



MEMO

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL

FROM: Caroline Dwyer; Transit Planning Manager

CC: Brian Litchfield, Transit Director; Diedra McEntyre, Principal Planner; Matt Cecil Transit Development Manager

RE: Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Plan Update

DATE: February 8, 2023

1. BACKGROUND

NSBRT

The North-South Bus Rapid Transit (NSBRT) project was first identified as a priority in 2009 and included in the Town's 2012 Comprehensive Plan. In 2021, NSBRT was identified as a Council Strategic Priority in the Town's Climate Action and Response Plan. NSBRT enjoys high levels of support, locally and regionally, and is a key component of the region's transportation strategy and long-term vision. It also plays a key role in the University's transportation and sustainability plans.

NSBRT is much more than a transit investment. It is also an investment in active transportation, safety, congestion mitigation, equity, environmental stewardship, smart growth, and economic development. Specifically, the project includes:

- A multi-use path (MUP) along most of the corridor
- Pedestrian safety improvements (including enhanced sidewalk connections to/from station areas and neighborhoods)
- Signal improvements; and
- Complete streets elements.

The NSBRT project is also an opportunity to leverage a significant federal investment to meet the Council's Complete Community and Climate Action priorities. CHT has estimated we will need approximately \$155 million to construct the NSBRT (\$124M federal share; \$31M non-federal share). \$29M of the non-federal share is secured through the Orange County Transit Plan; Chapel Hill Transit's share is ~\$2M. We are also seeking \$40M in state funding through the SPOT/STI process to reduce the impact on the Orange County Transit Plan and Chapel Hill Transit.

The NSBRT recently achieved a **major project milestone** when we were notified that the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) accepted our NEPA review "Finding of No Significant Impact."

2. TOD

In 2020, FTA awarded CHT nearly \$600,000 through the Administration's "Pilot Program for Transit-Oriented Development Planning" grant program. This program supports, ["Comprehensive planning...examin\[ing\] ways to improve economic development and ridership, foster multimodal connectivity and accessibility, improve transit access for pedestrian and bicycle traffic, engage](#)

[the private sector, identify infrastructure needs, and enable mixed-use development near transit stations.](#)” CHT initiated the TOD project in 2022, in coordination with the LUMO update, at the request of Council. The TOD plan and LUMO vision, collectively known as “*Shaping Our Future*” are aligned with, and guided by, previous plans and Council policy directives including the recently adopted Complete Community framework.

Shaping Our Future is a “next step” towards integrating best practices generating more sustainable land use and development and catalyzing great placemaking in locations with the best transit access. A market analysis conducted by the internationally recognized experts at S.B. Friedman assesses current land uses, land availability, vacancy rates, land prices, rents, and price points. Focus groups and one-on-one interviews were conducted with key stakeholders assessing development and redevelopment opportunities in the short- and long-term. Gaps between feasible development and available resources were identified and inform the recommendation of tools incentivizing and facilitating TOD.

An accessibility analysis determined how the NSBRT can improve walking and biking conditions by expanding beyond the immediate corridor and station areas and identifying missing network links and impediments to multimodal travel. Station area concepts provide illustrative examples of potential TOD scenarios, guiding policy development, regulatory recommendations, and estimating the potential development capacity of station areas. Lastly, the plan recommends a set of policy and regulatory tools that may help meet community goals, transit needs, and market projections. These recommendations provide staff and Council with a starting point for future discussions and decisions related to the LUMO Update.

Staff would also like to clarify that adopting *Shaping Our Future* does not:

- Entitle or pre-approve development for specific sites in the corridor
- Remove or reduce Town Council’s discretionary review or development approval authority
- Adopt regulatory mechanisms and/or development incentives, including regulations related to density, dimensional standards, building topologies, etc., which will be discussed and determined by the community and Council during the future LUMO update.

3. NEXT STEPS

Staff are proud of the process and the products generated by this integrated planning effort, a joint initiative of the Transit and Planning Departments. A [review draft of *Shaping Our Future*](#) is available, and on February 22, 2023, staff will ask Council to adopt *Shaping Our Future* and to begin the legislative process amending the Town’s Comprehensive Plan to include *Shaping Our Future* alongside the Complete Community framework. We welcome Council’s feedback and questions.