

**ROBERT M. CLINGER III**  
**REMARKS BEFORE *THE SUN NEWS***  
**EDITORIAL BOARD**

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2:45 PM

Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to appear before you to present my views on issues confronting Horry County Council and the candidates for District #2. As a note, the views I express here today are my own and are not necessarily those of any firm or organization with which I may be affiliated.

The first question that I am always asked is: Why did you decide to enter politics? My answer is simple: I believe that I can make a difference. In addition, I feel that I have a lot to give back to this county. I received an excellent education from Coastal Carolina University. I graduated from Coastal Carolina University, summa cum laude with a degree in Finance in May 2000. Though I could have left and gone to a big city where the opportunities and financial rewards may have been greater, I chose to stay here and continue building my life. This area is my home, and I plan to be part of its future. I think it would be natural for anyone with my finance, economic, and strategic planning background to want to participate in the decision making process that is going to help shape the future of this area.

Following three years at a boutique investment bank here in Myrtle Beach, I co-founded Highland Global, a strategic advisory and financial analysis firm that provides merger and acquisition advisory services, business appraisals, among other consulting services to privately held and family controlled companies both in the United States and abroad. I have written numerous articles on finance, economics, strategic issues, some of which have been published in valuation journals. And, I have written two books, *The Seven Deadly Sins of Business Valuation* and *The Seven Deadly Sins*

*of Business Valuation: Closely Held & Family Controlled Companies.*

I believe that the combination of my extensive financial and economic background and my fresh perspective for strategic planning for the future would be of tremendous value to the Horry County Council, particularly as we seek to confront the many challenges that lie ahead. In addition, my loyalties lie only with the people of Horry County and not with any special interest group or lobby. My economics oriented nature of addressing strategic planning, the typical “on the one hand...but on the other hand” reasoning, will ensure that I give careful and thorough analysis to each issue that comes before me on the County Council so that the best interests of the people of Horry County are served. And when compromise is necessary, as it will inevitably be in some cases, I will seek an outcome that is fair, equitable, and balanced in serving the interests of all parties involved.

When I started my education at Coastal Carolina University in the fall of 1996, the population of Horry County was over 160,000. By the time I graduated in May 2000, the population had increased by 25% to roughly 200,000. Today, the population is estimated at over 220,000, and by 2010 the population is projected to reach over 240,000. By 2025, the population may be as high as 350,000-400,000.

This growth has brought many challenges, particularly with respect to our infrastructure, zoning that strikes a balance between maintaining traditional neighbourhoods and developments that are necessary to accommodate the growth in our population, and the increased demand for public services necessary to maintain and improve our quality of life.

While the Horry County Council has addressed many of the challenges placed before them as a result of the tremendous growth in our area in recent years, the investments that have been made in our infrastructure and public services have only enabled us to catch up with the

strained demands created by this growth. As yet, we have not managed to position ourselves ahead of the current growth and that which is still to come.

In order to accomplish this, we must look to the *Envision 2025 Comprehensive Plan for Horry County*, which is currently being updated, as well as the Master Plan for the county which is being developed jointly by Coastal Carolina University and Clemson. And while the objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Plan serve as our roadmap for addressing future growth, the County Council must examine the issues before us in a careful and thorough manner so that the policies developed are conducive to promoting economic and business growth, protecting the quality of life and our environment, and providing for the necessary investments in our infrastructure that will be necessary to accommodate the future growth of this area.

A proactive approach that plans for the future is the best way to ensure that we do not fall behind the growth of this area ever again. But the Council must ensure that the decisions we make are consistent with the many objectives and goals set forth in *Envision 2025*. We must ensure that our decisions are made with the best interests of the residents of Horry County in mind and that those decisions are made after having given careful consideration to economic feasibility and financial responsibility.

As part of this, I believe that the decisions we make should be assessed against three criteria:

1. Is the decision being made in the best interests of the people of Horry County and the community or communities affected?

