

# Alamance County commissioner to oppose cash incentives for businesses

by Amanda Bender, April 6, 2010

In the next few weeks Alamance County Commissioner Tim Sutton is drafting a resolution to present to Alamance County and the state of North Carolina asking the county to support a stance against cash incentives for corporations moving to the state.

"My goal is to put everybody on an even playing field," Sutton said. "Let (companies) decide if they want to come to our county or go to another county based on land availability, the price of the land and access to highways and railroads."

The resolution is a statement of opposition to local and state governments offering cash incentives to new companies moving to the area. It is not a binding document, but it is Sutton's first step against the issue.

"As a practical matter, it won't have any impact," said Bob Orr, the executive director of the North Carolina Institute for Constitutional Law and former North Carolina Supreme Court Justice. "But hopefully it will help start a conversation or dialogue about whether we need to get local governments out of this incentive business."

Sutton questioned the ethics of offering cash incentives to incoming companies. He said it was not fair to the companies who are already operating in the county, especially if the company receiving the incentive is a competitor.

"If you are sitting there with the county managers and the county commissioners and you know they have the majority and they might have one or two who don't support you, they think, 'We could put another million, another two on the table and we could get this business in here,'" Sutton said.

Banning cash incentives is not only an issue of ethics, but also an issue of finances.

"There would not be any pressure on Alamance or Guilford or Buncombe or Wake to hand out incentives," Orr said. "There would be sort of a blanket prohibition on it, and it would thus save literally millions of dollars for local governments."

Sutton said he doesn't intend to completely go against all incentives offered by incoming companies, only those involving cash.

"I ask at least for our state officials to ban cash incentives in the state of North Carolina, and let the incentives be only for infrastructure, roads, industrial parts, railroad spurs and things that other people can use, not just the company coming in," Sutton said.

Linda Massey, chair of the Alamance County commission, disagrees with the resolution and said it would harm the state and its counties.

"I think it would cause more corruption in the long run," Massey said. "People will start paying people under the