

PETITION

FROM: Chapel Hill Planning Board
TO: Chapel Hill Town Council
DATE: January 16, 2007
SUBJECT: Process for Revision of Chapel Hill's Comprehensive Plan

PURPOSE

To identify for the Town Council potential concerns of the Planning Board regarding the process for examining changes to the Town of Chapel Hill Comprehensive Plan.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Comprehensive Plan is designed to manage change by setting a positive course for Chapel Hill's future. The Plan articulates a vision and direction for the community. It suggests ways in which we can invest in our community and build value for the future. And, most importantly, the Plan focuses on specific actions that will help us achieve a desired future.

BACKGROUND

The Chapel Hill Comprehensive Plan, adopted in May 2000, included provisions for ongoing monitoring and evaluation. The Plan also proposed that a major revision be undertaken five years after the adoption of the Plan.

REVIEW PROCESS

On January 12, 2006, the Town Council endorsed a process for examining the 2000 Comprehensive Plan. The Council requested that the Planning Board oversee the process as outlined below:

- Request Town advisory boards review and comment on possible modifications to the adopted Comprehensive Plan. All comments and recommendations are to be forwarded to the Planning Board.
- The Planning Board is to review comments and recommendations from advisory boards. The Planning Board is to then prepare a recommendation to the Council, identifying areas for possible revision or new sections to be added to the Plan.
- The Council is to consider recommendations of the Planning Board for revisions to the Comprehensive Plan and receive public comment on the proposals. The Council may approve an outline highlighting sections to be revised or added to the Comprehensive Plan.

- The outline would be referred to the Planning Board and the Planning Board would initiate work on revisions to the Comprehensive Plan.
- The revised Comprehensive Plan would then be submitted to the Council for review and adoption.

TASK FOR ADVISORY BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

In the spring of 2006, the following advisory boards and commissions and committees were given the opportunity to review the Comprehensive Plan:

Active Living by Design Committee
Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board
Community Design Commission
Greenways Commission
Historic District Commission
Million Solar Roofs Steering Committee
Public Arts Commission
Public Housing Program Advisory Board
Parks and Recreation Commission
Stormwater Management Utility Advisory Board
Transportation Board

In addition the OWASA Board of Directors and the Downtown Partnership were given the opportunity to review the Comprehensive Plan.

The advisory boards and commissions, the committees, the OWASA Board of Directors and the Downtown Partnership were requested to review and comment on possible modifications to the adopted Comprehensive Plan. The request was to include any suggested modifications to the existing Plan, new information, new topics, and any new or revised implementation actions.

The following review materials were provided to facilitate the review:

1. Description of Comprehensive Plan materials for review
2. Chapter 2 “Major Themes” of the Comprehensive Plan 2000
3. Summaries of adopted Comprehensive Plan goals and objectives, strategies and actions
4. Action Plan Initiatives Summary Table
5. Status List of Plan Actions

PRIOR PLANNING BOARD ACTIONS

On July 31, 2006, the Planning Board reviewed the Plan and recommended the following matters be identified and addressed in a revised Comprehensive Plan:

- Tree protection on private property

- Transportation, Fiscal Equity and Environmental Resources associated with the UNC Carolina North development
- The Public Arts Contextual Master Plan
- Follow-up on the Plan measures of progress which are identified in the existing plan
- Define the community's sense of downtown; define its characteristics, define terms such as "human scale" to assess whether downtown development proposals are appropriate.
- Review the Town's strategy to provide affordable housing, consider additional strategies and actions

On August 15, 2006, the Planning Board reviewed the comments received from OWASA, the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board, the Greenways Commission, the Public Arts Commission, the Parks and Recreation Commission and the Stormwater Management Utility Advisory Board.

The following list included the items and the elements identified by Boards and Commissions to date that relate to potential new or existing major themes. The Planning Board recommended that the Town Council revise the Plan to provide discussion of new themes identified in bold below, with goals, objectives and strategies for bulleted elements, also to refine or expand discussion of existing themes identified in bold below, with discussion of and goals, objectives and strategies for bulleted elements.