In some areas of this county there has been great concern regarding zoning and density issues, particularly with new developments. We must consider if high density developments are appropriate

where the surrounding community is much lower density. Since we cannot craft a blanket policy that is applicable for all situations, we must carefully examine each case that comes before us. In some cases where development or redevelopment is inevitable, we must seek to reach a fair and equitable compromise between those seeking high density and those seeking to maintain a low density environment.

2. Is the outcome of our decision consistent with the objectives outlined in the *Envision 2025 Comprehensive Plan*?

We must seek to develop policies that fit within the framework of the Comprehensive Plan and its many objectives and goals. For example, our decisions should help “to establish and implement strategies that support a sustainable economy through the creation of public-private partnerships, the diversification of markets, and the creation of higher wage jobs, while ensuring an attractive community and the protection of the natural resources of the county.”

3. Is this decision fiscally responsible and economically sound?

The County currently has a surplus stemming from windfall revenues resulting from building fees associated with the rapid growth in the last few years. While there are many ways that this money could be spent, we must make sure that our decisions are fiscally responsible. Infrastructure projects must be prioritized, and we must ensure that we assess policies in a fiscally responsible manner that does not deprive crucial infrastructure and public works projects of the necessary funding.

The Capital Project Sales Tax Act is an admirable

effort that would enable us to fund crucial transportation infrastructure projects, which would otherwise go unfunded if left to policymakers in Columbia. These projects could be funded in a manner that is economically responsible and that does not place a disproportionately large burden upon the residents of this county. The voters of Horry County certainly deserve to decide the fate of the Capital Project Sales Tax Act in a referendum in November.

In addition, we must ensure that major projects, such as the new airport terminal, that are being contemplated are economically feasible and fiscally responsible. But further, we must carefully consider if this is a wise use of the taxpayers money in light of other projects that could use funding.

Property tax relief is another issue that must be considered carefully. The future of property tax reform in Columbia remains uncertain. In the absence of such reform at the state level, property tax relief at the local level is likely to be a challenge for the Council.

While such tax relief at the local level is an admirable goal in the long-term, we must ensure that tax relief, if instituted, will not have an adverse impact upon the ability of Horry County to make the investments in our infrastructure that will be necessary to accommodate future growth in the area and in projects that improve the quality of life of our residents.

Substantial property tax relief would require the County to raise revenues elsewhere through other forms of taxation or fees, cut funding for capital projects, or incur additional indebtedness. While the County currently enjoys windfall revenues from

building fees associated with the extraordinary growth in the area during the last few years, even small tax relief would erode a substantial portion of that surplus and could jeopardize the long-term projects which will be funded from those windfall revenues.

Windfall profits or revenues are, by their very nature, ephemeral and could fall precipitously or disappear altogether in the event of a cooling in economic activity in the area. This could leave projects that may have already been started without further funding, create a fiscal deficit for the County, and force additional indebtedness or tax increases to pay for necessary infrastructure projects and operations. Property tax relief should be considered judiciously and thoroughly reviewed and analyzed with respect to the potential impacts of such action.

Beyond this, we must strive to improve the quality of life of our citizens through involvement with the Economic Development Corporation that will bring more diverse and better jobs to the area. We must be vigilant in seeking to protect private property rights, particularly in light of the *Kelo vs. City of New London* ruling from the United States' Supreme Court last year.

While we have responded well to the many changes of recent years, the challenges ahead are even more far reaching and more difficult. And they too will require the efforts of the Council, business leaders, and citizens working in cooperation to ensure that the objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Plan are met and that new objectives and initiatives are developed for the benefit of all stakeholders in this county for the future. I believe that we can effectively address the challenges that lie ahead, and I believe that my financial and economic background would be a valuable asset to the County Council as we work to accomplish this. With diligence and jurisprudence we can take the actions necessary to position ourselves ahead of future growth rather than behind that

growth. I look forward to the working for the people of Horry County in the future as we plan for and adjust to the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear here today.