

Amy Harvey

From: Jeanette Coffin
Sent: Wednesday, May 11, 2022 5:00 PM
To: Gray, Virginia
Cc: Colleen Willger; Adam Searing; Amy Ryan; Camille Berry; Jeanne Brown; Jess Anderson; Karen Stegman; Michael Parker; Pam Hemminger; Paris Miller-Foushee; Tai Huynh; Amy Harvey; Ann Anderson; Carolyn Worsley; James Baker; Laura Selmer; Loryn Clark; Mary Jane Nirdlinger; Maurice Jones; Ran Northam; Ross Tompkins; Sabrina Oliver
Subject: RE: Expedited Review of Affordable Housing Projects; please read before the tonight's meeting

Thank you for your correspondence with the Town of Chapel Hill. The Mayor and Town Council are interested in what you have to say. By way of this email, I am forwarding your message to the Mayor and each of the Council Members, as well as to the appropriate staff person who may be able to assist in providing additional information or otherwise addressing your concerns.

Again, thank you for your message.

Sincerely,

Jeanette Coffin

Jeanette Coffin
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-----Original Message-----

From: Gray, Virginia <vagray@email.unc.edu>
Sent: Wednesday, May 11, 2022 4:43 PM
To: Town Council <mayorandcouncil@townofchapelhill.org>
Subject: Expedited Review of Affordable Housing Projects; please read before the tonight's meeting

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Dear Council members and Ms. Mayor,

It was with great shock and alarm that an hour ago I saw Item 3 on tonight's agenda: Expedited Review of Affordable Housing. The title should have been "how to recreate the streamlined planning of Blue Hill but this time apply it all over town to affordable housing." And what is the old line about repeating the same mistake twice and expecting a different result? I think we all know.

The premise is that we don't have enough affordable housing because the review process is too long and costs developers too much money. Where is the evidence for this proposition? None is cited but the premise is repeated several times. The review process will be confined to only one commission—the Planning Commission—just like Blue Hill projects are confined to only the CDC. What about competing uses for the land and externalities from the housing projects? Where does that get reviewed? What about public input? Putting this shocker into a working session does not suggest that public input is valued. And hiring more staff to review the projects does not suggest that public input will carry much weight.

I have several ideas for legal/policy changes the Council could make, that have been tried in other locales. Instead of imposing the costs of increasing affordable housing on every other objective, why doesn't the Council initiate some new ideas of its own? For example, both Minneapolis and St. Paul are trying rent control to attack the affordable housing problem. You would have to ally with some other localities to lobby the state legislature for rent control authority, but why not try? Raleigh and Vancouver, B.C., have rezoned single family neighborhoods so that duplexes, triplexes, and condos can be mixed into existing neighborhoods. This concept is often called gentle density. Why not try this? Why not have consultants and staff suggest similar ideas that might be enacted?

I live surrounded on all sides by the massive ugly apartment building of Blue Hill. But I and my neighbors have for years looked forward to the day that we would have some relief in the form of a Community Park on the Legion site, the planning for which started in 2013. Now with no warning the Legion site is on a list of affordable housing sites because the town owns the land. The specific item on the list is "redevelop the Legion building" and build 60-145 affordable units. The Legion building should be torn down, not redeveloped. I have never heard anybody say it should be redeveloped. To announce on an obscure list the intention to abandon the Park idea and build affordable housing at the Legion site is not in keeping with discussions with town officials over the last nine years, nor recently. Last summer an elected official was at the Legion site and spoke enthusiastically of the need for a Park at the site. As recently as yesterday a town official toured the Legion site with neighbors and did not mention that affordable housing was on the agenda for the Legion site. The group that has worked on clearing out invasive in the park and neighborhoods around the park deserved notice about what would be on the agenda tonight.

I and others will be watching your session tonight. I sincerely hope that this expedited planning idea does not get very far before the public is allowed to discuss it.

Sincerely,

Virginia Gray, Ph.D.

Sent from my iPad