

# Wake vs. Johnston County Guide

Two Great Places.  
A Brighter Tomorrow.

PEOPLE.  
PLACES.  
POSSIBILITIES.

A practical side-by-side look at two popular paths for Triangle buyers.

Different lifestyles. New opportunities. A brighter tomorrow. Use this guide to compare Wake and Johnston counties and find the right fit for your next move.

## 1 Why Buyers Choose Wake



- ☐ Closer access to Raleigh and many major job centers.
- ☐ Wide mix of established neighborhoods and suburban options.
- ☐ Often higher prices, but more central convenience.

## 2 Why Buyers Choose Johnston



- ☐ More space and value for many buyers.
- ☐ Growing towns with a more relaxed, small-town feel.
- ☐ Strong appeal for buyers wanting room to spread out.

## 3 Commute Reality



- ☐ Wake can offer shorter access depending on destination.
- ☐ Johnston commute times vary a lot by town and time of day.
- ☐ Drive the route that will shape your daily life.

## 4 Lifestyle and Housing Mix



- ☐ Wake: more established amenities and closer-in communities.
- ☐ Johnston: newer growth, land options, and expanding town centers.
- ☐ The better fit depends on how you actually want to live.

## 5 Questions to Ask Yourself



- ☐ Do you want walkability or a bigger yard?
- ☐ How much does commute convenience matter?
- ☐ Which matters more right now: central location or value and space?

## 6 Best Fit Snapshot



- ☐ Choose Wake if you want central convenience and variety.
- ☐ Choose Johnston if you want more room and a different pace.
- ☐ Tour both before deciding—maps never tell the full story.



### Best Next Step

Compare homes and communities at [RaleighHouseSearch.com](https://RaleighHouseSearch.com).

Let's Find  
What's Next.



### Stay in the local loop

Join the weekly local list at [RaleighUnpacked.com](https://RaleighUnpacked.com).

LOCAL STORIES.  
HELPFUL GUIDES.  
A BRIGHTER  
TOMORROW.

People. Places.  
Possibilities.



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Information is general in nature and not legal, tax, or lending advice. Commute, taxes, schools, and market conditions vary by location. Equal Housing Opportunity.

## THE BIG IDEA

# Do not choose a county. Choose a routine.

County lines matter for taxes/services, but the daily-life differences are usually more local than the county label suggests.



| Dimension      | Wake County lens                                                                                          | Johnston County lens                                                                                                |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Access         | Many submarkets offer closer access to Raleigh, RTP, RDU and established regional amenities.              | Strong access to southeast Raleigh/Garner from some areas; distance to western Wake/RTP grows quickly by submarket. |
| Housing        | Very broad range: urban condos, townhomes, established subdivisions, luxury, infill and new construction. | Rapid new-home growth in many corridors plus established towns, rural edges and larger-lot options in some areas.   |
| Growth         | Infill + outward expansion; major transportation and redevelopment projects.                              | High-growth towns/corridors, new subdivisions, expanding retail/services and road projects.                         |
| Cost trade-off | Often higher acquisition cost in closer-in/high-demand submarkets.                                        | Can offer more space/value in some submarkets, but commute and infrastructure trade-offs matter.                    |

## TOWNS &amp; CITIES

# Where to look first.

A neutral map of places to compare - not “best” and not ranked.

| Wake / Wake-adjacent starting points     | What to compare                                                                                         |
|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Raleigh                                  | Urban/close-in/suburban choices, broad inventory, commute highly location-specific.                     |
| Cary / Morrisville                       | RTP/RDU access, planned communities, townhomes and established neighborhoods.                           |
| Apex / Holly Springs / Fuquay-Varina     | Southwestern growth, mix of established and new neighborhoods, different commute patterns.              |
| Wake Forest / Rolesville                 | Northern/northeastern growth, established town centers and newer development.                           |
| Knightdale / Wendell / Zebulon           | Eastern Wake access, expanding communities and newer development.                                       |
| Garner                                   | Primarily Wake with parts/adjacent growth extending into Johnston; strong southeast Raleigh connection. |
| Johnston starting points                 | What to compare                                                                                         |
| Clayton                                  | Major growth area with established downtown, numerous subdivisions and varied commute routes.           |
| Archer Lodge / Flowers-area communities  | Residential growth with more spread-out patterns; verify utilities/roads/HOA and exact commuting route. |
| Smithfield / Selma                       | County-seat/regional-service access, established neighborhoods, commerce and I-95/US-70 connections.    |
| Four Oaks / Benson                       | Smaller-town settings and I-95/I-40 access depending on location; housing can be more dispersed.        |
| McGee Crossroads / Cleveland-area growth | Fast-growing residential areas with direct I-40 access; compare congestion and future development.      |

