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Em **POWER**ment INC.

Reclaiming the POWER of our Communities

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DATE: March 4, 2004

TO: Chapel Hill Planning Department

FROM: EmPOWERment Inc.

RE: Zoning Atlas Amendment Statement of Justification

Background

In May 2002, the Town of Chapel Hill assisted EmPOWERment Inc. in purchasing 229 N. Graham Street. 229 N. Graham Street was purchased as part of a larger plan to improve the living environment in the Sykes Street area of the Northside neighborhood. As Town staff are well aware this particular property and the intersection where the property is located has been a troubled area. Often times, groups congregate at this location loitering around and individuals in the group are seen buying and selling drugs.

Initially, we proposed that the existing two bedrooms, one bath structure at 229 N. Graham Street be renovated and resold as a Land Trust home. During the planning phase of the project several discoveries caused us to change our mind on renovating the existing structure. The condition of the home at 229 N. Graham was worse than initially determined and more importantly, we became aware of the possibility for subdividing the lot and placing two homes at the site (229 & 231 N. Graham Street). It was a compelling opportunity to more fully utilize the northern end of the lot at 229 N. Graham Street, which has traditionally been one of the major gathering spots for drug dealers and intransigent crowds.

In July 2002, we began discussing with the Town of Chapel Hill the possibility of seeking a rezoning and a Special Use Permit to subdivide the existing lot and build two (2) new affordable homes. In September of 2002, EmPOWERment, Inc.'s former Director, Mark Chilton petitioned the Town Council and was granted expedited review. Subsequently, we have met with the Town's planning staff on several occasions and discussed the intricacies of our plan. We are now submitting an updated proposal incorporating the revisions requested as a result of the 1/22/04 Town of Chapel Hill Department Head Review.

Current Proposal

EmPOWERment Inc. proposes to demolish the existing structure at 229 N. Graham Street, subdivide the existing lot, and build two new homes on the site. Please see attached plans for designs of the two proposed homes. The home at the southern end of the existing lot (229 N. Graham Street) will be 1208 square feet and have three (3) bedrooms and two (2) bathrooms. The home at the northern end of the lot (231 N. Graham Street) will be 979 sq. ft. and have two (2) bedrooms and two (2) bathrooms.

According to the *Description of Required Information* sheet from the Town of Chapel Hill Planning Department, in order to justify a Zoning Atlas Amendment the proposed project must meet at least one of three criteria: (1) correct a map error, (2) to change and/or improve the general condition of an area, and/or (3) achieves objectives of the comprehensive plan. We feel that our proposal for 229 N. Graham Street meets criteria #2 & #3.

As mentioned above, the current environment where 229 N. Graham Street is located has been riddled by neglect, and crime. The proposed project at 229 N. Graham Street in combination with work at 501 & 503 Sykes Street will go a long way in improving and transforming the area (Criteria #2 for a Zoning Atlas Amendment). Currently, there are three homes at the intersection of Nunn Street, Whitaker Street, N. Graham Street, and Sykes Street that are unoccupied. With the proposed development of 229 N. Graham Street in combination with the work at 501 & 503 Sykes Street there will be four new homeowners located at this intersection. The added number of new residents and residents with a financial investment will act as a huge deterrent to illicit activity continuing in this area. Without subdividing the lot and developing an additional home at the northern end of the lot, you leave a large plat of underutilized land available to the loitering crowds to continue their current activity. The proposed development will greatly assist in changing the current four street intersection from a black hole for crime and dilapidation to a populated and invested neighborhood center.

We also feel strongly that the proposed redevelopment of 229 N. Graham Street meets many of the key objectives of the Town of Chapel Hill Comprehensive Plan (Criteria #3 for a Zoning Atlas Amendment), especially for downtown neighborhoods. Three of the main themes of the Town of Chapel Hill Comprehensive Report created in 2000 are to "Create and preserve affordable housing opportunities," "Conserve and protect existing neighborhoods," and "Identify areas where there are creative development opportunities." Both homes developed at 229 & 231 N. Graham Street will be Land Trust homes and by default will be affordable. With both homes being owner occupied and available at affordable prices the potential owners will continue the tradition in Northside of family-owned and occupied homes available to the working class community of Chapel Hill. Lastly, by using the Special zoning designation of Residential-Special Standards-Conditional (R-SS-C) we are creating an innovative way to provide more owner-occupied housing for Northside, affordable homeownership opportunities, and improving an area suffering from disrepair and abandonment.

Additionally, the proposed rezoning meets several of the goals, strategies and actions established by the Comprehensive plan. A goal of the Comprehensive plan is to "protect the physical and social fabric of Chapel Hill's neighborhoods." As I have mentioned several times, Northside historically has been a neighborhood of mostly owner-occupied homes and only until recently has the neighborhood undergone a mass transformation to rental properties. With the neighborhood comprised now of roughly 50 percent rental properties the "physical and social fabric" of this historic and proud neighborhood are greatly threatened.

Two strategies included in the Comprehensive plan address the need for "neighborhood protection" (with Northside one of the neighborhoods identified to protect) and "stopping the rapid conversion of owner occupied housing to rental property." The proposed redevelopment of 229 N. Graham Street will help protect the neighborhood by both reducing the criminal activity in the local area by bringing more people with a vested interest in the well-being of the community to the area and ensuring more owner-occupied housing and long-term neighborhood residents. Prior to EmPOWERment, Inc.'s redevelopment of 229 N. Graham Street the property was a rental unit (as was 503 Sykes Street). So, in developing 229 N. Graham Street (and 503 Sykes Street) we are not only preserving owner occupied housing, but also adding back to the stock of owner-occupied and affordable homes available to low and moderate-income families.

The proposed development accomplishes two actions recommended by the Comprehensive plan: the incorporation of "small area planning involving Town officials and local residents" and through "appropriate design" to incorporate new development into existing neighborhoods. Through the creation of the Sykes Street Steering Committee back in 2000 a group comprised of Northside residents, Town officials, Chapel Hill Police Officers, University of North Carolina City and Regional Planning Department faculty and students, and local affordable housing nonprofits, 229/231 N. Graham Street and the surrounding area has been studied and discussed. At a charette organized by the Sykes Street Steering Committee the idea for subdividing the lot and replacing the dilapidated structure with two new homes was discussed at length. Many felt that the addition of another home, especially an owner-occupied home, would reduce the opportunity for illicit activity to continue in the area. In addition, the idea has been discussed at two public forums with notification being sent to surrounding residents within 1000 feet of the proposed project.

Because of the size and location of the property in developing the proposed designs for the two new homes we worked with an architect to incorporate the homes into the surrounding physical and social environment. We have done this by incorporating into the two designs architectural features from nearby homes, like hipped roofs. We allowed for continuing flow of pedestrian traffic by establishing easement areas to accommodate sidewalks, curbs and gutters. And we will incorporate landscaping to enhance the physical appearance of the corner, add to the sense of place for the future homeowners and surrounding neighbors, while continuing the safe use of the area by drivers and pedestrians through height limitations on plantings.

We feel strongly that the proposed redevelopment will enhance and improve the quality of life in the Sykes Street area and as such are requesting a Zoning Atlas Amendment. We look forward to working with the Town to make this project successful and a vital part in the overall redevelopment of the Sykes Street community.