church groups such as Catholic Social Services and the Methodists' Bethlehem Center work in-depth with families.

More than 200 churches contribute to Crisis Assistance Ministry, a kind of "emergency room for families in poverty," providing clothing, rent and other services to help them get back on their feet and avoid homelessness.

Some church-based programs are highly imaginative. Take the eight-year-old St. Francis Jobs Program, begun in Christ Episcopal Church. The idea is to help school dropouts and disadvantaged youth — each with his or her own mentor — earn high school diplomacy or equivalency and pick up some of the work skills and living habits they'll need to succeed. In the past year, with Discovery Place as a partner, the students have been exposed to a state-of-the-art computer program that helps them build skills and select one of 200 real-world occupations, from electrician to licensed practical nurse. It also teaches how to cope with on-the-job anger and frustration.

Imagine the impact if each congregation in the region developed a program for long-term social reconstruction as significant as the St. Francis Jobs Program. The groundwork would be laid for a far more resilient society.



### The series

SEPT. 17

**Leadership:** The old-style, patriarchal business leadership is fading. It's time for the region's citizens to take charge.

SEPT. 24:

**Growth:** Who's planning the region's growth? Developers, financiers and highway engineers, that's who. Is that what citizens want?

OCT. 1:

**Work force:** The grim underside of the region's prosperity: too many low-skilled people.

TODAY:

**Neighborhoods:** Few cities in America are as impressive as Charlotte in their efforts to fight crime and poverty. But what's the next step?

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CHRISTOPHER A. RECORD/Staff

**Hope for the future:** Attracted by signs of progress, Dee Conrades moved to the North Charlotte last year. Although she loves the community, she worries crime could derail its comeback.

## City is challenging crime, poverty



T. ORTEGA GAINES/Staff

**A kid's view:** One glaring need in some Charlotte neighborhoods is parks and recreational facilities. In the Lakewood community, children sometimes resort to climbing a 10-foot razor wire fence to swing and slide on a playground at the nearby Lakeview Center, a program for people with disabilities and not open to neighborhood children.

### What's next?

Continued from page 9

the city two years ago started to take a careful look. For each neighborhood, it analyzed social and economic data from the 1990 Census. It did field surveys and surveyed neighborhood leaders. The picture that emerged was alarming — a central Charlotte with characteristics not unlike northern cities Charlotte had always pitied for their social turmoil.

The neighborhoods were sorted into three categories — "stable" (30), "threatened" (22), or "fragile" (the 21 with the most dire poverty and usually the worst crime, too).

Each year the city focuses special attention on the worst-off neighborhoods, combining resources from police, human services departments and neighborhood development offices. This year's list includes Seversville, Belmont, Cummings Avenue, Lakewood and Reid Park. Replacing curbs and sidewalks, finding pregnant women who need medical care, enforcing housing codes — just about anything that makes the neighborhood more secure makes the list.

Few American cities have come so far. In many — Dayton, St. Paul, Portland, San Antonio and Richmond, for example — neighborhoods have a real voice in their own governance. But in only a few does the city agree so clearly to focus resources on neighborhoods with the most compelling needs. It may make good sense. But it's also risky politics for a city council under pressure from more affluent neighborhoods.

■ **City teams.** Usually cities operate top-down, with orders moving down (slowly, as a rule) from one level of bureaucracy to the next. To respond to neighborhood needs, Charlotte city government is trying something radically different. Teams of workers are designated to work with neighborhoods and across diverse subject areas, from public works to human services.

As Deputy City Manager Pam Syfert put it, "It was time to take down the chimneys, challenge those departments operating in splendid isolation, and get our staff to mobilize themselves for action."

Few U.S. cities are willing to discard traditional bureaucratic ways and embrace team-type operations with a seriousness anywhere near Charlotte's.

■ **"Taking Back Our Neighborhoods."** Last year The Observer, WSOC-TV, WPEG-FM and WBAV-AM launched the "Taking Back Our Neighborhoods" series, focused on Charlotte's most crime-plagued neighborhoods. Each began with a meeting of neighborhood leaders and reporters to

Continued on next page

## Gutsy media get involved; push them to remain so

By NEAL PEIRCE  
And CURTIS JOHNSON  
Special to The Observer

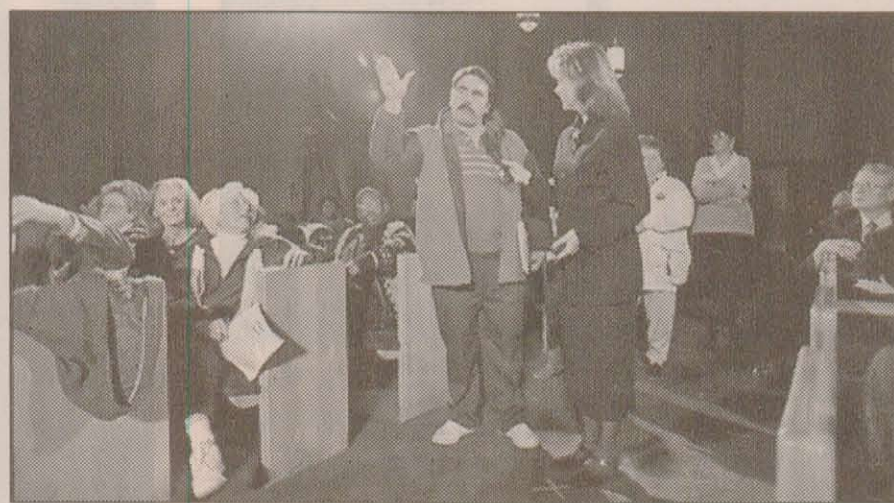
In the accompanying story, we compliment The Observer for its "Taking Back Our Neighborhoods" series. That may raise questions.

Readers may well say: "Wait a minute. Why are you guys complimenting the newspaper that was key in bringing you to town?"

Our answer: We just call the shots as we see them. What The Observer has done in its neighborhood series is rare among U.S. newspapers. And it's gutsy: Among many editors and writers, the idea of a newspaper getting involved in its community — seeking solutions to problems such as crime, sending its own representative to help organize community meetings — evokes deep suspicion and criticism.

We think the criticism is wrong. Our work with newspapers coast to coast convinces us The Observer series should be seen as a beacon, not a negative aberration. The paper's approach, a form of "solutions-based" civic journalism, is likely the leading edge of the future for an American press increasingly seen as beleaguered and out of touch with communities' desperate need for fresh answers to shared problems.

Clearly, any newspaper's basic responsibility is full, objective coverage. But in fact, much journalistic coverage these days focuses on conflict, the negative and the titillating. It ignores innovations and collaborations that can help rebuild a civil society. True journalistic responsibility is to find the balance. And the result of innovative approaches can be riveting journalism: Witness the fascinating stories about



L. MUELLER/Staff

**Neighborhood voices:** Part of the "Taking Back Our Neighborhoods" series involves town meetings where residents can cite community concerns. At a January 1995 town meeting for North Charlotte residents, Rod Quintero got up to talk about problems at his rental house on 32nd Street. "I stayed up one Saturday night and counted 43 people go in and go out of that house in an hour," he said. "I called the vice squad and got an answering machine."

neighborhoods and their heroic leaders fighting crime, decay and apathy that The Observer's series unearthed.

The Observer's broadcast partners — WSOC-TV, WPEG-FM and WBAV-AM — are to be congratulated for breaking with their industry norms to take part in the project. Televising the community meetings is especially important, and WSOC-TV has followed up with interesting programming on crime prevention.

Still, it's hard to believe that Charlotte television news' day-in, day-out preoccupation with grisly crime, fo-

cusered overwhelmingly on Charlotte's center city neighborhoods, isn't a real part of the problem, too. It focuses people on crime and fear and presents a one-sided view of the "fragile" neighborhoods as cauldrons of violence.

One station manager justified that preoccupation with crime by saying, "Charlotte is a violent city — that's the story."

We'd counter that the Charlotte citestate also offers amazing stories in business, arts, college life and neighborhood activities having nothing to do with crime. For a sampler, check the

initiatives mentioned in the accompanying article on churches.

Clearly, ratings drive much TV behavior. Maybe the Charlotte stations need a pact among themselves, limiting crime as a percentage of coverage and lead stories. That would create breathing room for other coverage — and do a huge favor to efforts to create a safer, civically supportive society.

We also offer a friendly challenge to the other Charlotte-area newspapers running this Peirce Report series — The Gaston Gazette, The Herald of Rock Hill, The Enquirer-Journal of Monroe, The Concord Tribune and The Daily Independent of Kannapolis. Their willingness to share a project with other papers who are usually competitors shows real farsightedness. It underscores a cooperative spirit rare in American newspapering and in metropolitan regions.

Can — or should — there be a follow-up? We suggest one. In a spirit of friendly and productive competition, why couldn't those smaller newspapers invent their own counterparts to "Taking Back Our Neighborhoods"? Just about every county has pockets of the same kind of desperation as Charlotte, as well as rural stretches of intense need.

The biggest boon for the region would be a series of civic journalism experiments, focused on neighborhoods, each designed to fit its particular place.

The newspapers might even agree to reprint occasional excerpts from each others' best efforts on what's arguably the most critical issue of our time — how to build a more cohesive society in which fewer people suffer or get left behind and in which everyone has opportunity.

# Build on success, and come together

Continued from preceding page

raise critical issues. Then came a televised town meeting and a day of media coverage: newspaper, television and radio. Citizens' complaints and proposed solutions were reported in the paper and broadcast. Needs were listed, help solicited.

Example: In the Herrinwood neighborhood people had seen suspicious figures hiding in the tall grass of some abandoned property. The city ignored requests to cut the grass (proof, it seems, that the team-based reforms in city hall still have a ways to go). Then a girl walking by was beaten and raped. At a town meeting, her mother stood and told the story. The grass was cut.

More than 700 individuals and organizations have volunteered to help, donating cash, goods or personal time.

**Children's Services Network.** How to overcome the problem that thousands of people — paid staff and volunteers — are involved in social services, yet problems seem to be worsening? To learn the answer, the Children's Services Network was set up by the city and county governments, the schools, United Way and the Charlotte Chamber. The idea is to be an advocate for children's services, but primarily for services that hard data can show are producing significant, quantifiable results in peoples' lives.

It's difficult to think of a more hard-headed, businesslike approach — but also a humanitarian one, if scarce social services dollars are then used in ways that get results.

For its first year, 1993, the network focused on teen pregnancy and the next on youth crime. In 1995 it's children from birth to age 5.

**Queen City Congress.** In most cities, neighborhoods remain unorganized or compete for crumbs from government or foundations. They rarely come together for a common cause.

So it was remarkable when, last spring, a Queen City Congress was organized by three dozen neighborhoods spanning the affluence spectrum, all within 2 miles of uptown.

The neighborhoods in May adopted a "Declaration of Interdependence" — a mutual assistance pact to fight for equal and quality attention from local government on issues from crack houses to parking. They agreed to help each other with information, education, training and plain old politicking.

**In time, one can see the Queen City Congress or some other neighborhood federation providing what's otherwise missing in the coalescence of pro-neighborhood forces in Charlotte today: a network of political support, neighborhood by neighborhood, so powerful it demands respect from government.**

Architect Ron Morgan, with Superior Court Judge Shirley Fulton one of the organizers, foresees yearly conferences that could in time encompass neighborhoods in suburbs and ring cities.

