#### **MEMORANDUM**

TO:

Mayor and Town Council

FROM:

W. Calvin Horton, Town Manager

SUBJECT:

Response to Petition from Colonial Heights Residents

DATE:

February 25, 2002

This memorandum responds to a petition brought to the Council on February 11, 2002. The petition comes from Michael and Amelia Collins and makes four requests of the Town Council. The Collins petition attaches a related petition signed by 47 residents of Colonial Heights, making 2 of the 4 requests in the Collins petition. All 47 residents show addresses as Williams Circle, Lea Court, or Bradley Road. A copy of these materials is attached. We recommend that the Council adopt the attached resolution, referring this issue to the Town Manager to study the possibility of a rezoning initiative for this area, and directing the Town Manager to examine the property in order to determine compliance with applicable health and safety codes.

#### THE PETITION

The precipitating event for these petitions is a January 22, 2002, administrative approval of a minor subdivision for a property at 717 Williams Circle. We note that on February 14, we received an application for appeal of this approval. That application will be heard by the Chapel Hill Board of Adjustment on March 6, 2002.

The Collins petition requests that the Town Council take four actions:

- 1. Order or recommend that the Board of Adjustment grant the appeal thereby rescinding the approval of the minor subdivision.
- 2. Investigate the subject property to determine whether it meets minimum standards of safety and hygiene under the Town's ordinances.
- 3. Institute procedures that will provide for a period of review and approval for minor subdivisions in residential neighborhoods by persons affected.
- 4. Consider any other action that the Council deems appropriate, including condemnation/purchase of the subject property for residential or recreational use.



The accompanying petition signed by other residents contains requests (1) and (3) of these four items.

#### **DISCUSSION**

We offer the following comments on each of the four requests.

1. Order or recommend that the Board of Adjustment grant the appeal thereby rescind the approval of the minor subdivision. [Petitioners' Request]

Staff Comment: The Board of Adjustment is a quasi-judicial body which, upon creation by the Council, takes on the powers and duties assigned to it by State Law and Town Ordinances. The Council has the authority to appoint members of the Board of Adjustment. Upon taking office, Board members take an oath to perform the duties assigned to them by law.

Among those powers and duties are the authority to review decisions and orders of the Town Manager made in the administration of the Development Ordinance. (In this specific case, the Manager approved a minor subdivision.) The Council adopts the Development Ordinance and the Manager is assigned the responsibility of administering the Ordinance. (In this specific case, the issue involves whether the Manager correctly approved the minor subdivision under the provisions of the Ordinance.) Decisions of the Manager may be appealed to the Board of Adjustment. (That has been done in this case.) The Board hears cases and has the authority to reverse or affirm, wholly or partly, the Manager's decision. (The Board is scheduled to hear this case on March 6.) Persons aggrieved may seek judicial review of decisions of the Board of Adjustment. There is no oversight role provided in the statutes or ordinances for the Council with respect to the specific decision which the Board of Adjustment is called upon to make.

The Council cannot order the Board of Adjustment to grant the appeal. Further, we do not believe it would be reasonable nor good public policy for the Council to make a recommendation to the Board of Adjustment in these circumstances.

We note that the appeal is going forward to the Board of Adjustment on March 6.

2. <u>Investigate the subject property to determine whether it meets minimum standards of safety and hygiene under the town's ordinances. [Petitioners' Request]</u>

Staff Comment: There are provisions in the Town Code of Ordinances that include minimum standards for maintenance of private property. Among these are regulations addressing accumulation of garbage and household refuse, nuisances, and dilapidated vehicles.

In response to the petition, we have investigated the subject property to determine compliance with these minimum standards. We inspected the property on February 19, 2002, and did not find violations of minimum health and safety regulations.

