



April 2, 2007

TO: Town of Chapel Hill Planning Board/Transportation

FROM: Trish Hussey
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Freedom House Recovery Center

Freedom House appreciates the feedback and support we have received from the Planning Board and Committees and our adjoining neighborhood. From the inception of this expansion project, our commitment has been to provide full information and education to our neighbors. As parents and family members ourselves, Board and staff want to assure our neighbors about the safety and protocol of our treatment facility.

Since 1974, Freedom House Recovery Center has been committed to making a difference in the lives of people with addiction and mental illness. We believe that people can recover, and live a full and rich life, and we have worked diligently with our community to create programs in which growth and recovery become attainable goals for people.

We have hosted two community meetings/dessert teas on our campus, inviting each and every member of the neighborhood, through printed invitations in their mailboxes, as well as emails to the neighborhood association President and Officers. More than 40 neighbors were in attendance, joining Freedom House staff and Board members. Neighbors voiced their concerns, and staff and Board addressed each of these concerns. We have also been in ongoing communication with the Neighborhood Association, offering to attend a neighborhood association meeting to lend further information and education on our program and our residents. Since this time, there have been two public information meetings held in Council Chambers to continue this discussion. We have also invited neighbors to visit and meet with staff and program alumni whenever they would like.

The major concerns from our neighbors focus on three questions included in their petition:

1. "There are many kids who do walking/biking/scooter/skating near Freedom House and around the Homestead Park. The expanded facility will bring in more traffic and therefore endanger the lives of children. Given the state of mind of the people being treated there, such danger even increases beyond what's caused by increasing traffic."

Freedom House residents and clients are not people who are dangerous to others. Graduates of our programs joined us at neighborhood meetings and at the Public

Information Meetings to introduce themselves and talk first hand about their recovery experience. These individuals are members of our community, and include: a lead benefits person for UNC Chapel Hill; a Unitarian Minister; a contractor who owns a very reputable business now; a young graduate of ASU. While in our program, residents and staff are engaged in a very intense daily schedule. People in our detox/crisis center never leave the building during their short, 3 to 14 day stay....it is much like being in the hospital. They do not drive. Residents in our halfway houses work fulltime, and are engaged in meetings and group therapy in the evening. Staff is always present at these times. To travel to work, clients walk to the bus stop, in the opposite direction from the adjoining neighborhood. In fact, they never walk through or near the neighborhood, and would have no reason to do so.

While at Freedom House, no resident or client is allowed to have a car on campus. Daily traffic in and out of the campus is comprised primarily of staff members ...counselors, clinicians, medical doctors and nurses. In staff meetings, we have asked that all staff be mindful of the concerns of our neighbors for their children and always drive slowly and cautiously when entering or leaving the facility. Staff members usually exit New Stateside Drive onto Martin Luther King Blvd, seldom driving through the neighborhood. New Stateside Drive is a very short street, and there is very little fast traffic on it. People using the park park in our parking lot....we welcome them. Others using the park aren't so considerate of speed limits and parking etiquette.

2. "The value of properties nearby will go down. We talked to people about this planning, and they indicated they would not consider buying a house nearby if there were such prominent facilities next door."

Hearing this concern from our neighbors, Board and staff responded by finding a neutral and reputable realtor of long standing in the community to answer questions and provide us with a multi-year survey from ML listings. This realtor volunteered their time. This information indicated that:

- a. *Homes were moving quickly on the market in this neighborhood (one home just behind Freedom House was only on the market for one day before selling for its asking price).*
- b. *Most homes sold for their asking price. Two on the list sold just below asking price, and the realtor felt that this was because the asking price was well above market value.*

Freedom House's 5 acre campus has existed to provide services for 34 years, surrounded by quiet wooded area, outside the town limits of Chapel Hill until 1993. When the park was being developed, Freedom House worked with the Town of Chapel Hill and the Recreation Department, trading our land to provide a right of way for New Stateside Drive and access to the park, and contingent to development of Parkside neighborhood. Clearly, our history demonstrates our commitment to community and neighbors.

3. "There have been noises from the facility, an expanded facility will magnify such noises and will give us hard time explaining to our kids who are making the noises."

Our structured programming engages residents between dawn and bedtime, with staff always present. We seldom have outdoor events or parties, and if we do, they are orderly, respectful and usually in the center of our campus....not in the backyard of the Men's House adjoining the neighbors. We would certainly contribute to the day to day interactions and conversations while leaving and entering our buildings, but this is a quiet campus. Neighborhood kids and those using the park create much more joyful noise than we do. We see this as a sign of a healthy and interactive neighborhood, and we welcome it. We would never ask our neighbors to keep their children quiet while playing in their yards. Our campus is our resident's home while they are with us....they use it quietly and appropriately.

We are ready, open and willing to continue a dialogue with our neighbors so that they will feel a level of comfort and ease sharing the community with Freedom House programs and residents.