

Abel Hastings, Town Council Remarks, 6/26/2019

My name is Abel Hastings. I am the administrator of the Friends of the Greene Tract Forest. With this petition, of over 660 names, I am here to ask the members of the Town Council to follow the recommendation documented on page 22 of the RENA report, which states to “Ensure that large parts (80%) of the Greene Tract are permanently preserved as open, natural, space.” I also believe all the remaining 20% should be used for affordable housing. To do this, I think the Town Council should formally align on a target for the right amount of *both* housing and preservation in order to meet multiple community interests.

But before I begin, I want to address a misconception. Some people believe The Friends of the Greene Tract want to overwhelm the interests of the Rogers Road Community and want to keep housing away from particular neighborhoods. I want to go on record that we are in support of the RENA report and want the associated housing on whatever part of the Greene Tract that makes sense, be it near Larkspur, Phoenix Place or some other location. We strongly believe we need to work together to meet both the housing and conservation goals.

The case for affordable housing is clear. And with that in mind, I’d like to take a few moments to make the case for 80% preservation of the Greene Tract.

Without Greene Tract, Chapel Hill will find itself severely lacking in greenspace in the future because we rely on the Carolina North Forest. According to UNC’s development plan revised just this May—only 26% of the UNC Carolina North Forest (CNF) will remain protected. Once developed, Chapel Hill will fall to just 17% of the American Planning Association’s recommendation for per capita greenspace. And Chapel Hill will have just one-third as much greenspace per capita as Durham or Raleigh. The Greene Tract may be Chapel Hill’s only chance for a large park of its own.

Second, the Greene Tract Forest plays a crucial role in the Town’s stormwater management of Bolin and Booker Creeks. Recall the flood that affected University Mall and imagine what it would have been like without the Greene Tract.

Third, Greene Tract preservation supports the Town’s climate change goals. The large trees of the Greene Tract, some with a 13-foot circumference, have a disproportionate and irreplaceable impact mitigating climate change.

Finally, new information has come out requiring the current proposal to be reworked. The School System Leadership has suggested the proposed school site is not a suitable option. Perhaps a better option would be to propose the school on the adjacent and already clear-cut Neville Tract.

The need for BOTH housing AND preservation is clear. But the current Greene Tract proposal has put the Town Council in the untenable position of having to choose between affordable housing and land preservation. I do not think the Town has to choose between these two.

I request that the Town Council commit to affordable housing AND preservation by establishing transparent proportions of both housing and preservation land. A recommendation for 80% preservation and 20% housing has already been made by the Rogers Road community – and we support this target. Once proportions are publicly established, the path forward will become clear and groups can work together.