1. New Major Themes

Provide discussion of new themes identified in bold below, with goals, objectives and strategies for bulleted elements:

Environmental Protection:

- Air quality
- Climate change, reduce carbon dioxide emissions, greenhouse gases
- Tree protection
- Water quality
- Water resources:
 - Protection
 - Conservation and efficient uses of water resources
 - Wastewater Treatment
- Stormwater management program:
 - Reduce non-point source and point source pollution
 - Meet federal and state regulations e.g., National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) and Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL)
 - Integrate stormwater management planning and practices
 - Reduce impacts of development
 - Guidance for development design and mitigation, low impact design (LID) clustered development, minimize impervious surfaces.

Health Promotion:

- Active living through improved infrastructure, development, street and public space design, programs and promotion
- Promote healthful food consumption and access to healthy foods
- Smoking reduction

Sustainability:

- Objectives and strategies, encourage sustainable design and development
- Co-locate housing and jobs. Location efficient mortgages
- Relationship to affordable housing and preservation
- Transportation (alternate fuel buses, solar power infrastructure)
- Green building, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)
- Guidelines and regulations for green buildings, energy efficiency and solar exposure
- Regional cooperation
- Downtown focus for commerce and retail
- Sustainable design and renewable energy focus for new housing and housing renovation Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design – Neighborhood Design (LEED-ND)

Public Art:

See Draft Public Art Contextual Plan

2. Existing Plan Themes

Refine or expand discussion of existing themes identified in bold below, with discussion of and goals, objectives and strategies for bulleted elements:

Maintain Urban Services/Rural Buffer Boundary:

- Collaborative planning with OWASA for sustainable development

Participate in the Regional Planning Process:

- Growth management, sustainable development
- Transit
- Walking and bicycling
- Watershed protection
- Stormwater management

Conserve and protect existing neighborhoods:

- Pros and cons, relationship to creating development opportunities
- Extend Local Historic Districts to National Register Districts
- The economic benefits of historic preservation to the Town

Conserve and Protect the Natural Setting of Chapel Hill:

- Importance of entranceway corridors

Creative Development Opportunities:

- Downtown characteristics
- Mixed-use
- Conservation developments,
- Sustainable developments
- Redevelopment and Infill development
 - Opportunities and constraints, impacts, density and community character

- Transit Oriented Development

Encourage desirable forms of non-residential development:

- Developments which decrease dependency on non-renewable energy

Create and preserve affordable housing opportunities:

- Sustainable designs to provide affordable living costs, incorporate renewable energy sources
- Additional strategies and actions

Cooperatively Plan with UNC:

- Development of Carolina North:
 - Interconnected with all plan themes, specifically transportation, environmental resources and fiscal equity
- Affordable housing
- Alternative transportation
- Stormwater programs and strategies off and on campus
- Environmental protection

Balanced Transportation System:

- Focus public transportation on mobility and access for all citizens and ages
- Increase efficiency, expanded system for Chapel Hill Transit
- Town wide walkability and connectivity in particular to public facilities
- Reducing dependence on non-renewable energy sources
- Promote, facilitate and incentivize alternate transportation
- Improve connectivity for pedestrians and bicyclists
- Improve walkability and bikeability of schools
- Measure accessibility in addition to mobility
- Work with NCDOT to promote walking and bicycling

Complete the bikeway/greenway/sidewalk systems:

- Expand and connect systems to promote physical activity and health

Community Facilities and Services:

- Parks recreation, open space and greenways (see Master Plans)
- Recreation requirements for developments
- Continuous funding stream for maintenance of parks recreation, open space and greenways

Develop strategies to address fiscal issues:

- Incentives for green building and renewable industry

In its October 3, 2006 report the Planning Board stated its belief that the matters identified by advisory boards and commissions amounted to more than minor adjustments of the Comprehensive Plan. The Board stated its belief that there should be additional opportunities for citizens to provide input at this review stage of the plan revision process and thus recommended that there be two of three opportunities for citizens to provide input at a public forum with one of those being held on a weekend.

