SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TASK FORCE
First Report

Abstract: Sustainable Communities meet the basic needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their basic needs. Practicing sustainable development is fundamentally about "thinking outside the box." Four ways to do so are: (a) to consider the effects on sustainability in each policy area; (b) to pursue the most environmentally compatible responses to cope with existing problems; (c) to seek imaginative, but practical "preventive" solutions that avoid creating many of our growth versus environment dilemmas; and (d) to come up with integrative solutions that better balance our community, economic, and environmental values and goals.

Background

The Chapel Hill Town Council created the Sustainable Development Task Force nine months ago (see Appendix A for its charge). The 13 member group (see Appendix B for list of participants) sought to build on studies completed over the past three years by the Chapel Hill Sustainability Committees I, II, and III. The three Committees were a joint effort between Town citizens and University of North Carolina graduate students, overseen by Professor David Brower of the Department of City and Regional Planning.

The first study, "Operationalizing Concepts of Sustainable Development for the Town of Chapel Hill," sought to acquaint the Town Council and relevant planning bodies with the nature and significance of sustainable development and to demonstrate why it matters for Chapel Hill. The second report, "Indicators for a Sustainable Chapel Hill," described ways to measure progress in achieving a more sustainable town. And the third, "Sustainable Development Policy Recommendations for the Town of Chapel Hill," described an action agenda for weaving sustainable development into everyday Town practice.

This latter report also suggested that the Town create a standing committee to investigate sustainability for Chapel Hill and dedicate staff support to that committee. The Sustainable Development Task Force is, in many ways, a result of this recommendation.

This new Sustainable Development Task Force met twice per month since December 1997. It divided into six different committees: Housing, Sustainable Enterprise, Solid Waste, Water Quality, Biodiversity and Transportation, which also met frequently. A number of experts were called on to present background on certain topics, including: Vice Chancellor to Facilities Bruce Runberg from UNC, Neil Pedersen, Superintendent of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro School System, and Transportation Planner, David Bonk. The Task Force drafted a variety of interim reports, including ones on "Protecting Biodiversity" and "Planning Sustainable Transportation".

After exploring these difficult topics, the Task Force concluded that its efforts to integrate sustainability into Town practice would be best served by providing input into the Comprehensive Planning Process. Indeed, we hope to influence this process in three ways:

- By sharing this report, along with the earlier student papers with those on the Comprehensive Planning Work Group;
- By meeting with the Work Group early in the process to discuss our findings, concerns, and recommendations; and
  By meeting with the Work Group to give its members the Sustainable Development Task Force's feedback on preliminary Comprehensive Plan drafts.

The rest of this report elaborates our thinking about making a more sustainable Chapel Hill a reality.

What Is a Sustainable Community?

Definition

Sustainable Communities meet the basic needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their basic needs.

Fundamentals of Sustainable Communities

Create healthy living environments
1. Ensure a basic level of public services that fulfill basic human needs.
2. Nurture, plan, and design urban forms and systems to promote well-being and ensure secure neighborhoods, communities, environmental health.

Protect, restore and maintain ecological integrity
1. Recognize the limits of resources and the assimilative capacity of natural systems to absorb human impacts.
2. Identify, protect, and preserve open spaces and critical natural areas.
3. Avoid, minimize or mitigate degradation to natural systems.

Conserve energy and natural resources. and use them efficiently
1. Incorporate environmental and social impacts into the cost of goods and services
2. Use renewable and non-renewable energy and resources efficiently, and encourage the use of renewable resources.

Balance social. economic. and environmental concerns in decision-making
1. Use an integrated decision-making approach that reflects the interdependence of natural, built, political, economic, and organizational systems.

Promote equity, human dignity, and social justice
1. Ensure equitable access to basic services and resources
2. Promote cooperation and participation among all socioeconomic groups in local decision-making and governance.
3. Distribute environmental, social and economic costs and benefits equitably.
4. Foster respect for diversity.
5. Promote intergenerational equity.

What Trends are Impacting Chapel Hill's Future?