It's clearly a huge challenge to take the neighborhood and anti-crime efforts in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County and expand them across the region. In a handful of cases, the other counties have good programs in place. The time may be ripe for a series of regional conferences, with citizen and neighborhood groups as prominent as public officials.

But here's the question: What will Act Two be in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County? Expectations are raised, new capacities developed.

The issue is critical for the neighborhood heroes — people who have stepped forward. Some have shown real heroism. Consider James Freeman of the Belmont neighborhood. He tells of hearing bullets whiz overhead as he sat on his deck, and of standing in his driveway facing down a youth with a cocked shotgun.

**Some neighborhood leaders complain that other areas — "the squeaky wheels" — get all the grease. Some risk burnout. Patsy Martin of Seversville works eight hours a day at her regular job only to come home to 20 telephone messages of people asking her help with neighborhood problems.**

"It's a constant fight" for the troubled neighborhoods, community activist Franklin McCain told us. "They have to fight daily for trash pick-up, street maintenance, vacant lots cleared of refuse and tall grass, and for policing."

Neighborhood leaders say they worry about keeping the city's attention, worry The Observer will have no sequel to its neighborhood series and worry about the commitment of city staff and reporters in their areas.

Burnout is clearly a threat. Friends of these threatened neighborhoods need to think about some solutions. One model might be the neighborhood college recently begun for local leaders in Hampton, Va.

Another might be the Leadership Initiative in Neighborhoods program in St. Paul, run by the St. Paul Companies. Modest grants go to individual neighborhood leaders, often strong advocates for their areas, so they can attend seminars, visit other neighborhoods, or undertake internships or mentorships. In a few years, the program has produced a coterie of men and women who are becoming strong forces in their communities. A byproduct has been higher visibility and respect for St. Paul's grassroots leaders.

Another question shadows neighborhood improvement: Once fragile neighborhoods have more and stronger leaders, once they are cleaner and safer, once government services are up to snuff, what will maintain the momentum?

How does a low-wealth neighborhood move closer to sustainability, toward the mainstream economy? If people don't have jobs, what's the future?

Six community development corporations now provide housing and other economic development efforts in Charlotte neighborhoods. An active Charlotte-Mecklenburg Housing Partnership draws on city and federal money to rehabilitate homes. Efforts



T. ORTEGA GAINES/Staff

**Flood of problems:** Some of Charlotte's poorer neighborhoods lack basics that other neighborhoods take for granted — like adequate storm drains. In Druid Hills, the intersection of McArthur and Poinsett is a trouble spot when it rains.

are ongoing — with mixed success — to get banks to lend to would-be homeowners in troubled neighborhoods.

Is there a broader way to get the free market operating in these areas? Maybe businesslike Charlotte should heed Harvard economist Michael Porter. He says it's time to identify the inner cities' inherent advantages — they're near downtown, for example — so enterprises will voluntarily seek urban locations not out of charity, but out of self-interest.

Why not a string of cleaning firms, caterers and office supply companies serving uptown offices but based in nearby neighborhoods? Some early offers of business advice and potential capitalization, from Charlotte banks and other firms, might trigger a number of startups.

Similarly, banking and insurance companies need data entry. Why not train pools of workers — maybe even start small companies — to operate in these central city neighborhoods, serving Charlotte-area firms? There's a current effort to train residents and start just such a firm in Edgewood Terrace, a low-income area in Washington. Private firms, not government, are the chief backers and prospective customers. Such an effort might work perfectly in the redesigned Earle Village or elsewhere in the region's low-income areas.

**Next, a hard, honest look is needed at why residents of the troubled neighborhoods don't snap up more of the jobs available within fairly easy reach of their homes.**

The triangle of territory marked by uptown, Charlotte/Douglas International Airport and the Arwood-Southern Industrial Park defines one of the richest job-producing areas in the entire South. The job types vary greatly, too, from secretarial uptown to distribution at the airport and manufacturing at Arwood.

You can make all sorts of excuses: Black applicants face discrimination. The schools don't prepare all students properly. Welfare has an enervating effect. But the fact remains: There's a huge problem. It won't do just to shake a finger at overwhelmingly African-American communities and tell them to shape up their act. Serious work must go into building new bridges — attitudinal, physical, electronic — between the people and neighborhoods who need the jobs and the firms who need to fill them.

The city's new respect for troubled neighborhoods, the newspaper's attention and political groups like the Queen City Congress can change attitudes. We were struck by the emergence of leaders with strong, middle-class outlooks in the troubled neighborhoods. These individuals can be architects of the new connections.

Success won't be instant everywhere. Yet in these threatened neighborhoods are thousands of con-

cerned parents, thousands of young people yearning for a better chance. It would be almost criminal not to reach out to those families.

Government can be a vital partner. Consider all-day schools, wherever the money can be found to provide them. Constructive afternoon programming — whether sports, crafts, arts or tutoring — can address the disastrous problem of latchkey kids getting into deep trouble at young ages. Community colleges can help with parallel adult education courses for unemployed or underemployed people.

Imagine what a good supply of computers could achieve — in schools and in community centers, housing projects, recreation centers, libraries. Exposed to computers, young people in deprived areas — urban or rural — can begin to see exciting opportunities. "Edu-tainment" software could be as effective here as anywhere else.

Some specific software applications could help in the poorer areas. One would be job listings and descriptions, so young people can envision the work possibilities open to them and make direct contact when they're ready. Another would be day-care matchups, linking people who want to work with others willing to take care of children. A full-bore carpooling system, especially to dispersed industrial park locations, using up-to-date GIS (geographic information system software) could be organized online.

Could Charlotte-area foundations or businesses — beyond donating computer equipment and software — speed this process? We believe so. A group of nonprofit agencies in the state, working with the N.C. Department of Commerce, is setting up a Community Information Broker Project.

The idea is to provide brokers who are coaches, translators, Internet "supernavigators." The brokers help nonprofits, businesses and governments in less affluent communities get up and flying in the electronic age. None of the four test sites (aided by a federal grant) are in the Charlotte area. But local funders might do much good for both urban and rural communities by "buying them in."

The middle-class people in the Charlotte citistate have a right to ask: If so many social programs are already under way, why are crime, joblessness and desperation so high in so many neighborhoods?

The answer must be: Hold onto your chairs. Those efforts take time. The overall formula for social care in your region isn't perfect yet. More years of hard experimentation and effort are vital.

The worst course would be to abandon today's efforts because government budgets are tight or progress seems slow. That decision would only guarantee a degraded citistate.

**In the long run, the initiatives we've outlined have an excellent chance to drive down poverty and drive down crime — and thus drive down taxes.**

But citizens have a right to know what progress is — and isn't — being made. The Children's Services Network is taking the first steps toward realistic benchmarks of performance.

The universities and local philanthropies should keep a careful eye on the network's benchmarking, and perhaps explore how to expand it to the whole region. (UNC Charlotte has agreed to house the network's database, permitting systematic evaluation). The media should report regularly on how the benchmarks look and where problems remain.

The region's policy shouldn't be wild spending. Nor should it be neglect. It should be concerned action, both government and private — and then tough accountability for results.

## Why care? All will pay for problems left to fester

By NEAL PEIRCE  
And CURTIS JOHNSON  
Special to The Observer

**W**hy is it important that the Charlotte region — cities, towns, rural areas together — reduce crime and poverty?

You may say: I live in southeast Charlotte in a comfortable, secure house. Or in a new Gaston County subdivision. Or in a historic home in Salisbury, Shelby or Davidson.

Why should I care about the desperation in Charlotte's poorest neighborhoods? What's it to me if many low-income blacks appear to have given up hope for a good job? Is it my concern if thousands of white, blue-collar families barely hold on?

The answer: No matter where you live in the Charlotte region, your hope for lower taxes, your future income prospects, your personal safety — all are at stake.

Reason No. 1: Large numbers of poor people burden the school, social services, courts and prison systems with massive costs. All those expenses must be covered by taxes.

Second: The age of decent pay for low-skill work is dying. Today's fast-food or janitorial jobs hardly pay a living wage. In a competitive global economy, high-paying industries seek places with skilled workers. A citistate with thousands of people chronically ill-educated is destined to slip competitively. Then work opportunities and wages for all citizens decline.

Third: Crime. One public official told us Charlotte-area people love their guns and their cars. The gun is to fend off attackers. The car is a security shield; you only need stop where you feel safe.

People are buying expensive security systems; more and more want to live in gated or guarded communities. All this says crime plays a big role in the region's life, and big money is spent guarding against it. But more subtly, civic life drops off as people shun club meetings or other organized activities.

Businesses withdraw from areas where they fear they'll be victimized. Drug-dealing or addicted youths get the message their lives aren't worth much, so no one else's need be respected, either. Random violence seems to spread. Everyone is less free.

Much has been made of Charlotte-Mecklenburg's astronomical crime rate — twice as high as most of North Carolina. Yet the problem is not all Charlotte's. Its crime-plagued neighborhoods are in one sense responding to region-wide demand. Just as the city boasts of being a transportation hub for airplanes and trucks, police say it's also a magnet for people from surrounding counties hunting a prostitute or drugs.

In time, violence could wreck the Charlotte citistate's economic dream machine. Nothing less than a regional consensus — zero tolerance for crime — will do. Topping Atlanta's numbers for murder and mayhem is not the competitive race Charlotte set out to win.

The good news is the number of prevention efforts under way. In time, they could eclipse today's bloodstained snapshot of violence.

### About the Peirce Report

The Peirce Report is written by nationally syndicated urban writer Neal Peirce and his partner, Curtis Johnson. They were invited to Charlotte by The Observer, the Foundation for the Carolinas and UNC Charlotte's Urban Institute.

The Foundation for the Carolinas raised the money to pay for the report. Donors were: the Carolinas Partnership, the Belk Foundation, the Duke Power Foundation, Foundation for the Carolinas, NationsBank, the Blumenthal Foundation, the Cannon Foundation, First Union National Bank, Southern Bell Telephone Co., Wachovia Bank and Trust Co., Lance Inc., Branch Banking and Trust Co. and First Charter National Bank. Donors had no say in the reporting and writing and did not see the articles before publication. The writers did not know who the donors were.

The Gaston Gazette, The Herald of Rock Hill, The Concord Tribune, The Enquirer-Journal of Monroe and The Daily Independent of Kannapolis are also publishing the report.

**CALL US** 

■ What's your opinion of the conclusions in the Peirce report?

In Charlotte: 377-4444 and enter 1006  
Outside Charlotte: 1-800-432-1802 and enter 1006  
We'll print a sampling of comments.



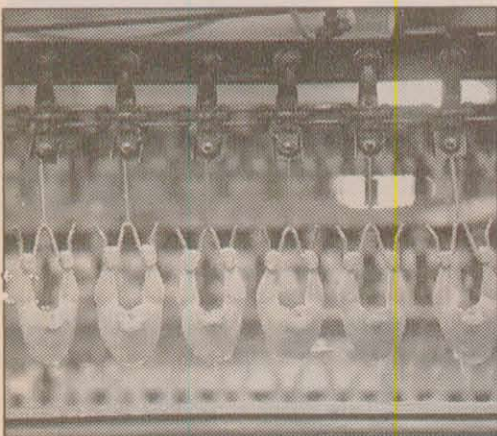
MARK B. SLUDER/Staff

**Standing guard:** To get an idea of what crime can do to a neighborhood, consider Charlotte's Reid Park community, where resident Frazier

Wade keeps a loaded shotgun next to his bed. "I'm scared the robbers will hurt me," says Wade, 85.