3. Institute procedures that will provide for a period of review and approval for minor subdivisions in residential neighborhoods by persons affected. [Petitioners' Request]

Staff Comment: We currently have procedures to provide notification to nearby property owners when an application for a minor subdivision is submitted to the Town. These procedures were initiated by a Council-adopted resolution on April 10, 1995 and call for the Town Manager to send notice to property owners within 500 feet of a property upon submittal of a minor subdivision application for the property. These procedures were followed in the case of the minor subdivision application for 717 Williams Circle.

We note that the Development Ordinance is very prescriptive regarding approval of subdivisions, and there is no latitude for discretionary action if an application meets all requirements in the Ordinance. We do not believe that it would be reasonable or legal to write the Ordinance in a manner that would require that "persons affected" by a proposed action be placed in a position to approve or deny an application.

We further note that the Development Ordinance makes a distinction between major and minor subdivisions. The Council could decide to modify the Development Ordinance such that all subdivisions, major and minor, would need to be approved by the Town Council, following a public hearing. We note that approximately 7-10 minor subdivisions are processed administratively in a typical year. A minor subdivision is defined in the Development Ordinance as:

Minor Subdivision -- a subdivision pursuant to an approved Zoning Compliance Permit for a two-family or multi-family townhouse development, an approved Special Use Permit for a planned development, or an approved commercial subdivision, or a subdivision that does not:

- i) create more than four (4) lots from any one tract of land, whether such lots are created at one time or over an extended period of time; and
- ii) dedicate or improve any new street other than widening approved existing streets; and
- iii) extend a public water or sanitary sewerage system other than laterals to individual lots; and
- iv) install drainage improvements which would require easements through one or more lots to serve other lots.

We do not recommend eliminating the distinction between major and minor subdivisions.

4. Consider any other action that the Council deems appropriate, including condemnation/purchase of the subject property for residential or recreational use. [Petitioners' Request]

Staff Comment: The property is not currently identified on any plans for recreation facilities or recreational use.



We note an additional idea that has not been raised by the petitioners, but that may be worth considering for this neighborhood. Many typical existing lots in Colonial Heights are more than twice as large as the minimum lot size specified by the Residential-2 zoning district that covers this neighborhood. (Minimum lot size in R-2 is 10,000 square feet). It is possible that a rezoning initiative for this neighborhood might address the issue by raising the threshold for possible subdivision of existing single lots into two lots. This solution was successfully used previously when another Chapel Hill neighborhood faced a similar issue. This solution would not affect the subject property (717 Williams Circle) but may preclude further such subdivisions of existing lots.

#### SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

We believe that the minor subdivision application that was administratively approved on January 22, 2002 for a lot at 717 Williams Circle was correctly processed and approved. The correctness of that action has been appealed to the Board of Adjustment, and will be determined by the Board in March. We do not believe that it would be appropriate for the Town Council to participate in that consideration by the Board of Adjustment. We note that a decision of the Board of Adjustment may be appealed to Superior Court.

We recommend that the Council adopt the attached resolution that would direct the Town Manager to study possibilities for a rezoning initiative for the Colonial Heights neighborhood that might preclude future minor subdivisions in this neighborhood.

#### ATTACHMENT

1. February 11, 2002 petition from Michael and Amelia Collins (p. 6).



# A RESOLUTION REGARDING COLONIAL HEIGHTS NEIGHBORHOOD (2002-02-25/R-15)

WHEREAS, the Town Council has received a petition raising concerns about the condition of a property located at 717 Williams Circle in Chapel Hill; and

WHEREAS, the petition also raises concerns about potential impacts of subdivision of single lots in this neighborhood into two lots;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the Town of Chapel Hill that the Council requests the Town Manager to prepare a report on the feasibility of initiating a rezoning action for the Colonial Heights neighborhood that would serve to help preclude future subdivision of single lots into two lots.

This the 25<sup>th</sup> day of February, 2002.

AGENDA #3a(7)

# Petition to Chapel Hill Town Council made by

Michael and Amelia Collins 723 Williams Circle Chapel Hill, NC 27516 919-967-4119

to be presented at the Council Meeting on February 11, 2002



### Petition for Redress Of Grievance by the Town Council

Presented to: The Chapel Hill Town Council, February 11, 2002

#### Facts and Background

On January 22, 2002, the Planning Department of the Town of Chapel Hill granted approval to a minor subdivision of the lot located in the Colonial Heights Neighborhood at 717 Williams Circle, Chapel Hill (Exhibit A).