## ANALYTICAL COMPARISON

# Run the total-cost model.

The “cheaper house” can cost more once the routine is included - and the reverse can also be true.

| Cost / time variable | How to model it                                                                                                    |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mortgage payment     | Use actual rate, down payment, taxes, insurance and HOA - not portal estimates alone.                              |
| Property taxes       | Use the parcel's county + municipal tax jurisdiction and current rate; confirm special districts where applicable. |
| Insurance            | Quote the specific property. Roof, prior claims, flood exposure and property type can materially change premium.   |
| HOA                  | Compare recurring dues, one-time fees, included services, amenities, reserves and special assessments.             |
| Commute cost         | Miles x workdays + parking/tolls + time value. Test real traffic rather than map averages.                         |
| Maintenance          | Age/condition may matter more than county. Budget for systems, exterior, yard and site.                            |
| Utilities            | Municipal vs. well/septic, electric/gas providers, internet availability and trash/water charges.                  |

## One useful equation

Monthly housing cost + monthly commute cost + expected maintenance reserve = a better comparison than purchase price alone.

GROWTH & INFRASTRUCTURE

# Growth can create opportunity and friction at the same time.

Check what is approved, funded and under construction near the address.

- Search municipal/county planning portals for rezoning, subdivisions and comprehensive-plan context.
- Review NCDOT project maps and local transportation plans for roads/interchanges that affect your route.
- Look at adjacent undeveloped parcels - today's tree line may not be permanent.
- Ask who maintains the road and whether utilities are municipal, community/private, septic/well or mixed.
- For new communities, review future phases, amenity timing and declarant/HOA transition provisions.
- Drive the route at your actual departure and return times before making location assumptions.

## WORKSHEET

# Your county decision matrix.

Score the address, not the reputation.

| Factor                     | Weight | Wake option | Johnston option | Evidence |
|----------------------------|--------|-------------|-----------------|----------|
| Monthly total cost         | 20     |             |                 |          |
| Commute / routine          | 20     |             |                 |          |
| Housing type / lot         | 15     |             |                 |          |
| Amenities you actually use | 10     |             |                 |          |
| Road / growth outlook      | 10     |             |                 |          |
| HOA / restrictions         | 5      |             |                 |          |
| Utilities / internet       | 5      |             |                 |          |
| Resale flexibility         | 10     |             |                 |          |
| Personal fit               | 5      |             |                 |          |
| TOTAL                      | 100    |             |                 |          |

## Get both sides of Raleigh Unpacked

The Local List keeps readers connected to events/places across both counties. Readers showing home-search intent can move to [RaleighHouseSearch.com](https://RaleighHouseSearch.com) for a custom shortlist and live listings.

## Important

Educational information only; not legal, tax, lending, inspection, engineering, insurance, or appraisal advice. Property, school assignment, tax, HOA, utility, zoning, insurance, flood, and market information should be independently verified. Equal Housing Opportunity. Brokerage services are offered through eXp Realty LLC. This guide does not replace any agency disclosure or written brokerage agreement required by North Carolina law, NCREC rules, MLS policy, or REALTOR® practice requirements.

## Sources & verification

This guide is educational and uses current public guidance where noted. Rules, forms, taxes, incentives, and local conditions change. Verify transaction-specific questions with the appropriate licensed or governmental professional.

- **Wake County government:** <https://www.wake.gov/>
- **Johnston County government:** <https://www.johnstonnc.com/>
- **NCDOT:** <https://www.ncdot.gov/>
- **NCREC - Material facts:** <https://bulletins.ncrec.gov/how-to-discover-material-facts/>