COUNCIL RESPONSE TO OCTOBER 3, 2006 PLANNING BOARD REPORT

On October 23, 2006, the Council discussed the Planning Board report. Council members stated that many of the items identified by the boards and commissions were already contained in the plan, also that the Council has implemented or was implementing strategies and actions of the plan, which would address many of the comments. Some Council members suggested that the plan does not require wholesale change, just minor modification to reflect changes that have occurred since 2000. Council members proposed that a revision to the plan identify and communicate the actions that have been implemented since 2000. The Council expressed its desire to continue working on items contained in the plan, which remain to be addressed.

On October 23, 2006, the Council deferred action to hold a public forum and directed the staff to identify any items that needed to change in response to the Planning Board review. They also requested staff to advise it how to integrate these in the plan to complete the review process.

Staff had prepared a matrix of the comments and suggestions received from the various boards and commissions. The matrix identified which board or commission made the comments and suggestions and provided a staff response addressing the comments and suggestions. The matrix also identified a location in the plan where the matter is already addressed or where it could be addressed by way of an addition or modification.

In response to the Council direction on October 23, 2006, staff proposed to redraft chapters of the Comprehensive Plan as outlined in the staff response section of the matrix. In addition to the matters identified in the matrix, they proposed to update any other information which had now been superseded by formal actions of the Council.

CURRENT CONCERNS OF THE PLANNING BOARD

The Planning Board believes that:

- The process of possible revisions to the Comprehensive Plan should be based on an examination of the whole picture, not just a chapter -by-chapter approach since it is the presentation of a clear, comprehensive vision statement that we feel is missing from the current Plan. We believe that there is a critical need for a comprehensive vision statement which enables a reader to easily understand where the Town wants to be in 20 years; a vision statement by which the community can judge the compatibility of major development proposals. Furthermore, we believe that there is a need to have this vision statement in place before the currently proposed chapter by chapter update in order that those evaluations can proceed within the context of this comprehensive vision statement.

Major areas of focus in the development of a comprehensive vision statement might include: a) a vision of what downtown should look like; b) a vision of how to integrate new high-density developments with existing neighborhoods; and c) a vision of the potential impacts of further growth on our natural resources and our public facilities.

- The process for reexamination of the Comprehensive Plan in which the Planning Board has been involved has uncovered several major themes that are not highlighted in the

current Plan: Environmental Protection, Health Promotion, Sustainability, and Public Art (as outlined on pages 3-4 of this memo). The Planning Board believes that incorporation of these new themes in and of itself requires a thorough review of the current Plan to determine whether these new themes can be adequately addressed by revision of existing chapters or will require that new chapters be added to the Plan.

- The rapid increase in both new development applications and the magnitude of the proposed projects, as well as requests for re-zonings, suggests that any potential revision of the Comprehensive Plan should not be drawn out over a long period of time, as would most likely occur with the currently-proposed chapter-by-chapter approach. The Board believes that adoption of a comprehensive vision statement will facilitate the further examination of the Plan and allow for a more accelerated process.
- The examination and possible revision of the Comprehensive Plan should strive for maximum citizen input which is not readily supported by the currently-proposed process. The Board would like to adopt a process which incorporates much greater citizen input, particularly in the initial development of a comprehensive vision statement.

REQUESTED ACTION

The Planning Board hereby petitions the Council to reconsider its current charge to Staff in which they requested that Staff develop a process by which the Planning Board would oversee the examination of the Comprehensive Plan on a chapter-by-chapter basis. Instead, the Planning Board requests that the Council:

- A) Ask the Staff to work with the Planning Board to develop a comprehensive vision statement for the Comprehensive Plan, utilizing citizen input to the greatest extent possible
- B) Ask the Staff to work with the Planning Board to develop a process and schedule by which the Comprehensive Plan will be reviewed in its entirety by the Planning Board, as well as by Staff, other advisory boards and citizens, and recommendations for possible revisions to the Comprehensive Plan made to Council at the earliest time possible.