

# Cobb commission candidate spotlight: Andy Smith, District 2

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Serving two years on the Cobb Planning Commission underscored for Andy Smith what he has been stressing as his “overriding priority” in his campaign for the Cobb Board of Commissioners:

“To preserve Cobb County as the place where we all chose to settle,” he said. “The only way to do that is to plan for growth.”

That’s a delicate issue anywhere, and especially in District 2, which includes most of East Cobb and the Cumberland-Vinings area.

Smith, who lives in East Cobb and is co-owner of Smith Todd & Co., a construction management company, is one of three Republicans running in the June 9 primary to succeed retiring commissioner Bob Ott.

The winner will face Democrat Jerica Richardson in the November general election.

Smith was Ott's appointee to the planning board as well as the Neighborhood Safety Commission (he resigned from the former when he launched his campaign).

Smith also attended the same high school as Ott in New Jersey, but neither knew the other had resettled in the same part of metro Atlanta until Smith had a case before the Cobb variance board when Ott served on that.

(Ott, who is completing his third term, has not made an endorsement in the race.)

Smith headed south to attend Georgia Tech, getting a degree in architecture, and settled in East Cobb 23 years ago.

At the same time, East Cobb continued to become a magnet for those like him, attracted by the quality of schools and the single-family residential character of the community.

The result is that there isn't much land left, as high-density zoning cases and related development issues have begun to alter what's been regarded as a classic suburban enclave.

"If we don't protect the existing residential neighborhoods, we've already lost the fight," Smith said.

The tricky part is doing that while acknowledging the need to plan for the future, especially around forecasts by the Atlanta Regional Commission of Cobb County surpassing a population of one million by the year 2030.

"We need a commissioner with experience in planning and zoning," Smith said. "Zoning done right provides a significant benefit."

Smith said he thinks high-density development needs to be restricted to the Regional Activity Center zoning category.

He realizes that "some people object to high-density in all cases, but some people like that, and want it in areas that are walkable.

"As long as we keep that development where it's planned to go, then we'll be fine."

Senior housing also has generated growing conversation in Cobb, for density and school reasons (senior homeowners 65 and over are exempt from paying school taxes).

Smith noted that in District 2 there many senior residential units that are rentals (including a portion of a mixed-use development under construction on Powers Ferry Road on the site of the former Restaurant Row.

The two other Republicans running in the primary, [Fitz Johnson](#) and [Kevin Nicholas](#), have said they are adamantly against East Cobb Cityhood.

Smith said he's undecided on the issue.

Cityhood leaders had not fully revised the proposed city map and were still considering potential services when they chose not to pursue legislation this year.

"It's my responsibility to keep an open mind until all the facts are in," Smith said, acknowledging the cityhood issue has been an emotional one that has generated intense opposition.

"My focus will be to do the job to eliminate the need for cities. Everybody wants Cobb County to remain the place it was when they settled here. It's going to evolve but we want to have control of how it evolves."

That task figures to be more challenging as county leaders grapple with the economic fallout from the COVID-19 outbreak.

Smith said he admires Cobb officials "for implementing standards that the state has asked for" but said the important issues facing the county remain the same.

Also among them is enhancing salary and benefit packages for public safety personnel. Smith supports the concept of a step-and-grade system that has begun to be implemented, but noted a "compression issue" has emerged in which officers and firefighters with more seniority are at times being eclipsed along that scale by those with less time in the county system.

Smith said that regardless of how such a plan is finalized, "it's important to let officers know it's a plan that they can count on.

"It's not going to be cheap, but it needs to be fair."

As for the county's SPLOST (Special Local Option Sales Tax) program, Smith said he supports the current process of seeking extensive community feedback before finalizing a project list, but "we need to make sure they are true needs and not just wants."

Smith is heavily involved in activities at Mt. Bethel United Methodist Church, and community organizations that include Habitat for Humanity. He's also been involved as a youth sports coach.