



History and Background of Fuquay-Varina

Prized by its residents for its “small town” feel, Fuquay-Varina remains true to its historical roots. Two communities grew together around the development of the local transportation network and tobacco farming, a combination that established them as trading centers for southern Wake and neighboring Counties. Since their separate foundings and eventual union in 1963, Fuquay-Varina has continued to grow and develop within the context of its rural settings and in response to the inevitable changes brought by time.

This document aims to present a logical and sustainable transportation plan for Fuquay-Varina, its citizens, and its business community. Some long-time inhabitants, observing the town’s recent growth in development and traffic, cannot help but ponder, “When did Fuquay-Varina get a rush hour?” This mindset needs to be considered in developing the right transportation plan for the community, one that balances the preservation of a “small town” feel with room and planning for future growth.

The Origins of Two Towns

When Frenchman William Fuquay first settled in the small farming town of Sippihaw, little did he know the future for the land he had purchased or the town named for the original Native American tribe that inhabited the area. He could not have known that his great-grandson, a tobacco farmer named Stephen, would discover a spring in the mid-1800s while plowing the fields of the family plantation. Originally used solely for drinking water, Stephen soon came to the conclusion that the mineral water flowing from the springs had healing properties. As word spread, locals began to help the springs establish this reputation, which brought residents from neighboring communities and counties to its waters. The springs were eventually walled in to better serve the tourists coming to the area by road or rail. In 1860, Fuquay sold the springs to a group of local investors who formed the Chalybeate Springs Company to market the attraction and its waters.

At that time another Sippihaw resident, J. D. “Squire” Ballentine, was returning home from the Civil War. Ballentine had been the town’s schoolmaster before going off to fight for the Confederate Army. During his tour of duty, he had received letters from one of many southern ladies who wrote to the troops to improve their



*Ballentine Schoolhouse
(Fuquay-Varina Historical Society)*

morale. Originally signing her name “Varina,” Virginia Avery would later meet and fall in love with Ballentine. He continued to call her Varina throughout their life together. When he became the first postmaster at the new post office in town in 1880, he named it “Varina” in her honor. A community grew just south of the springs, near the post office and the couple’s Varina Mercantile Company general store. In time, it adopted the same name. Ballentine’s business success allowed him to construct the local historic landmark Ballentine Spence House in 1910, the first house to have plumbing and electricity in the area. This house still stands today.

Growth at the Turn of the Century

The Fuquay Mineral Spring’s popularity grew toward the turn of the century, especially in the 1890s as local businessman John Mills developed the idea to offer “Moonlight Excursions” to the springs. He fitted flat rail cars (the same ones he had been using to ship lumber to and from his Sippihaw yards) with seats and offered nighttime train trips to southern Wake County from Raleigh. As more guests came to the springs to “take the waters,” a group of small hotels sprung up in town, along with restaurants, barbeque stands, and a dance pavilion with a player piano. The town became a tourist destination and was the site of special celebrations on Fourth of July and Easter Mondays. During these events, residents of Raleigh would take the train down to watch the accompanying baseball games and participate in the dances and celebrations. Hotels like the Ben Wiley Hotel catered to the out-of-towners and became as much a center of town life as the springs. In 1902, Sippihaw was renamed “Fuquay Springs” in honor of its founding family and was officially incorporated in 1909.



*Ben Wiley Hotel
(Wake County Government)*

When it was incorporated, the new Fuquay Springs town limits included the Varina business district and the rail junction of the Cape Fear, Northern, Norfolk, and Southern Railroads, the core of the neighboring town. But Varina reestablished itself the following year when the Varina Union Station was erected and a new post office was created, spurred by the lobbying of Mr. Ballentine. Four years later, the Bank of Varina was established. Several warehouses for the growing tobacco business were built in town over the next few years, capitalizing on the railroad connections. Another supply store and a knitting factory followed. As Varina came into its own as a hub for area agriculture, the Fuquay Springs Corporation was formed and began bottling and selling mineral water from the springs commercially. Area businesses continued to develop and, in 1927, US 401 was paved through town, shortening travel times to Raleigh and nearby communities.



