

Richmond County may see growth from BRAC effort

November 4, 2008

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Richmond County Daily Journal
Rockingham, NC

Richmond County is one of 11 counties included in the All American Defense Corridor and will see some impact from the growth that is taking place at Fort Bragg according to the Fort Bragg/Pope AFB BRAC Regional Task Force's Community Impact Assessment presentation Monday.

"This is one of the most competitive opportunities we've had with the four-star headquarters coming to Fort Bragg from Atlanta," said RTF Executive Director Paul Dordal. "It changes everything and brings about a \$1 billion increase in funds to the region."

RTF Regional Planner Don Belk and Dordal both emphasized that the growing military installation at Fort Bragg will require "strategic sustainable development" throughout the entire region that will "integrate and coordinate regional planning to link the urban, rural and military installation communities."

"Our region has been suffering declining industry for some time with 16,000 jobs lost in the last five years through the 11 counties in the region," Belk said. "At the same time, dropout rates have increased, unemployment rates have increased. Now we need to make Fort Bragg a driving force behind revitalizing our economy."

Dordal and Belk said that as Fort Bragg grows, more than 700 jobs will be created and the gross regional product will grow by more than \$50 million by 2013. However, for this to happen successfully, Belk highlighted 10 categories that need to be improved by 25 actions the RTF will take.

"We're looking at long-term sustainability and growth in this region in three pieces: people, planet and profits," Belk said. "How can we accommodate the growth that is coming?"

Though Belk said that Richmond County would experience the least amount of direct impact due to growth at Fort Bragg, there would be many fringe benefits as new jobs are created and moved to the region.

"We're going to need an unprecedented level of cooperation from the counties, municipalities and residents in the region," Belk said. "We ask everyone to work together to plan for the new infrastructure that will be needed."

Transportation and infrastructure are core issues for Richmond County as Interstate 73/74 is still being extended through the county. The county's highway system is crucial to shipping needs for Fort Bragg as Highway 74 is the base's main connection to the Charlotte area. Richmond County also connects Fort Bragg to Raleigh and the Triad area. Belk also said the reviving passenger rail service would benefit both the county and the region.

"We are working to create a multi-modal transportation plan to fully utilize the highway system and railways," he said. "Richmond County in particular can really be a mobility center and will benefit significantly from a return of passenger rail service."

Belk discussed the need to improve existing schools and build new ones to accommodate new students. He also said that community colleges will need to be used as a job training ground for the new jobs that will be available as the base grows.

Health care was also an issue for the RTF, as the region is short on dentists, surgeons and behavioral/mental health specialists. Belk said the region needs to attract more medical personnel to meet the needs of military personnel, especially those returning from war zones.

The region's water and wastewater systems also pose a problem for development at Fort Bragg. Many water lines and water treatment plants are outdated and don't have the capacity to meet the growing demand.

"We're looking at a regional master plan to perhaps consolidate the region's water systems into one," Belk said.