1. Population growth. Population increases directly impact an area's natural resources. As Chapel Hill's population continues to grow, the natural environment will continue to feel its effects. The decisions that Chapel Hill makes now will determine how much of an impact that population growth will have.
2. A changing demographic profile of the community.
3. Decisions by major employers, including University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill expansion plans.
4. The existing urban form. The current separation of land uses creates a community dominated by single occupancy vehicles. Continuing with that pattern will lead Chapel Hill further from sustainability.

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Where Are We Now?

1. We often disregard our connection to natural systems upon which we depend. As long as that attitude persists, we will continue to live in an unsustainable community.
2. Data exist that can reflect historical and current trends. Heeding that data can help us make sound decisions about our future.
3. We must think in terms of future generations and incorporate long-term sustainability into all decision-making.
4. No industrialized economy, including Chapel Hill's, is sustainable. Becoming a more sustainable community requires difficult ‒ often politically unpopular ‒ choices which balance environmental, economic and social concerns.

What Have We Learned?

1. Exploring how to practice sustainable development is complicated, given the complex inter-relationships between different choices, trends and the current inadequacy of the data needed to make wiser decisions.
2. The three earlier reports, our internal memos and research, and the earlier Strategic Report (June 12, 1989) contain intelligent ideas about enhancing sustainability in transportation, water, land use, waste, and other key areas. A careful study of these documents would aid the Comprehensive Planning process.
3. Incorporating and practicing sustainability is fundamentally about "thinking outside the box." Four ways to do so are: (a) to consider the effects on sustainability in each policy area; (b) to pursue the most environmentally compatible responses to cope with existing problems; (c) to seek imaginative, but practical "preventive" solutions that avoid creating many of our growth versus environment dilemmas; and (d) to come up with integrative solutions that better balance our community, economic, and environmental values and goals.
4. Lastly, you can only move in the direction of sustainable development if you are tracking data indicators that allow you to track your progress. The Sustainable Development Task Force recommends that the indicators proposed in the earlier research be collected, analyzed, and discussed annually by the Town Council and relevant planning bodies and incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan.

A RESOLUTION ADOPTING A CHARGE TO AND STRUCTURE FOR THE TASK FORCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (97-7-7/R-20)

BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the Town of Chapel Hill that the Council hereby adopts the following charge to and structure for the Task Force on Sustainable Development.

A. Structure of the Task Force

1. The Council will appoint by September 8th a Chapel Hill Task Force on Sustainable Development.

2. The Task Force will be convened by Joyce Brown and Lee Pavão.

3. The Task Force will elect its own chair or co-chairs and vice chair, adopt its own procedures and committee structure, etc.

4. The Task Force shall represent the diversity of our community.

5. The Task Force will have about 20 members, all appointed by the Council.

6. The Task Force will be charged to complete its work in two years, with the understanding that the Task Force could request and the Council could decide to extend the Task Force's term.

B. Proposed Charge

1. Using the documents created by Chapel Hill Sustainable Development Committees I, II and III and after receiving preliminary comments from citizens in a manner determined by the Task Force, draft a proposed set of principles of sustainable development for consideration by the Council by the winter of 1997-98 for inclusion as part of the Comprehensive Plan.   .

2. Recommend priorities for implementing a data collection and reporting process for using indicators developed by Sustainable Development Committee III with recommended additions, deletions and other changes to the indicators as the Task Force deems appropriate.

3. Make recommendations to the Council on whether and how to include Sustainable Development indicators in the Comprehensive Plan, Development Ordinance and other Town policy documents.

4. Propose mechanisms to share information and ideas regarding Sustainable Development efforts with the Orange County, Carrboro and Hillsborough local governments, with the Orange Water and Sewer Authority, and to the extent practical and useful with other localities in the Triangle area.

5. Work with Town Boards and Commissions to support and encourage their understanding and consideration of sustainable development principles when appropriate and consistent with the Council's policies embodied in the Development Ordinance, Comprehensive Plan and other policy documents.

This the 7th day of July, 1997.

Appendix B

<u>Members of the Sustainable Development Task Force</u>

David Brower, Chair
Joyce Brown
Pat Evans
Arnie Katz
Kit McGinnis
Aaron Nelson
Lee Pavão
Seth Reice
Anna Schwab
Bill Schweke
Joanne Shirer-Mitchell
Dirk Spruyt
James Ward