

March 21, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

Please let this serve as an official petition requesting that the Town of Chapel Hill, Orange County and, the Town of Carrboro along with our affordable housing providers and partners come together to create a work group to develop strategic recommendations for our manufactured housing/mobile home parks (MHP). We also welcome and encourage the involvement of the Towns of Mebane and Hillsborough as part of this group, should they wish to participate.

Residents of mobile home parks are important members of our community who not only keep our towns and institutions running but add to the fabric of our communities and enrich the life of the towns and county in so many ways.

Recognizing that many forces – including rising land prices, longstanding policies to protect natural areas, and skyrocketing market opportunities for development in our region – are conspiring to threaten our mobile home parks [or “natural occurring affordable housing”], and that it is not within the towns’ or county’s power to mandate that a park remain open, we need to quickly develop a joint plan for protecting and rehousing such residents if their homes are threatened.

As we have repeatedly seen in Chapel Hill, future development and redevelopment of properties will continue to either displace or diminish the housing of vulnerable populations, including our mobile home residents. We must, as partners and government officials, come up with a coherent and coordinated plan that addresses the development pressures on these communities and creates options that meet the needs of mobile home park residents and alternatives that do not leave all of us at the mercy of the market or developers when properties inevitably come up for redevelopment.

The work of this group should include but not be limited to:

- Defining the scope and severity of the problem.
- Educating elected officials and the community about the situation, including where local governments have control and what legal options are available to residents and government bodies.
- Identifying existing mobile home parks in the area, with information about current vacancies and opportunities for expansion.
- Engaging with the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, Orange County Schools, UNC and UNC Health for input into these conversations.
- Including possible expansion of existing parks, opportunities for MHP owners to join co-ops, transition to townhomes and smaller multifamily options, as well as any other financially sustainable solutions

Based on this work, we are asking the group to bring a list of effective and strategic recommendations back to our boards that includes:

- A range of housing options and wrap-around services for mobile home residents
- Options for partnering between various entities
- Opportunities for leveraging state, federal and other grant funds
- Ways to mitigate the disruption for residents if a park is to be closed

At the end of this working group, we should all come to consensus around a shared plan that includes policy guidance to all of our respective staffs. With this plan in place, we can create as many viable options for our mobile home park residents as possible, clearly communicate these options to the public and define the support available for assisting displaced residents.

We anticipate that this work group will need support in the form of staff time and facilitation, as well as content expertise from our affordable housing staff and attorneys as needed.

Members should include:

- Elected officials from Orange County (2), Chapel Hill (2), and Carrboro (1) with invitations also extended to Hillsborough (1), and Mebane (1).
- Town and County staffs related to affordable housing and law
- MHP residents (2-4, depending on recruitment)
- Partner organizations (2) that can give expertise and context
For example, El Centro and Empowerment

Structure: The elected officials with taxing and regulatory authority will be voting members, along with mobile home park residents. There will be a chair and vice chair, both elected officials. Each board will select elected officials to serve on this work group to ensure each group has representation at all meetings. The group will enlist a facilitator, such as Maggie Choatas, to facilitate the meetings, help the group work toward consensus, document progress and help draft final recommendations with next steps. The voting members, with input from partners and content experts, will vote on final recommendations with clear timelines and expectations for each group.

Timeline: (TBD with input from managers/staff). We need a realistic timeline that will give time for high quality work and that also pushes us given the urgency of the problem.

Signed,
Jess Anderson
Amy Ryan
Pam Hemminger