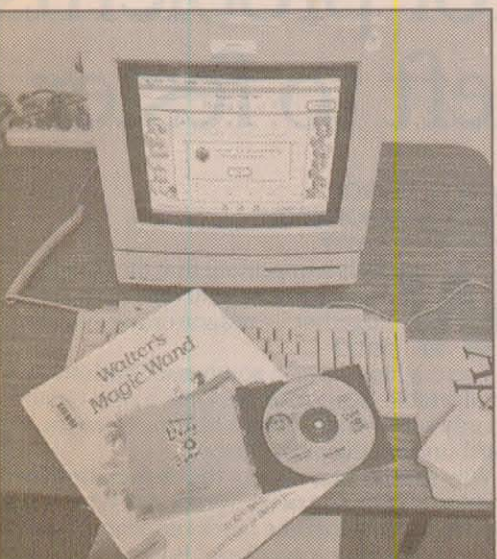
# THE PEIRCE REPORT

## Shaping a shared future



JOHN D. SIMMONS/Staff

**What happens as more and more industries eliminate low-skill jobs? It's no stretch to imagine researchers designing robots to work the poultry production line. The only jobs left will be for a handful of highly-skilled technicians who control the robots.**



LAYNE BAILEY/Staff

**If computer literacy and access is to be a passport to economic security and to full participation in the community, then leaving out a big chunk of the population is callous. It amounts to saying some people are less worthy than others.**

### The series

**SEPT. 17**  
**Leadership:** The old-style, patriarchal business leadership is fading. It's time for the region's citizens to take charge.

**SEPT. 24**  
**Growth:** Who's planning the region's growth? Developers, financiers and highway engineers, that's who. Is that what citizens want?

**TODAY**  
**Work force:** The grim underside of the region's prosperity: too many low-skilled people.

**NEXT SUNDAY**  
**Neighborhoods:** Few cities in America are as impressive as Charlotte in their efforts to fight crime and poverty. But what's the next step?

**WEDNESDAY, OCT. 11**  
**Conference:** Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson will be keynote speakers at the annual fall conference of UNC Charlotte's Urban Institute. The conference, "The Peirce Report: Recommendations for Our Region's Future," will be 1-5 p.m. at UNCC's Cone University Center. It costs \$30 and is open to the public. To reserve a place, call Ginny Larson in the Office of Continuing Education, 547-2879, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays.

# Charlotte's Web: A taste of what's ahead

By NEAL PEIRCE  
 And CURTIS JOHNSON  
 Special to The Observer

A coterie of electronic wizards ensconced in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library has been busy for a year, spinning Charlotte's Web.

To view their handiwork, dial 336-8013, setting the modem on your home computer to 8-N-1. Or find Charlotte's Web on the Internet, address <http://www.charweb.org>. If you haven't signed on yet, chances are you'll soon find the temptation irresistible.

In the fast-evolving global economy, computer connections are crucial. And as quickly as any community computer network in America, Steve Snow and his colleagues are connecting the far-flung parts of the Charlotte citistate into a working web of interactive communications.

Even in its formative months as many as 6,000 browsers visited Charlotte's Web. The system is available in all 23 public library branches, in 11 recreation centers, as well as in neighborhood centers, boys and girls clubs, the Charlotte Chamber and homeless shelters. Eventually it will be in 74 publicly available access sites. Schools are linking to the system as fast as possible.

Its purpose is to open on-ramps to the information highway across Mecklenburg and, as soon as feasible, to all counties of the Charlotte citistate.

Community computer networks akin to Charlotte's Web are springing up elsewhere — the Cleveland Free Net, Philadelphia's LibertyNet and others. The Charlotte effort is as skillfully framed as any.

First, it aims at an immensely broad



MARK B. SLUDER/Staff

**Energizing force:** "Here's an opportunity — to give a hand to people without means to leapfrog into the next generation," says Steve Snow, director of Charlotte's Web. "Computers should be a real energizing force for neighborhood, economic, civic development."

spectrum of information and services. Examples range from information on where construction will snarl traffic to listing new city and county government jobs. E-mail and Internet access will be offered. Adding information and services "will never end. It's a continual process," says Snow.

Second, serving the entire region — businesses, nonprofits, schools, even homeless shelters — is a top priority. The web's computer whizzes have focused on driving down connection costs for those who can't afford state-of-the-art computers, modems and dedicated telephone lines.

The prime example may be creating on-line access for the Anita Stroud Center at the Fairview Homes public housing complex. The web's technical gurus have hooked up four "486" PCs running Windows software. With a special kind of software originally designed for ham radio operators, they connected them to an old "286" PC. In the 286 they installed one high-speed modem connected via a phone line to Charlotte's Web. Now all four 486s have graphical Internet access using one phone line and modem.

At a homeless shelter for families, the web crew resurrected yesteryear's

hardware — "286" model PCs — for a similar multimachine, single-line, text-only system. Businesses are giving old 286s away. Hundreds of similar set-ups are possible.

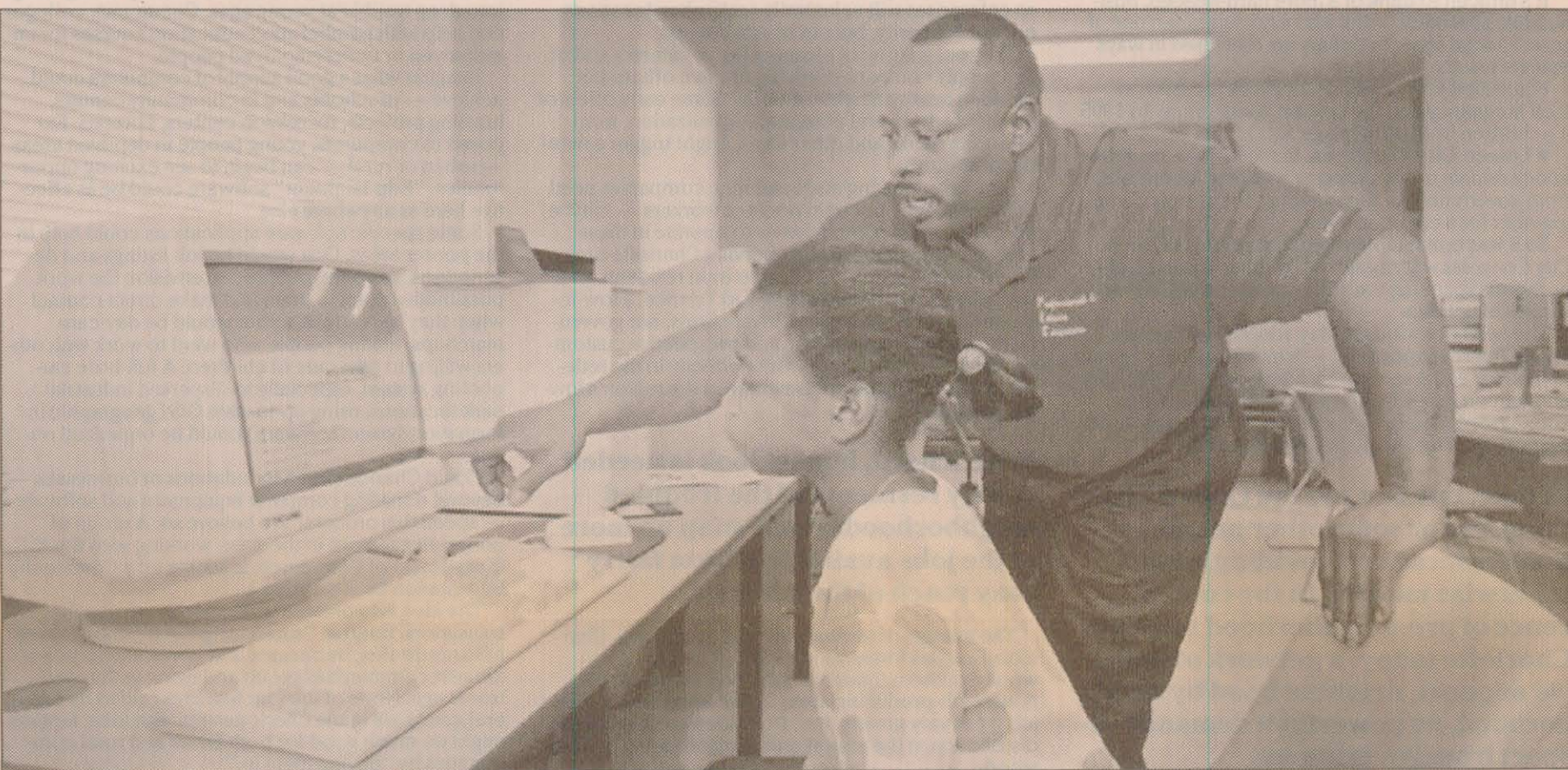
Third, Charlotte's Web is training an expanding team of coaches, who can explain to others how to use the system.

Cost problems may emerge: The system started with a \$450,000 federal technology grant from the National Telecommunications Information Agency. Renewal is imperiled by congressional budget-cutting, and no long-range funding system is in place. This quandary is shared among the web's originating partners — Charlotte-Mecklenburg's public library and schools, Central Piedmont Community College, UNC Charlotte and WTVI-TV.

But if reaching out to consumers is the test, this bunch ought to make it. It has offered to go regional in a big way with the CiteNET program of the Central Carolinas Citizens Forum. That effort would link 100 people from each of eight counties to respond to surveys on issues and offer elected leaders an instant pulse of the public mood.

And Steve Snow does not sound like someone to be held down by geography. He dreams of putting all this on wheels — an electronic bus — and moving it all over the region, wherever people are excited about computers and telecommunications.

Eventually he sees a region connected, but without worry over cables and lines — a wireless but endless chain of communications, a widening web of constantly interactive work and play.



MARK B. SLUDER/Staff

**Connecting Charlotte:** Larry Howard, a staff member at the Anita Stroud Center in Fairview Homes, helps 8-year-old Jacquelyn Hoover on the Charlotte's Web network. The system is available in all 23 public library

branches, in 11 recreation centers, as well as in neighborhood centers, boys and girls clubs, the Charlotte Chamber and homeless shelters. Eventually it will be in 74 publicly available access sites.

## Training

Continued from page 16

work world faster than chroniclers can tell the story. The price of getting by, not to mention getting ahead, is to get involved in the revolution.

We believe the stage is set in the Charlotte region to harness this power. It could be done through the Charlotte's Web community computer network, through the state's N.C. Information Highway, through exciting new ways to help children learn sooner and more eagerly, with computers.

Add these pieces together, devote the kind of far-sighted regional leadership that is, for example, making Charlotte a lively and successful arts center, and the Charlotte citistate could become America's pre-eminent electronic village.

Getting there won't be easy, or cheap. Only 37% of homes in the Charlotte region are computer-equipped, according to the latest Charlotte Observer/WSOC-TV Carolinas Poll. That leaves 63%. Even households with a computer may need more training and sophistication.

