

Memorandum

To: Mayor and Town Council
Topic: Future Land Use Plan
From: CHALT with signers , Linde Brown
Date: January 16, 2019

How does Chapel Hill become an environmentally sustainable town? How do we accommodate growth in our planning?

The answer is through a well-designed land use map and zoning with steps implemented to accompany it.

We were proud that the Chapel Hill Town Council adopted the Paris Accord. If that is to have real meaning, then our vision for future growth, the future land use map (FLUM), must match that promise by encouraging uses that limit or prevent the kinds of environmental degradation that contribute to climate change.

If we fail to do so, our land use decisions will further degrade our local environment and increase our vulnerability to the effects of a warming climate. A well designed land use plan can improve the health and sustainability of the Chapel Hill landscape if we use it as a guide before building rather than trying to solve—at tax payer expense--the environmental problems created by failure to do so.

A well designed land use plan will put us on a better path if we add the following elements:

- Identify streams and low-lying areas that must be protected for water quality and to mitigate the effects of flooding events. Integrate that information into the land use map. Adding this information later on is too late.
- Provide for green spaces, parks and trees, in the plan while maintaining as many old growth trees as possible.

- Assess the capacity of the town to support growth based on the availability of transit and infrastructure to accommodate development. Already congested corridors such as 15-501, 54 or 86 are not good places for increased density unless the town has a plan to deal concurrently with projected future traffic.
- Pay attention to vistas coming into town along our entranceways. Merrit's pasture is a great example of the beautiful southern entrance.
- Emphasize other town goals, aside from density.

Importantly, the Town *must stop* depending on increased density to solve the Town's fiscal problems. It won't. We learned during the last 7 years of primarily residential growth, the cost of town government services rose by an average of 3.7% a year, while property tax revenues only rose by an average of 1.3% per year. (Source Budget Director Ken Pennoyer's January 3, 2018 Introduction meeting for Incoming Council Members, and January 9, 2018 memo.) Clearly, in Chapel Hill, like everywhere else, residential growth is not paying for itself.

Density may work in some places--if it can be supported with the necessary infrastructure yet current plans don't consider the impact of development on air quality and traffic. The draft land use map bears no relationship to reality.

It would be a mistake to base any conclusions about public opinion on a survey where respondents were asked to choose only between increasingly dense plans, without providing any other options. It is, however, noteworthy that when respondents were presented with a less dense option (i.e., 4 stories or fewer) and a more dense option (4+ stories), in almost every instance a larger percentage of respondents preferred the less dense option.

We must do better. In order to reflect our shared desire live up to the commitments we made when we adopted the Paris Accords--to promote a sustainable and livable community--please add and integrate the elements mentioned above to the future land use map.

Thank you.