*Varina Union Station
(Wake County Government)*

Moving Toward Unification and the Present

By this time, Fuquay Springs and Varina had become major trading hubs for southern Wake County as well as neighboring Harnett and Johnston Counties. Yet improvements to automobiles and area roads caused a decline in tourism at the springs. Rather than visiting the springs, residents in the region chose to visit the coast as travel times decreased.

During this time, however, the tobacco industry continued to drive the area economy, with 5 warehouses, a cotton buyer, and 15 stores established by the end of the 1920s. The shared emphasis on agricultural and industrial growth brought the towns to a shared vision, and as their residents worked, played, and attended church together, the eventual merger into Fuquay-Varina in 1936 was inevitable.

Residents of Fuquay-Varina today still value the small town atmosphere that has always pervaded the community. While development in the area today includes numerous residential communities and commercial sites along the major roadways into town, many of the older structures from its past remain within the town limits and are still cherished by the community. The Victorian, Craftsman, and Colonial Revival homes constructed in the late 1800s and early 1900s are contributing structures to the Fuquay Springs National Register Residential Historic District, while the downtown shops and businesses are part of the Varina National Register Commercial Historic District. Area landmarks located in these districts include the Ben Wiley Hotel, the Ballentine Spence House, and the Dr. Wiley S. Cozart House, built across the street from the springs by the original owner and proprietor of the Ben Wiley. The springs are now contained in a small park developed on the site in 1945 which was handed over to the town in 1998 to maintain as a historic park.



*Fuquay Springs Park Pavilion
(Fuquay-Varina Revitalization
Association)*

The Town is presently at a point where decisions made regarding growth and development will greatly influence the direction of the community. From 1970 to 2000, the population more than doubled, growing from 3,576 residents to 7,898. Current estimates by the NC State Data Center show that Fuquay-Varina grew an additional 23% from 2000-2003 to 9,726 people, making it the 26th fastest growing community in the state and the 11th fastest for those with populations over 5,000.

Community preservation as well as economic development are important issues, since the area has been a prime location for families and individuals relocating to and within the successful Triangle region. More than 20 manufacturers and industries have located their businesses in the area. The ten with the highest number of employees are identified in Table 1.1. The area Chamber of Commerce is quick to point out the prime location of



Fuquay-Varina in relation to the state capital of Raleigh, area airports and highway corridors, and other metropolitan areas in the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic regions.

Table 1.1 — Top Ten Employing, Chamber of Commerce Manufacturers and Industries

Manufacturer/ Industry	Established	Field/Product	Employees
Freight Handlers, Inc.	1991	Lumping Services	600
Tyco Electronics, Raychem	1981	Telecommunication Accessories	505
Guilford Fibers	1985	Polyester Yarn	476
John Deere	1997	Golf/Commercial Mowing Equipment	380
Southbend	1970	Institutional/Commercial Ranges	250
Bob Barker Company	1967	Institutional Supplies	224
In-Serv	1997	Industrial Contractors	200
Berk-Tek (Alcatel)	1989	Fiber Optics	120
Stephens Custom Building Materials	1934	Custom Building Materials	85
Powell & Powell Supply Co., Inc.	1940	Fertilizers, Lawn and Garden Items, Canopies	58

The Future of Fuquay-Varina

Fuquay-Varina is one of the finest communities in Wake County and central North Carolina, as reflected in the residential and economic growth of the town. In a message from current Mayor John Byrne on the town website, he states:

Our Town Government is working hard for the community to provide services that help make our quality of life better in Fuquay-Varina. . . Economic development, education, traffic control, public safety, infrastructure, planning, parks and recreation are all part to the big picture. Fuquay-Varina is located in the garden spot of Wake County and the path of progress of the Research Triangle Park and is changing with each passing day. What we do as a team to make it better is most important to our future generation.



*Downtown Fuquay-Varina
(Fuquay-Varina Revitalization Association)*

This document ventures not only to respect the past, but also to consider Fuquay-Varina’s exciting future. In developing the *Community Transportation Plan*, consideration must be given to forecasts that project a population of nearly 25,200 residents (15,500+ new residents) and 15,500 employees (8,800+ new employees) by 2020. As this plan was created, Town and County officials, area businesses, and concerned citizens sought to provide



a system of roads, transit, rail, pedestrian facilities, and bikeways that will serve the community that faces this type of considerable growth over the next quarter century. These people strived to handle these issues in a logical and sustainable manner.