Schools show glaring gaps in computer capability. The Union County school system has a gross shortage of computers, for example. Those its schools do have are seriously out-of-date. Yet it recently took a determined onslaught by some 150 residents, teachers and school officials to persuade the county commissioners (by a grudging 3-2 vote) even to put a special, 3-cent tax for computer acquisition onto this fall's ballot.

This — more than sports, tall buildings or a tax structure twisted to benefit business — is what will truly count for economic development.

What about setting up a regional watchdog committee of electronic communications experts to analyze the quality and breadth of computer use in schools, workplaces, libraries and community centers? Its annual report on progress and deficiencies, with comparisons to other regions, would enliven public debate and encourage action.

Let there be no mistake: The path is strewn with big

boulders. In a functioning electronic village, everyone must be wired in.

Yet the Charlotte region can change and respond brilliantly to new conditions. It has done it before.

Once, for example, the area was a global textiles leader, a third of the region's workers holding jobs in textile plants spread from Fort Mill to Kannapolis. Gaston County once claimed more spindles than any county in America.

No longer. Only a fraction of the old textile jobs remain. Yet with technology, the region is producing as many textiles as it did in those old-fashioned days.

A new educational future, built on computers, is vital.

**Kids seem to learn faster, and remember longer, with computers. Adults use them to make a better living. Companies that go electronic compete more effectively. For many people, a new generation of databases has become indispensable to efficient business or personal life.**

But as widespread as computers are today, they still play narrow, specialized roles. No region has had the courage to say: We'll make computers our way of life, for everyone's communications, to prepare a whole generation of workers and leaders.

North Carolina, under Gov. Jim Hunt, has made an earnest effort to establish a statewide network. But a statewide scale is daunting, forcing a focus on institutions, not individuals.

More impressive is the locally grown effort, Charlotte's Web, now bursting from its formative stages. It is already tapped by thousands of citizens across the region each month.

This fall, as many as 30 Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools will be linked by a new CMS Network, providing students with a link to schools, libraries and academic sources throughout the state and, via the system's Internet connection, the world. Eventually, the system will connect to all elementary, middle and

high schools in the county.

Why shouldn't the surrounding counties not find a way to hook onto the CMS Network at a reasonable fee?

It seems likely more opportunities will be opening soon in the region. Catawba County is the center of fiber optic cable manufacturing in the United States. Firms there have generously provided cable connections for the county's schools and community colleges. As any school is built or renovated in Catawba, direct fiber connections to each classroom are built in. Fiber cable permits communications at some hundred times the speed of most modem-to-phone-line connections.

A growing number of smaller U.S. cities are grasping the vision of a personalized, universalized system of electronic connection. Blacksburg, Va., claims to be the best example, calling itself "the most computer-connected place, per capita, on the planet."

During the first year or so of the Blacksburg experiment, connectivity has spread like a prairie fire. With a few keyboard steps, citizens can consult doctors, check the community calendar, apply for a building permit or just send a message to someone.

They can check what's on at the movies, or a restaurant's menu or what Virginia Tech is offering. A hundred shops list merchandise on-line. A third of the city's residents are connected, for about \$8 a month. Bell Atlantic laid a network of fiber cable, making access to the system almost instant.

For all the fear about computer communications depersonalizing communities, Blacksburg citizens report a surge in feeling connected to each other.

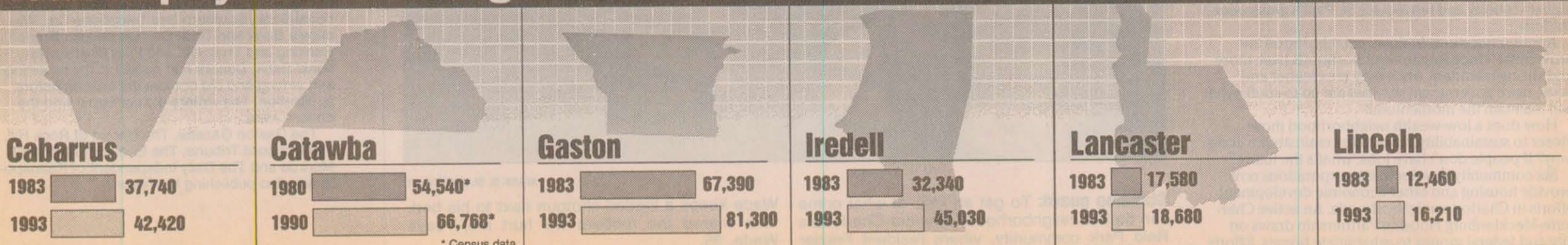
Doing this at Charlotte regional scale is ambitious. But where in America is the potential "fit" better? This city and region have always hankered to be ahead of the curve. And the strategy could short-circuit the region's deeply rooted, cultural suspicions of formal education.

While everyone would benefit, the most stunning advantage might be for kids — the citizens and leaders of the 21st century.

Put computers in front of kids, and watch what happens. Today's children seem born with logic chips embedded in their brains.

Continued on next page

## Total employment in the region



# Schools sign on to big dividends

**C**an computers make a difference in schools, especially for kids with the fewest advantages? The experience in rural Orangeburg, S.C., is yes, according to press coverage and a recent report from Al Santoli of the Freedom House Children at Risk Project.

Orangeburg District 5, the school district for the city of Orangeburg, has an 80% black enrollment. Most households in the district earn less than \$15,000 a year. Starting in the 1980s, then-Supt. James Wilsford designed a community partnership with teachers and arranged to introduce latest-model multimedia computers.

Within five years, a majority of elementary students were scoring above the national average in language, reading and math skills. More than half the district's high school graduates were going to college. Foreign delegations have visited Orangeburg to see how computers help children learn faster and develop conceptualization skills. The district won the inaugural Computer World Smithsonian Award for advancing education technology.

**Even kids at high risk of dropping out are able to learn using interactive CD-ROMs.**

Take a look in the classrooms, and the reasons are obvious. Computer access begins with phonetic write-to-read games in preschools. It culminates with scientific CD-ROM workstations in the high school. Whether in reading, writing or math, most kids with a strong early exposure to computers show curiosity and do well academically.

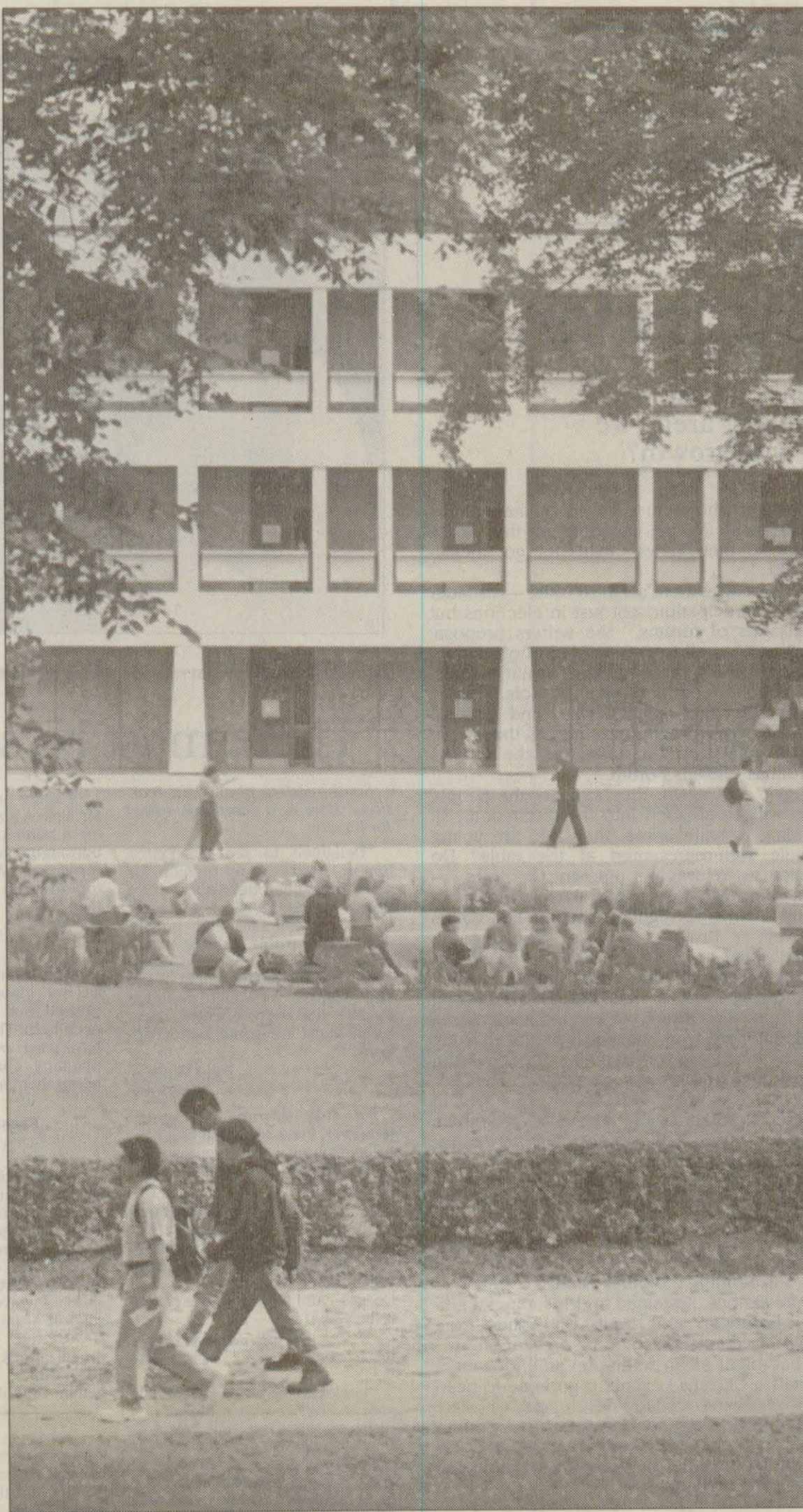
Even kids at high risk of dropping out, kids who stubbornly resist standard classroom learning, are able to learn and advance using interactive CD-ROMs.

The broader community has made important contributions. Businesses and military bases donate last-generation computer equipment through a nonprofit foundation the schools set up. It's important to note Orangeburg doesn't put all its eggs in the high-tech basket. Teachers have been retrained. Parental involvement is strongly encouraged. Local businesses encourage employees to become student mentors.

"School improvement councils" have been set up, including the principal, parents, teachers and, in high schools, students chosen by peers. Tough discipline is exercised when students miss consecutive school days, using the parental accountability features of the S.C. Education Improvement Act.

But those running the program have little doubt: Without computer technology, they think progress registered would have been only a fraction as great. Communities that grasp computers' potential will have a dramatic advantage in creating a better future for their children.

— Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson



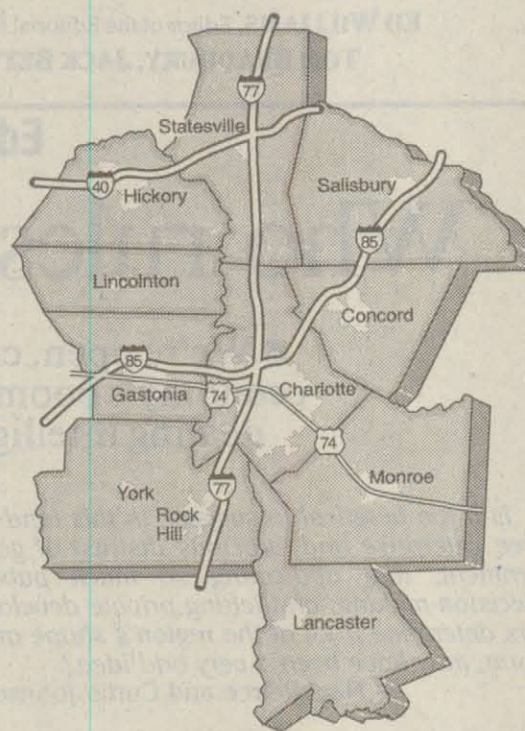
**Toward a high-skill work force:** In Charlotte, part of the answer to better qualified workers is Central Piedmont Community College on

Elizabeth Avenue. CPCC is widely regarded as a premier institution in preparing people for more sophisticated work force skills.

MARK B. SLUDER/Staff

## THE PEIRCE REPORT

Shaping a shared future



The Peirce Report is written by nationally syndicated urban writer Neal Peirce and his partner, Curtis Johnson. They were invited to Charlotte by The Observer, the Foundation for the Carolinas and UNC Charlotte's Urban Institute.

Peirce, 63, of Washington, whose column runs regularly in The Observer, has written 10 Peirce Reports for other cities. Johnson, 52, of St. Paul, is a former executive director of the Twin Cities Citizens League and chairs the Metropolitan Council of Minneapolis-St. Paul, a planning agency.

They spent a week in June interviewing some 100 residents. Also on the interview team were Alex Marshall, a reporter for The Virginian-Pilot of Norfolk, and LaRita Barber, now director of internship programs at Queens College.

The Foundation for the Carolinas raised the money to pay for the report. Donors were: the Carolinas Partnership, the Belk Foundation, the Duke Power Foundation, Foundation for the Carolinas, NationsBank, the Blumenthal Foundation, the Cannon Foundation, First Union National Bank, Southern Bell Telephone Co., Wachovia Bank and Trust Co., Lance Inc., Branch Banking and Trust Co. and First Charter National Bank.

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The Peirce Report was edited by editorial writer Mary Newsom. Photos are by Observer photographer Mark B. Sluder; graphics are by staff artist Dean Neitman. The pages were designed by Perspective editor Greg Ring; Steve Johnston was copy editor.

### Continued from preceding page

Offered computer access and a little basic instruction, they take off. The possibilities are magnified when they're exposed to the imaginative learning software now available on disks and CD-ROMs. Challenged in a fun way, a kid with a math problem will often make a dramatic jump in interest and capacity. The same is true with English, geography or science.

With computers, kids have control. The machine opens vistas without being judgmental — without a parent or teacher telling kids whether they're doing OK.

A colleague told us a moving story about a mentally handicapped child that adults had difficulty getting through to. Finally, the child was put in front of a computer. He took quickly to its programs. A social worker asked him why he liked the computer. He answered: "The computer calls me Jerry. The other kids call me handicapped."

**If every child in the Charlotte region had frequent and easy access to a computer, good software and adult guidance, would schools face the overwhelming job of motivating children that they often face today?**

Consider our traditional school model. It's an educational factory. Children sitting in rows in a classroom, getting information crammed into their heads. By contrast, with a big chunk of standard instruction left to the new technology, teachers could become coaches, leaving the lecture style behind. They could be more sensitive to individual children's problems.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools have made a significant start. Every third-, fourth- and fifth-grade classroom has a minimum of four computers. Computer use in other classes varies, as does the extent to

**CALL US**

■ What's your opinion of the conclusions in the Peirce report?

In Charlotte: **377-4444**  
and enter 1006

Outside Charlotte: **1-800-432-1802**  
and enter 1006

We'll print a sampling of comments.

which teachers have altered teaching styles. "In some schools it's changed pretty dramatically," says Hal Gardner, the schools' director of educational technology.

A fascinating experiment will unfold in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' planned Education Village, next to IBM's Charlotte campus. Of \$25 million in school reform grants IBM plans to make nationally, the first \$2 million was targeted to the Education Village's four schools for computers and cutting-edge education software.

The announcement came in September 1994 from IBM Chairman Louis Gerstner, perhaps corporate America's prime exponent of fundamental education reform linked to computers and cutting-edge software.

"The education system needs the kind of top-to-bottom reengineering that business has accepted as the price of survival," said Gerstner. "Technology has transformed the American workplace. It can also transform classrooms and the way schools operate."

Those principles shouldn't be focused just on the Education Village schools — they should spread through all the region's counties.

The continuing challenge, of course, will be to make sure the new technology reaches not only the talented and well-off, but into communities that are

rural, or less affluent, or both. Such areas, especially, need strenuous efforts to get the technology and appropriate training introduced wherever there's an opening — in town halls, community centers, schools, churches, and wherever possible, private homes.

Sadly, technological progress often takes from the poor and disadvantaged. It strips away jobs, makes old skills useless. In the words of Steve Snow, director of Charlotte's Web: "We're already a country at risk for people who don't have computer access. But here's an opportunity — to give a hand to people without means to leapfrog into the next generation. Computers should be a real energizing force for neighborhood, economic, civic development."

**It is vital to identify information highway advocates and interpreters in every town and neighborhood of the region, to help people of all ages hook onto information networks.**

Check around. You'll find at least one or two unappointed evangelists of cyberspace in almost every neighborhood. Charlotte's Web is starting to organize these enthusiasts, offering specific training on teaching new users how to get on the system, navigate it, save and load information.

That kind of outreach is critical. Otherwise, cyberspace further divides the region and community.

We recognize that tens of thousands of folks in Weddington or Myers Park or Davidson already wake up to a world saturated with computers and communications technology. Maybe you're yawning, wondering what the fuss is about. In affluent homes, it's a rare child who doesn't have a computer.

But while households in southeast Charlotte may be adding fax machines and updating their modems to the latest baud rates, in neighborhoods like Seversville or Belmont the challenge is just to pay the monthly phone bill. And in some proudly back-

ward rural areas, advanced technology may be suspect — sometimes seen as a cover for automated assembly lines and lost jobs. Thousands of the region's people may feel controlled by computers, but never their masters.

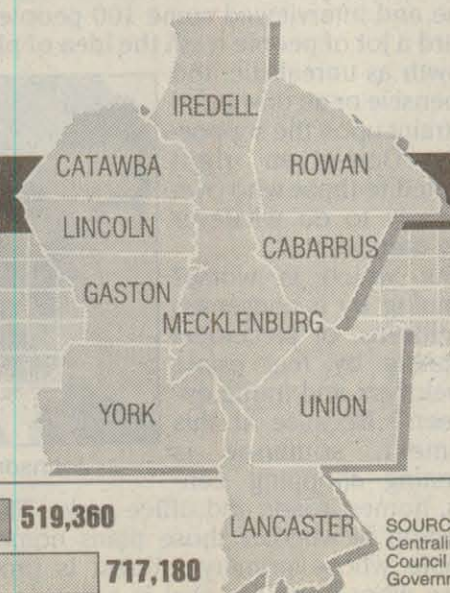
This is a moral issue. If computer literacy and access is to be a passport to economic security and to full participation in the community, then leaving out a big chunk of the population — especially when ways could be found to include everyone — is callous.

It may not be deliberate, but it amounts to saying some people are less worthy than others. In a region with some of the grandest churches we've seen, such exclusion seems profoundly inconsistent with strongly held values about right and wrong.

And leaving many people computer-illiterate, stranded in technological limbo, is also dangerously bad economics. No place that's reaching for the heights in international competition can afford a large, dramatically less productive segment of its work force. Unprepared workers — many of whom, in time, will have difficulty finding jobs at all — mean fewer firms will find the area attractive. The workers become a social burden the rest of the population will have to subsidize through welfare and Medicaid, or indirectly, through shifted medical costs, crowded courts and prisons.

The smart policy says: While the region's at a pinnacle in banking and finance, before the last low-skill jobs go, get busy lifting every resident onto the Information Highway.

From Philadelphia to San Diego, communities are talking about pieces of this strategy. The opportunity for the Charlotte region is to link computers with kids and families, workers, workplaces and community more comprehensively than any other metropolitan region. The long-term benefits, for everyone, would prove stunning.



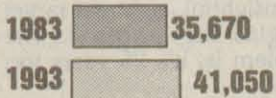
### The region

The numbers below are total employment figures for the region. (Employment data for Catawba County was not available and is not included in the total below)

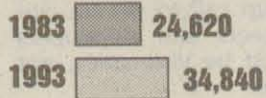
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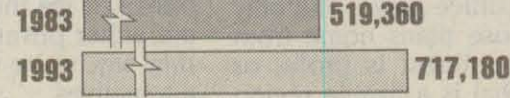
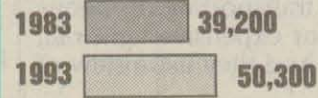
#### Rowan



#### Union



#### York



SOURCE: Centralina Council of Government

# The Charlotte Observer

ROLFE NEILL, Chairman and Publisher

JENNIE BUCKNER, Editor JOHN LUBY, General Manager

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ED WILLIAMS, Editor of the Editorial Pages FRANK BARROWS, Managing Editor

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## Editorials

### Who rules this region?

■ We're open, civic-minded and our economy's booming. So why aren't we dealing intelligently with growth?

*Is it too heretical to suggest, in this land of free enterprise and ferocious distrust of government, that abdicating so much public decision-making, and letting private developers determine a lot of the region's shape and form, may have been a very bad idea?*

— Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson

Urban experts Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson have taken a long look at the Charlotte region, and, while praising our regional cooperation and civic spirit, they conclude we badly need an infusion of democracy.

Part One of their four-part Peirce Report begins today in The Observer and five other Charlotte-area newspapers. Read it, and you will find both praise and criticism, all powered by a surging optimism about the potential for this booming, exuberant "citistate."

Mr. Peirce and Mr. Johnson interviewed at least 100 people and emerged deeply impressed at the culture of civic cooperation and participation here. They applaud Charlotte-Mecklenburg's efforts at consolidation, calling it "a beacon of common sense."

But with their optimism come serious worries. "Growth is your biggest problem," Mr. Peirce told an editor, "and no one has come to grips with it."

In his view, the region is in thrall to an outdated belief that some influential leader — whether banker or mill owner or philanthropist — is always running the show for the rest of us. Blend that belief with the deep suspicion of government Mr. Peirce and Mr. Johnson encountered here, and you get a place where Joe and Jane Citizen aren't likely to think their opinions matter a whit.

That distrust of government, Mr. Peirce proposes, means our region's growth is shaped by what big real estate developers and traffic engineers want, not by what most citizens prefer.

He and Mr. Johnson conclude that whatever the Charlotte region's power structure was 40 years ago, it is fading. And they found little that has replaced it save the "radical populists" —

politicians who seem to govern by denouncing government. While welcome in the public dialogue, their views ought not go unchallenged.

