

HIGHER DENSITY RESIDENTIAL ZONING

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This is to express my strong opposition to the proposed creation of a new higher density residential zoning district. There are many reasons to oppose higher densities in Chapel Hill. I will concentrate on one.

In the past we have developed under certain assumptions, one of the main ones being that we will always have plenty of water. Water experts have previously described our area as water rich.

With our current drought, that has changed and our thinking and planning need to change accordingly. The drought of 2002 should have been a wake-up call, but it wasn't. In spite of such warnings we have been going forward with the same assumptions of a plentiful water supply, I assume thinking that our droughts are a temporary aberration.

I don't see how we can go forward with such assumptions any more. We need to acknowledge that the future is now an unknown as far as our weather and our water supply. One of North Carolina's foremost water experts, David Moreau, chairman of the state's Environmental Management Commission and director of the N.C. Water Resources Research Institute was quoted in the September 30, 2007, News and Observer as saying "We've moved into an era where one can no longer live under the assumption of unlimited water supplies, and it's largely associated with urban growth."

Future weather predictions now indicate increased weather extremes, including droughts. We simply don't know what we will be facing in the future, and the smartest move forward would be to go with caution, not full speed ahead as this rezoning would imply.

It is clear that planning mistakes have been made in the past, but to base our future planning with such lack of acknowledgement of our current drought and our uncertain water future is to put planning mistake on top of planning mistakes. Higher densities in the future could create a problem of such dimensions that we can't even foresee. Please shelve this plan. Our future should be based around conservation and preservation, not higher and higher densities.