Colonial Heights is a single-family residential neighborhood dating from the 1950's, and has a quiet and friendly character that the local residents have worked hard to improve and maintain. Several of the residences have been reclaimed from near-derelict status over the past decade. Many others have undergone recent improvements and expansions.

The lot that was subdivided is an exception to this pattern. Located directly in the middle of the neighborhood, the residence and grounds are and have for years been in poor repair. The owner lives in Taiwan, appearing only occasionally for a few weeks every year or so. The house remained otherwise abandoned until long-term guests from Taiwan were recently installed. Other than occasional emergency repairs, maintenance has been minimal, provided largely free of charge through the kindness of neighbors as favors to the owner. Dilapidated vehicles have been present in the front and back yards for years, trash and junk is visible on the property, and the existing residence has been neglected for so long that the surrounding residents believe it may constitute a health hazard and a danger to the neighborhood and any persons inhabiting it. On January 27, 2002, the CH Fire Department was called to investigate fire damage to the ramshackle garage. There has been no sign that repairs will be undertaken.

The surrounding homeowners (not all of whom were officially notified) were shocked to receive notice of the subdivision of this lot only a few days before it was approved. Local homeowners appealed to the lot owner to reconsider and presented him with a letter to that effect, stating their concerns (Exhibit B). He refused.

#### **Basis for the Petition**

Th Co	is minor subdivision runs directly contrary to the wishes of the vast majority of the blonial Heights homeowners for the following reasons:
	It will open up the neighborhood to the prospect of new construction that will destroy its private and residential character, and increase traffic:
	The near "Flag Lot" configuration of the undeveloped lot is such that there is a high probability that it will be developed as rental property, i.e., a multi-tenant apartment disguised as a residence;
	The surrounding residents can expect that the new development will be constructed and maintained per the same low standards as the existing residence, creating a slum in the heart of Colonial Heights;
	Further development of the property in question will contribute to existing drainage problems downhill from the property.



In spite of these potentially disastrous consequences, the surrounding neighbors and residents have no advance input, recourse, or right of approval in this decision to subdivide, even though they will be severely impacted by the consequences of it, both in regard to property value and to quality of life. The homeowners of Colonial Heights purchased their homes in the belief they were safe from such potentially disastrous changes to their neighborhood. They were wrong.

#### Requested Action

The petitioners request that the Town Council take the following actions, to the extent it is empowered, and through the offices of the appropriate authorities:

- 1. Order or recommend that the Planning Department Board of Adjustment grant the appeal of the petitioners Michael and Amelia Collins (to be filed), and reverse the subdivision of the property in question.
- 2. Institute an investigation of the property in question to determine whether it meets minimum standards of safety and hygiene under the town's ordinances and, should it be determined to be in default, direct enforcement of those ordinances to bring the property into compliance.
- 3. Institute procedures or amendments to the town ordinances that will provide for a period of review and approval for such minor subdivisions in residential neighborhoods by the persons affected, thus providing residents with a vehicle for protecting their interests in their neighborhoods against ill-considered and poorly suited development plans.
- 4. Consider any other action in relief of the petitioners that it deems appropriate. including condemnation/purchase of the property in question and conversion thereof for use appropriate to the neighborhood (residential, recreational, etc.).

We respectfully implore the council's intervention in this matter.

Chapel Hill, February 11, 2002.

The Petitioners:

Michael and Amelia Collins
723 Williams Circle

Chapel Hill, February 11, 2002.

Michael and Amelia Collins

724 Williams Circle

Chapel Hill, NC 27516

967-4119

and the undersigned homeowners and residents of Colonial Heights.