"We believe there's a third route — broader citizen participation, not just in elections but thousands of forums," the writers propose. They want us all to get invested in our future, to get talking in churches, Rotary clubs, chambers of commerce and schools. They're encouraged that neighborhood and regional alliances are springing up, such as the Queen City Congress in Charlotte and the Central Carolinas Citizens Forum.

Again and again, they say, get the people who will be affected into the discussions. In tackling juvenile crime, they ask, are young people well-represented at the table? Do efforts to rejuvenate uptown Charlotte — something Mr. Peirce and Mr. Johnson applaud — involve regular residents and voters as well as business leaders? Involving the public, they note, makes those involved feel like shareholders, rather than sharecroppers.

Allowing input is vital. But so is honoring that input. Too often, our elected leaders toss aside the hard-won consensus of citizen study groups in order to sniff at the heels of powerful developers or business executives. This not only destroys what little faith voters had in politicians to start with, it discourages others — at least those who do not own large tracts of real estate — from getting involved.

Maybe this is a way in which the region's leaders can leave a legacy more valuable than skyscrapers or sports arenas or — heaven help us — aquariums. What if the business, philanthropic and political leaders of Charlotte and the surrounding counties went to work to ensure serious, sustained and meaningful citizen discussion and input on issues from growth to education to crime prevention?

That might mean setting up an endowment to staff a Citizens League to go head-to-head with shopping center developers or state transportation engineers in front of city council. It might mean bankrolling a vast, regional coalition of neighborhood activists. The possibilities are exciting.

### Smart growth or sprawl?

The town of Post Falls, Idaho, was happy to be a low-tax haven. Just outside Spokane, Wash., it welcomed strip shopping centers, discount retailers and other sprawling forms of suburban growth. But a few years back, leaders there analyzed the true taxpayer cost of their haphazard growth patterns. To their dismay, the analysis predicted either municipal bankruptcy or huge tax increases within 10 years.

Consider New Jersey. Rutgers University compared the cost to the state over the next 20 years for two different kinds of growth — today's pattern of sprawl versus another that would channel development more selectively, near existing towns.

The numbers were staggering. The current style of sprawl would cost \$1.3 billion more in capital expenses — roads, sewers, schools — and \$400 million in operating expenses (in today's dollars).

And that, say Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson in Part Two of their four-part Peirce Report, is our so-called "free" market.

#### Planned growth or piecemeal planning?

Messrs. Peirce and Johnson, nationally known writers on cities and urban issues, visited Charlotte and the surrounding area in June and interviewed some 100 people. They heard a lot of people trash the idea of planned growth as unrealistic, too expensive or an unwanted restraint upon the supposedly God-given right granted to those who own property to do whatever they darn want.

But which is worse? Planning by a consensus of citizens, or piecemeal planning by real estate developers and traffic engineers? Because at this moment, someone is planning shopping centers, homes, roads and office parks. The only question is whether those plans come from people whose primary interest is profit, or those whose primary goal is a livable region that maintains its economic health. In a

healthy community, both groups must be involved.

Further, while across the country other cities are grappling with issues like those raised in Post Falls, few in the Charlotte area seem even aware of the debate. And the debate itself is not happening here.

What is happening, Messrs. Peirce and Johnson write, is that business and development interests are essentially the only ones with any significant say in how the region grows.

#### Our unbalanced planning commission

Few things illustrate the power real estate and development interests wield as clearly as the makeup of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission. Of the 14-member board, 10 have direct financial ties to real estate, development or construction. Only one has a background as a neighborhood advocate. Another seat is vacant.

Elected officials who allowed that to happen — county commissioners, city council members and the mayor — should blush with shame. It is unconscionable for a major advisory board on growth and development to be so strongly tilted toward those who profit directly from growth and development.

Clearly the expertise of people in the real estate industry is needed on the planning commission. But the expertise of neighborhood leaders and disinterested — as opposed to uninterested — citizens is just as important.

#### Get more citizens involved

That is one of the clearest messages in today's Peirce Report: Get more citizens involved. The report offers some intriguing suggestions for doing that:

- Set up a center at UNC Charlotte where anyone — developers, neighborhood leaders, planners — could use modern computer software to analyze growth and illustrate alternatives. It's possible to draw, on computers, what proposed subdivisions would look like, then rearrange them. Which looks better, a park in the middle of the neighborhood or a berm of "green space" at the edge? Does the dreaded "higher density" look like a New York slum or Savannah?
- Encourage citizen input, through intensive surveys and interactive radio and television.
- Use creative entrepreneurship on mass transit. If we think our transportation options are either private cars or expensive light rail, they say, we're wrong. And they list a slew of alternatives.

We think they're on target. Do you?

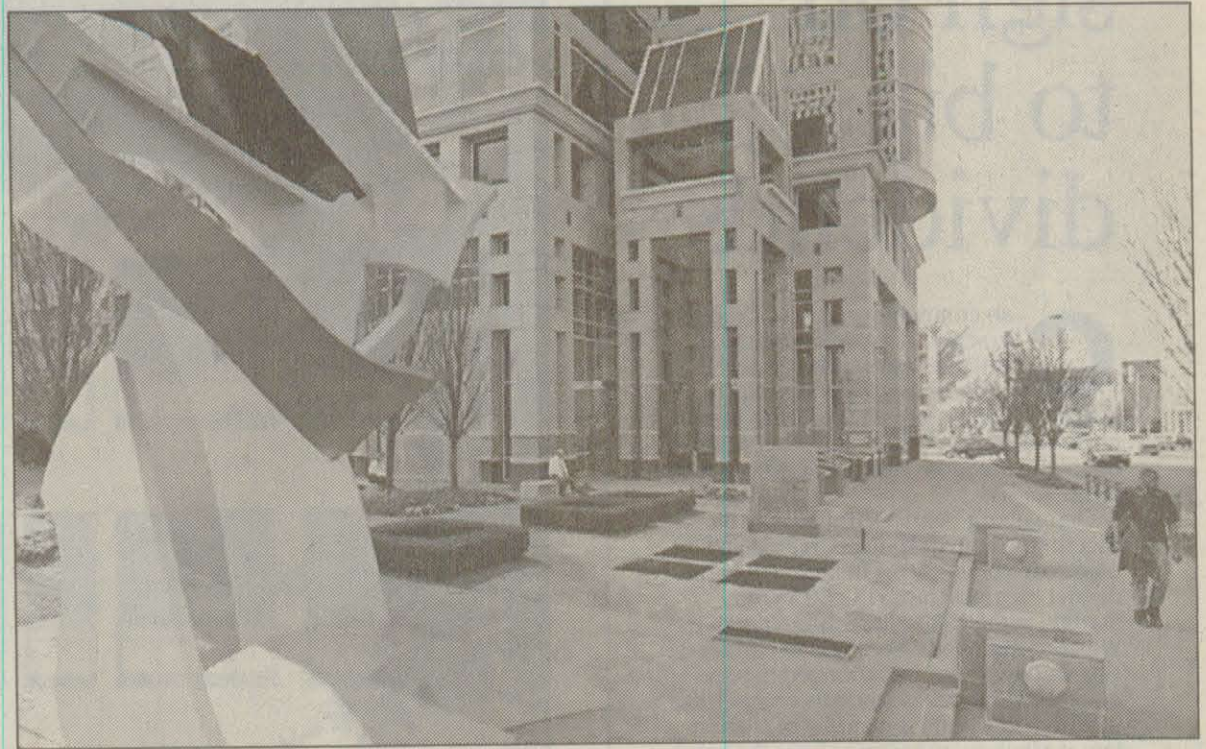


Peirce



Johnson

## THE PEIRCE REPORT Shaping a shared future



MARK B. SLUDER/Staff

Deserted streets: What represents the distinctive flavor of Charlotte? Its empty uptown?

### 'There must be some better options'

Some readers phoned in reactions. Here is a sampling, edited for brevity:

"Delighted to see the Peirce Report. It's been my opinion for some time that developers have been running the show. Mecklenburg's growth rate and growth design are terrible. I'd like to see some planning and organization going into the development of the city — and do we want to continue to pave the entire county? There surely must be some better options."

— Paul Walker  
Charlotte

"A very informative report. However, I was mystified that Lancaster County was not represented in the region — we should be part of it."

— Ed Ogburn  
Lancaster, S.C.

"The Peirce Report is wonderful. We have moved 53 times in 50 years — up and down the East Coast — and these men are calling it the way it is."

— Margaret Seiniger  
Charlotte

"I enjoyed the article, especially after having been fortunate enough to hear (Miami) architect Andres Duany speak. Neal Peirce and his colleagues hit several nails on the head. One thing I'd like to see them address is how to reverse some of the damage that's already been done — especially in dealing with the ivory tower residents of the Department of Transportation, people who are removed from what's actually happening."

— Linda Lee  
Charlotte

"As a black with some North Carolina roots I find the Peirce Report interesting. Charlotte is well on its way to becoming just another big city with all the problems of Los Angeles. The report says all the right things — most of them obvious. I doubt that Charlotte will do much to address it."

"It's interesting that the lone picture of blacks showed people doing an Afro-centric dance in front of a cultural center."

— Paul H. Logan  
East Flat Rock

"I agree pretty much with what Mr. Peirce is saying about the need for a participatory democracy — bottom-up government rather than top-down. We've probably had top-down in Rock Hill for some time."

— Steve Rast  
Rock Hill

"The community must make use of our input. People are being pushed out of their homes. We need help. The big city developers have taken over. NationsBank, the planning commission — it's all about them and not about us."

— Geraldine Jones  
President, Earle Village  
Charlotte

"As adopted North Carolinians since 1985, and proudly so, we are not too impressed with this report. These fellows are obviously out-of-towners coming in and looking around. We do a very good job here in North Carolina, but we should involve those who demand support from our system — the NAACP, etc. — all those kinds of organizations who take from our community. Let's all work together. God bless North Carolina."

— Gerald J. Fitzgerald  
Whispering Pines

"Developers and CEOs have been a benefit to Mecklenburg County, but they make their decisions based on monetary gain. Until we elect leaders who don't compromise themselves by always turning to these chieftains rather than to the community at large, we can have all the forums and community involvement we want but we will continue to have urban sprawl, bad development decisions, traffic jams and overcrowded schools."

— Christine Parks  
North Mecklenburg

"Thank you, Observer, for this wonderful series. The Peirce Report is right on in saying that we need democracy in action. People are going to have good government only if they take part in it — and they will if they are encouraged to."

— Betty Seizinger  
Charlotte

### 'Movers, shakers have their way'

It is late in coming, and it's too bad the situation has to be pointed out by outsiders. Anyone who has been attending city council meetings or city zoning meetings and has observed special interests at work realizes the movers and shakers have their way.

— Ray Young  
Charlotte

I live uptown. I found that the Peirce Report was valuable and I agreed with their conclusions. I agree that it's time to get on with something other than just talking about the problem.

— James Palermo  
Charlotte

I agree with the report and the need for the citizens to get involved in the whole economic process. One thing I want to mention: I work in the evening as a manager at a bank, from 4 until 12 or 1 a.m. Businesses don't necessarily expect people to work only 40 hours, especially managers. A lot of people I know who work in Charlotte don't use mass transit for the simple reason that they never know when they're going in to work or when they're getting off.

Paul Smith  
Concord

I say it's about time thoughtful folks who have a stake in making our region cleaner, better and more livable take control of their future. The Peirce Report should be a wake-up call to private citizens, engineers and developers that we must be visionaries, not reactionaries.

