

PLANNING COMMISSION

The charge of the Planning Commission is to assist the Council in achieving the Town's Comprehensive Plan for orderly growth and development by analyzing, evaluating, and recommending responsible town policies, ordinances, and planning standards that manage land use and involving the community in long-range planning.

RECOMMENDATION FOR RULES AND MEMBERSHIP OF ADVISORY BOARDS & COMMISSIONS – LUMO TEXT AMENDMENT

May 6, 2025

Recommendation: Approval ☐ Approval with Comments ☐ Denial ☒

Motion: Wesley McMahon moved, and Strother Murray-Ndinga seconded, a recommendation that the Council adopt Resolution C (Denying the Proposed Text Amendment) with the attached draft comments as a supplement to their vote.

Vote: 7 – 1

Yeas: Elizabeth Losos (Chair), Jonathan Mitchell (Co-Chair), Strother Murry-Ndinga, Chuck Mills, Wesley McMahon, Libby Thomas, and Erik Valera

Nays: Geoff Green

Recommendation: Approval ☒ Approval with Comments ☐ Denial ☐

Motion: Wesley McMahon moved, and Geoff Green seconded, a recommendation that the Council find that the proposed Rules and Membership of Advisory Boards & Commissions – LUMO Text Amendment Application is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan

Vote: 5 – 3

Yeas: Jonathan Mitchell (Co-Chair), Geoff Green, Chuck Mills, Wesley McMahon, and Erik Valera

Nays: Elizabeth Losos (Chair), Libby Thomas, Strother Murry-Ndinga

Prepared by: Jacob Hunt, Senior Planner

**Comments on
“Rules and Membership of Advisory Boards & Commissions – LUMO Text
Amendment”**

Chapel Hill Planning Commission meeting note
May 6, 2025

By a vote of 7 to 1, the Planning Commission (PC) voted AGAINST the proposed text amendment to standardize membership rules for the four remaining boards and commissions, for the following reasons:

- While “consistency across boards” was cited as a key rationale for setting a uniform size, PC members agreed that such consistency offers no inherent benefit. Each board serves a unique mandate, operates under a different scope, and is governed by distinct statutory frameworks. Therefore, board size should be determined based on each board’s specific needs and functions.
 - **PC:** There was broad support for maintaining the PC's current size. As the only remaining board addressing a wide spectrum of planning issues—transportation, housing, environmental stewardship, parks and recreation, etc.—a larger membership ensures broader expertise and perspectives. The high number of applicants suggests no difficulty in filling the seats this year, and the recent elimination of boards is likely to sustain a strong applicant pool going forward.
 - **Board of Adjustments (BoA):** Consider keeping the size at 10 members (or, alternatively, 5 members) due to the BoA’s unique voting requirements. BoA decisions require 80% affirmative votes of all members. With 7 members, the threshold would effectively rise to 85%, complicating decision-making. A BoA member present at the session noted that 5 members would be too few for fair and balanced deliberations.
 - **Community Design Commission (CDC):** Given its specialized scope, the CDC has historically struggled to fill its seats. Currently, only 4 members serve, and there currently aren’t enough applicants to reach 7 next year. While the proposed amendment allows Town staff to assume CDC responsibilities if a quorum isn’t met, during the information session a CDC member questioned whether this would disincentivize efforts to fill the seats. The PC supports reducing the CDC’s size to 5 members, with a quorum of 3, as a more appropriate structure.
- **Cross-cutting concerns also influenced the PC’s recommendation:**
 - **Equity and representation:** Larger boards offer greater opportunities for diverse representation across the Town. The staff proposal includes plans to improve outreach and recruitment—through revised application questions, expanded recruitment, and training. All PC members supported these initiatives regardless of the size of the boards. However, the suggestion that *ad hoc* public consultation is a more effective engagement method was

questioned by some members of the PC. Regardless of whether this is the case, boards and commissions represent the highest level of resident influence short of Council service and should remain as accessible and inclusive as possible.

- **ETJ and JPA seat requirements:** These requirements for the PC and BoA effectively give disproportionate influence to lower-density areas of the town—similar to how low-population western states have two Senate seats. This imbalance could sway future discussions of land development, particularly if total PC membership were reduced.
- **Voting procedure recommendation:** The PC proposed changing how voting majorities are calculated. Rather than basing a majority on the number of filled seats (excluding members with a conflict), it should be based on the number of members present at the meeting (also excluding those with a conflict) – provided the quorum requirement has been met.

Overall, the PC felt the amendment process appeared rushed. With the recent reduction of boards by two-thirds, members emphasized the need to test the new structure—with only four boards and improved recruiting efforts—over a longer period. Prematurely reducing board sizes could undermine community trust and engagement, sending the wrong message about the Town’s commitment to public participation.