### Exhibit A

Copy of Minor Subdivision Application Notification (2 pages)



January 18, 2002

#### APPLICATION FOR MINOR SUBDIVISION

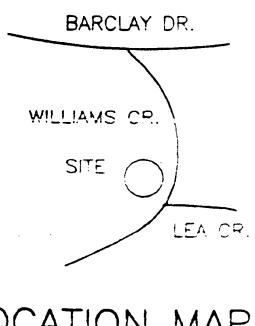
The following application for a Minor Subdivision has been submitted to the Town for review by the Lown staff

#### 717 Williams Circle Ting Kuo Shieh and Shu-Chun Shieh (File 7.32.E.6)

This application is for a minor subdivision proposing to create two lots (see proposed subdivision on back). The 19,497 square foot site is located at 717 Williams Circle (see map below). The property is located in the Residential-2 zoning district. The property is identified as Chapel Hill Township Tax Map 32, Block E, Lot 6.

The Town is notifying you of this application because County tax rolls list you as the owner of property located within 500 feet of the property for which the minor subdivision is proposed.

The application is on file in the Chapel Hill Planning Department (in Town Hall) and may be viewed weekdays between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. An appointment with Town staff will ensure their availability to answer your questions. For additional information, please call the Planning Department at 968-2728.



LOCATION MAP

To appoint

To:

Name

Blue Shieh

717 Williams Circle



#### Dear Blue:

We recently received notice from the town of Chapel Hill that you intend to subdivide your lot. The subdivision can only be seen as a prelude to constructing a new residence on the new lot. While we recognize your right to do with your property as you see fit, we would like to ask you to reconsider for the following reasons:

- 1. Constructing a residence on the new lot would destroy the private character of the wooded area behind your house and the houses of your neighbors.
- 2. Since the residence would most likely be a rental house, the increase in traffic would disrupt the peaceful nature of the neighborhood.
- 3. Constructing a building on the new lot could worsen the already bad drainage problems for the lots lower down (on Bradley St.).
- 4. Squeezing another structure into the wooded area could significantly lower the residential quality of life and value of the surrounding houses.

Although you have insisted to some of us that you do not intend to build on this new lot, it seems obvious that once the lot is divided, construction of a residence is only a matter of time. In fact, there is no other logical reason for dividing the lot.

We respectfully ask that you reconsider your decision to subdivide your lot. Your neighbors,

Address

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	Brent Cohen	708 Bradley Rd.
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	Gaston Fubanks	712 Williams Circle
	Marcy D. Colyn	708 Bradley Rd.
	- Harry Count	708 Bradley No.
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	165	713 Williams CV
	David & Louis Laborts	749 William Circle
	Amy Golen	740 Williams Cir. CH, NC
	Cindy aller Cox	10 Lea Court 2751C
	Brooks Rnie Johet	711 Williams Circle
	Ray & Bothe Bridge	709 Willer Cirle
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### Petition for Redress Of Grievance by the Town Council

Presented to: The Chapel Hill Town Council, February 11, 2002

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- 4. Consider any other action in relief of the petitioners that it deems appropriate, including condemnation/purchase of the property in question and conversion thereof for use appropriate to the neighborhood (residential, recreational, etc.).

We respectfully implore the council's intervention in this matter.

Chapel Hill, February 11, 2002.

The Petitioners: Michael and Amelia Collins 723 Williams Circle Chapel Hill, NC 27516 967-4119

## 22

## Petition for Reversal of Minor Subdivision

We, the undersigned residents and homeowners of Colonial Heights, do hereby request that the Town Council of Chapel Hill take the following action:

- 1. Order or recommend that the Planning Department Board of Adjustment reverse the subdivision of the lot located at 717 Williams Circle, Chapel Hill, NC, 27516 (File 7.32.E.6, decision of January 22, 2002).
- 2. Undertake procedures or amendments to the town ordinances that will provide for a period of review and approval for minor subdivisions in residential neighborhoods by those persons directly affected thereby.

Signature:	Name:	Address:
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## Petition for Reversal of Minor Subdivision (page 2)

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