— Al Schwirck  
Lake Norman

The urban studies department at UNC Charlotte wants to rule the whole region. They want Metrolina to be like an octopus with Charlotte as the head. Those of us in the ring cities want to retain our autonomy. Big is not better. The citizen input theme coming from the urban studies department is strategy only, a gimmick for them to win and rule.

— A.C. Cooke  
Concord

The Peirce Report is timely and a wake-up call to everybody in Charlotte. We just moved from near Sharon-Amity and Independence to Plaza-Midwood, because we were tired of all the traffic and wanted to live in a neighborhood where we could walk to a grocery store without having to cross six lanes. But I think the citizens must be educated before they can envision what they want Charlotte to look like. Answering questionnaires is one thing, but we need more information. I'm an adult educator and a big proponent of study circles, where small groups come together and learn from each other and get new information, then move toward action. It's more democratic than just mailing questionnaires.

— June Blotnick  
Charlotte

I was born and raised here, unlike most people who live here now. I enjoyed the Peirce Report. It's very insightful, right on target and I'm glad they wrote it. The only problem is, it's 25 years too late.

— Dorne Pentes  
Charlotte

I have lived on the same road for more than 66 years, and I have seen citizens' involvement destroy a lot of communities. For instance, Providence Road — now they're griping about too much traffic. The state, county and city had planned projects to improve traffic over the past 30 years or so, but citizens groups got together and said no, not in my backyard."

— Alvin Williams  
Matthews

"We left here in 1979 after seven years. When we returned two years ago, we were shocked to find Independence Boulevard still unfinished. Charlotte is a beautiful city, but you're not going to be able to support what's proposed in the Peirce Report unless you've got roads that can move people — and I can't believe you don't have a beltway."

— Vicki Scott  
Lake Norman

"According to NationsBank Chairman Hugh McColl Jr., 'The so-called group that people think controls everything downtown cratered about four or five years ago.' What's his definition of 'cratered'? If you think these individuals are no longer at the center of power, you're fooling yourselves."

— Howard Thompson  
Denver, N.C.

"I think the Peirce Report is exciting and challenging. I hope there are many people listening, particularly those with influence, so that common sense, rather than greed, wins out the day. I'm looking forward to next Sunday's installment."

Helen Preston  
Gastonia

"I found it very comprehensive. It's an excellent written report. My only concern is that Burke County was left out of the region. We are part of the Charlotte region and part of the Carolinas Partnership and we are marketed as part of the Carolinas Partnership. We're a little disappointed that The Charlotte Observer and others did not include us as part of the overall strategy for economic development of the region."

Jeff Morse  
Valdese

I've lived here 5 years, and I totally agree with the Peirce Report. You're either rich in Charlotte or you're poor. There's nothing for the middle class. And only the rich people who are, as the Peirce Report says, tied to real estate have any say as to what happens and who gets what. They may be rich, but they need to open their eyes and look at what's going on around them.

— Michelle Jones  
Charlotte

The report is excellent and right on target. I especially appreciated Sunday's story on the traffic and what can be done with it.

— Athena Chagaris  
Charlotte

The Peirce Report is eye-opening. I agree with a lot of its suggestions, but how do we actually get involved, to have an active say? Some of the suggestions seem difficult to pursue. Give us some practical steps. Thanks very much, and continue your fine work on the articles.

— Tom Lowando  
Matthews

Their conclusion that we need to mold ourselves after more successful cities such as Portland, Ore., is the wrong approach but maybe the right direction. The South's heritage and culture is a very proud one. We need to work with what we've got and improve from there — not change dramatically in architecture, style of living and things such as that.

— Frank Bradshaw  
Matthews

# The Charlotte Observer

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## Editorial

# Attack the weakness

■ The Charlotte region has a gung-ho attitude, but a poor reputation for public schools and skilled workers.

That picture from Tuesday's front page — a Panther in the foreground, the NationsBank tower in the background — says a lot about why this region's pro-business attitude ranked first in the nation in a 1993 Fortune magazine survey.

But that's not the whole story, note urban affairs writers Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson today in the third part of their report on the Charlotte region.

"The Charlotte area rated a dismal 53rd among 60 regions in skilled workers," they write, "as well as 53rd in quality of public education." That's why Raleigh-Durham and the Research Triangle ranked at the pinnacle of Fortune's list of the best cities for knowledge workers, and why Charlotte was lost among "the rest of the major cities."

Raleigh has a nice story in Fortune, skeptics argue, while Charlotte has the Panthers and the Hornets. But tomorrow comes. Maybe it will bring a robot to pluck chickens and take other basic jobs that put food on the table for poorly educated workers. Maybe it will bring an ever-greater influx of unskilled workers desperate for entry level jobs — and just a paycheck away from our region's already strained safety net of social services.

### 'Schools, schools, schools'

If we want tomorrow to bring high-paying jobs, we have to attack the reality that too many of the region's people are not ready for the future. Start with the fundamentals:

■ "Schools, schools, schools," as the report puts it, come first. The schools can't catch up, much less get ahead, without money for buildings, for programs, for technology. Bond issues and annual budgets are important. So is the determination to overcome the old legacy of limited education and the new reality of urban poverty. If the region thinks business as usual is enough, tomorrow is more likely to bring the bottom of the list than the top.

■ "Training, training, training" is also as important as it is familiar. That certainly means support of North Carolina's much-praised but under-funded community colleges. It also means expansion of undergraduate and graduate university programs — primarily at UNC Charlotte. In this region, 5.2% of adults have graduate degrees; in the Triangle, the percentage is more than twice as high. UNCC is a critical tool for providing advanced education for the region's workers and students, and for drawing bright students and professors from elsewhere. UNCC, Central Piedmont Community College and their sister institutions are essential for attracting companies that need highly educated workers and educational opportunities for their employees. Charlotte and its neighbors must worry about the students coming along, the workers moving in and, equally important, the thousands of residents who left school years ago.

■ Computers, especially when networked across the region and the state, can do a lot for students and teachers, for workers and employers, for officials and citizens. Education and training can be first-rate and self-paced; they can be delivered at many hours and many places. The genius of the public library's Charlotte's Web is not just the community network, but the training and access for adults and children alike who lack the background or



MARK B. SLUDER/Staff

Charlotte's pride, but not the whole story.

the equipment to plunge ahead on their own. None of this is news. Education and training have been near the top of the region's priority lists for years. Technology is a staple of every educational conference and many classrooms. But lifting a region, like obtaining an education, takes work as well as dreams.

It also takes money, and years of persistent effort. Standard schooling takes 13 years, and the Charlotte region doesn't do well enough at that. Yet kindergarten is too late to start, and high school graduation is too early to quit. Maybe places that are comfortably ahead can afford to defeat school bonds and chase off impolitic reformers. This region can't.

### Needed: a regional report card

Messrs. Peirce and Johnson urge the region to nourish the promising electronic innovations springing up here. And they recommend creating a regional committee to guide and prod the region into the electronic age.

But the region also ought to have a report card on education and training. It needs a body to provide independent, continuing and expert oversight. What do the test scores say about achievement of the region's children and the progress of its schools? What will the schools need, and what can the taxpayers provide? How is the region actually doing in educating its children and training its workers?

The university can provide the expertise. Maybe business can provide some of the money. But citizens have to provide the drive. Unless citizens are willing to act — and to stay after their elected officials year in and year out — not much will happen, or change.

### Agree? Disagree? Call, write us

What's your reaction to today's installment of "The Peirce Report: Shaping a Shared Future?" We'll publish a roundup of calls and letters. Write us at Peirce Report, Editorial Department, Charlotte Observer, P.O. Box 30308, Charlotte, N.C. 28230-0308. Fax us at (704) 358-5022. Or call us at 377-4444 and enter 1006, or call 1-800-432-1802 and enter 1006.



MARK B. SLUDER/Staff

Do you recognize Charlotte? Much has changed since this aerial photo of uptown was taken in 1984. For today's view, see page 1.

# Managing menace of uncontrolled growth

■ When a city doesn't manage its growth, it abdicates a key responsibility — and leaves taxpayers to pay the costs of resulting squalor.

By DAVID WALTERS  
 Special to The Observer

Charlotte is schizophrenic about growth. To most local politicians, and certainly to local business leaders, growth is good, the much-vaunted "engine of prosperity" of American capitalism — some would even say of American democracy itself.

But to many ordinary citizens, growth represents the antithesis of this good life. Instead, it becomes a threat, as rural areas are relentlessly urbanized, children are packed tightly into squalid "temporary" classrooms and family schedules are wrenched apart by split-shift learning. The menace is manifest also in the loss of respected old buildings and remembered landscapes that are wiped from the earth, excised from our communal memory. Citizens' groups organize to fight development; their motives range from selfish NIMBYism to ideals of community and ecological vision.

The Peirce Report highlights these dilemmas well and does us all a favor by demolishing some dangerous myths about growth. Most significantly, it demonstrates that if development is not creatively managed to achieve a balance between competing camps, then a city's future is threatened by a generic visual squalor and a real loss of economic edge.

### Wake up to the real world

Local politicians who fear increased taxes "when-ever a planner has a vision" should wake up to the real world. Everything has to be paid for in the end, and avoiding the problem now just defers the day of reckoning. This is civic negligence of the worst kind, substituting easy rhetoric for difficult action and hiding the fact that uncoordinated development means higher taxes.

This comes about when a town doesn't manage its growth, when it abdicates the difficult responsibility of mediating between the forces of the market, its sense of community and the stewardship of its environment. In these *laissez-faire* economics ordinary taxpayers are left to pick up the tab for maintaining miles of new streets, hiring more police and fire fighters and building more schools. The activity of citizenship, a cornerstone of democracy, is reduced to the passiveness of consumerism.

For an alternative, local leaders and the Peirce Report need journey no farther than north Mecklenburg County. (Don't use The Observer's maps though; none of the three northern Mecklenburg towns exist in this "regional" vision.) In Huntersville and Cornelius, but most assertively in Davidson, local citizens have been doing for some time what the Neal Peirce



Walters

team prescribes as the best remedy for our region's urban ailments. Townspeople have formed committees, educated themselves and taken charge of their planning process, tackling head-on the difficult issues most Charlotte politicians don't seem to understand.

Davidson's nearly complete plan for sustainable growth defined one of its primary aims as controlling property taxes, so that the costs of land development are not inherited by future generations as unbidden legacies.

### What's missing? Values

Townspeople squarely faced what is perhaps the central issue in our culture: while the free market can be an efficient engine of prosperity, it is a poor generator of values. Those missing values must come from ordinary citizens — by articulating civic, physical and social visions of what they want their community to be and what it should look like.

The Davidson Land Plan Committee transcended the most pernicious of contemporary planning myths — that low-density, large-lot zoning is the best way to preserve a rural character with plenty of open space. In fact, precisely the opposite is true. All around us, the natural landscape is being urbanized because of this well-intentioned but mistaken belief.

At residential densities of one and two units to the acre, development spreads all over the land, with lots of road needed to connect everything. The very things people want to preserve, good usable open space and a beautiful landscape, are what they demolish in the process.

Instead of this featureless future, Davidson is designing a more compact arrangement, preserving the precious, small-town qualities and much of its landscape while proposing a range of new housing to suit all income levels.

To make this vision practical, the citizens' committee invited developers and large landowners to take part in the process, to achieve a genuine mediation between property rights, civic ambition and market forces. There is common ground; quality sells. Genuine small-town life lived in traditional settings is not only charming; it is ecologically sensible and marketable, too.

### Listening to their own voices

Development that takes the existing town as its model, extends the pattern of connected town streets and public spaces, disperses traffic instead of concentrating it, allows people the choice of walking or riding transit instead of having to drive everywhere, and that fits subdivisions within large areas of landscape preserved for posterity, benefits townspeople and developers alike.

Citizens and planners in all three north Mecklenburg towns are working toward similar goals. Each group in its own way is questioning the seductive sirens' spell spun by salesmen of the status quo. Instead they are listening to their own voices, and to a few visionaries as well, steering toward a beacon that marks a proud legacy for future generations.

David Walters is professor of architecture and urban design at UNC Charlotte and a consultant town planner to Cornelius and Davidson.

## Editorial

# What happens next?

■ The Peirce Report offers challenges to the region. How can citizens take up those challenges?

For four Sundays, Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson have issued their "challenges to the region."

The two nationally known urban writers, who have done similar studies of 10 other U.S. cities, have written of our region's changing leadership, rapid growth and low-skilled work force. Today, writing about social problems, they praise what they see happening in Charlotte. They mention, among other things, community policing, the City Within A City initiative and the hard-headed analysis of the Children's Services Network. "The totality of effort in Charlotte-Mecklenburg is stunning," they write.

Their advice distills to this: Keep working on the problems, assess which programs get results, then support them, and never forget that poverty and crime affect all of us, not just "neighborhoods across town."

But what happens next? The challenges from Messrs. Peirce and Johnson are wide-ranging and far-reaching. Not surprisingly, to anyone familiar with their work, they urge our region — which they prefer to call a "citistate" — to work together. They support thoughtful planning and creative approaches to such difficult issues as mass transit and training low-skilled workers. But most of all, they push democracy. Citizens must be actively involved, their opinions solic-

ited and honored, Messrs. Peirce and Johnson say, even if that isn't how we've traditionally done things here.

Clearly, not all their recommendations will succeed. Some residents will surely argue not all of them should. But many are well worth pursuing. What follows is our checklist, some specific actions that could address the issues the Peirce Report highlights.

### Leadership and citizenship

■ Put serious money and support behind such citizen coalitions as the Central Carolinas Citizens Forum and the Queen City Congress. Treat them seriously and, in return, expect them to make a serious contribution.

■ Look at problems regionally, and insist that government do so as well. Expand some government services across county lines.

### The region's growth

■ Open a special center, with sophisticated computer technology, perhaps at UNC Charlotte, to help citizens envision and analyze development and growth. Developers would have to take their proposals there first.

■ Put citizens first. Charlotte city council, the mayor and Mecklenburg County commissioners should vow that appointments to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission will result in a body in which citizens with no direct financial

interest in real estate, development or construction are in the clear majority. That policy should also apply to other citizen boards with significant impact on growth or development issues, such as Charlotte's Tree Advisory Commission and watershed study groups.

■ Emulate the Portland, Ore., regional planning process, in which thousands of citizens can make clear choices among growth alternatives.

■ Stop tearing down historic buildings — especially in the ring cities, which still have a fighting chance to maintain a sense of history.

### Training, schools and work force

■ Create a regional watchdog committee of electronic communications experts to gauge where the citistate stands and urge action.

■ Set up a similar regional report card on education and training.

### Poverty, crime

■ Broaden community policing into the region.

■ Don't exaggerate crime. Local television stations should moderate their excessive use of crime news.

■ Serve the community. Each church or synagogue in the region should develop at least one program addressing the community's social problems.

Things are already afoot. The UNCC architecture school wants to set up the high-tech computer center for growth and development. It seeks less than \$30,000 but was told no money is available now. Perhaps a public-private venture is worth exploring, or donations from foundations.

In downtown Gastonia, two historic buildings seemingly destined for demolition have won a reprieve. Members of the Uptown Revitalization Committee, citing the Peirce Report's criticism of uptown Charlotte, helped convince Gastonia officials to lease the old P&N Railway depot for a year. An architect will study its structural quality, and that of the 70-year-old First Baptist Church at Franklin Boulevard and South Street.

We'll keep you posted on developments.

### Want to hear more?

Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson will be keynote speakers Wednesday at the annual fall conference of UNC Charlotte's Urban Institute.

The conference, "The Peirce Report: Recommendations for Our Region's Future," will be 1-5 p.m. at UNCC's Cone University Center. It costs \$30 and is open to the public. To reserve a place, call Ginny Larson in the Office of Continuing Education, 547-2879, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays.

PART III

# Workforce



MARK B. SLUDER/Staff

Tomorrowland today: On a computer and a Planet Earth mouse pad, a Charlotte-Mecklenburg student learns skills vital for the Information Age.

## Future rides on lifting job skills

By NEAL PEIRCE and CURTIS JOHNSON  
Special to The Observer

**N**o one would blink an eye if a Hollywood producer filmed a movie showing a group of Charlotte bankers gathered around a polished mahogany table, debating whether this is the week to buy Japan.

Nor would anyone be surprised if, within 50 miles of that mahogany table, "60 Minutes" were shooting footage of hundreds of low-paid workers filing into a dank building to spend the day separating body parts of dead chickens.

This vivid contrast, a citistate both go-go global and mired in sweatshop labor, can't last. And it won't.

Right now, the region boasts a robust economy and entrepreneurial vigor. Most of its citizens, skilled or not, are employed. But the region has too many people with low skills.

What happens as more and more industries eliminate low-skill jobs? It's no stretch to imagine, at this moment, researchers somewhere — maybe Milacron in Ohio — designing robots to work the poultry production line. The only jobs left will be for a handful of highly skilled technicians who control the robots.

In basic skills and education, Charlotte — which so loves to be ahead of the curve — has a dramatic and dangerous mismatch to overcome. And it's a mismatch oddly obscured in the region's public debates. That's because in many ways, the region seems to be succeeding brilliantly.

Few U.S. metropolitan areas have as dynamic an economy, with low unemployment, fast growth, diversification. It was no accident a cross-section of America's leading business executives, polled by Fortune magazine in 1993, rated Charlotte No. 1 among 60 regions in the quality of its business climate. The area also rated high — second — in its political environment, meaning few unions or intrusive regulations.

But read the fine print of the Fortune findings. You discover a grim underside. The Charlotte area rated a dismal 53rd among 60 regions in skilled workers, as well as 53rd in quality of public education.

Too many employers report woefully unprepared entry-level workers, sometimes lacking basic reading and math skills, and nearly always without technical sophistication. Many of the region's manufacturing plants have problems because some workers can't read well enough.

In an Information Age, any region saddled with a

### THE PEIRCE REPORT

#### Shaping a shared future

Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson, nationally known writers on cities and city growth, have taken an in-depth look at the Charlotte region, as they have done previously in 10 other cities. This is the third in their four-part series.

reputation for meager education and knowledge is in a precarious position. No region will stay both dumb and rich for long.

Part of the answer to this problem is obvious and something you've heard before, although we don't pretend it is easy: schools, schools, schools. Pass the school bond issues. Continue to push for im-

provement and reforms. Tell kids the truth about how the economy is changing.

Another obvious part of the answer — again, something you've heard before — is training, training, training. Indeed, inventive high school curricula have been introduced. Some, like "Tech Prep," are well-suited to young people not headed (as most aren't) for a four-year college but who need an education to prepare them for work.

In Charlotte, Central Piedmont Community College can help. CPCC is widely regarded as a premier institution to prepare people for more sophisticated work force skills.

But we also see that, as elsewhere in the nation, public confidence in the schools has sagged until many no longer believe increasing the investment improves the payoff. In that climate, do you just cave in and settle for whatever you can get?

We think a better option is to try something fundamentally different. Why not link education — kindergarten through high school, classroom to home — to the technologies transforming our world: computers, multimedia software, the Internet, communitywide and worldwide interactive communications?

Communications technology is changing the

Please see Training/page 4D

### Challenges to the region

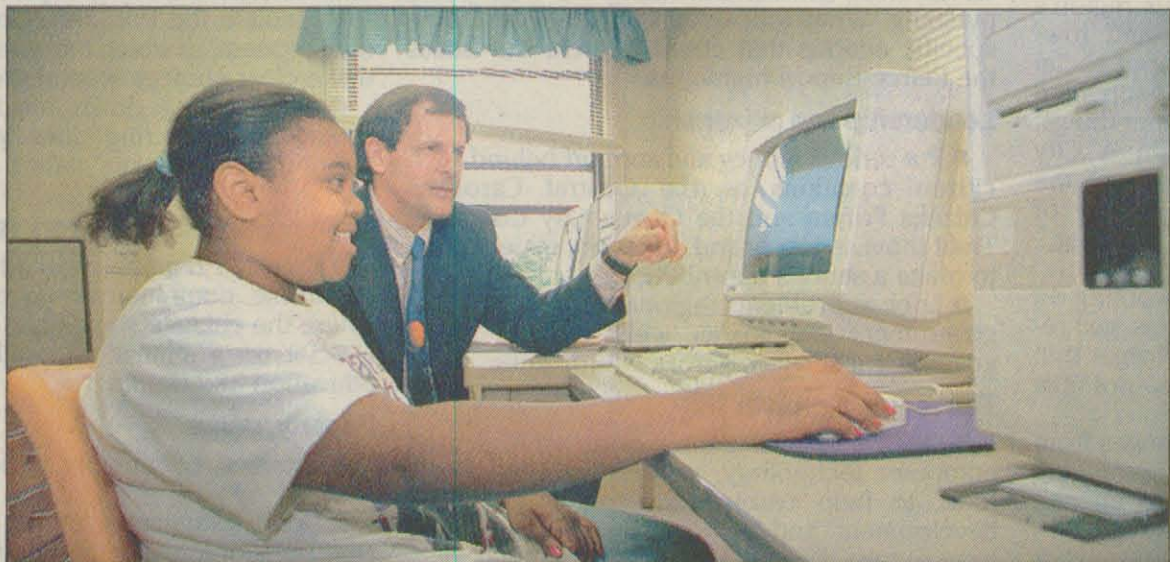
- Use computers and state-of-the-art software to overcome the big gap between the Charlotte region's skilled and unskilled workers, between affluent and poor neighborhoods.

- Make a wired region, with outreach to all, a keystone of economic development.

- Focus on computers and software to lift the region's schools into an era of reengineered education accessible to all.

- Support and advance the breakthroughs being made, which include Charlotte's Web, the schools' CMS Network, fiber-optic capacity and the IBM-supported computer/software capacity in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system's Education Village.

- Create a regional watchdog committee of electronic communications experts to gauge where the citistate stands — compared to its needs and to other regions — and propose next steps.



MARK B. SLUDER/Staff

Charlotte's Web: Steve Snow, director of Charlotte's Web, helps 11-year-old Melissa Wallace surf the Internet at the Anita Stroud Center in Fairview Homes. Now bursting from

its formative stages, Charlotte's Web is connecting the far-flung parts of the Charlotte citistate into a working web of interactive communications.