



Topline Summary of Focus Group Findings

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

University of North Carolina Health Care Systems

The Town of Chapel Hill

Prepared on Behalf of /UniDev LLC

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BACKGROUND

In Spring 2000, all employees of the Town of Chapel Hill, and a random sampling of employees of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of North Carolina Health Care System were asked to respond to a *"housing demand"* survey. At that time, these institutions were in the early stages of an analysis regarding the feasibility of developing a housing program for their employees. The proposed housing development would possibly include retail services, office facilities and parking. Based on the responses to that initial survey, as well as, additional research conducted, the institutions proceeded in developing a conceptual plan. In order to further test that conceptual plan, another survey was distributed in late January/early February 2001 that included more specific, detailed questions about the housing portion of the conceptual plan. Paired with this second survey, the decision was made to conduct a series of focus group panel discussions to learn what the level of interest in such a proposed housing initiative would be from potential homebuyers/tenants. In addition, it was also important to learn of the concerns and issues that arose when considering living in the downtown Chapel Hill area. As part of this process, COLUMBIA FOCUS was selected to design and conduct six focus groups among faculty and staff of UNC at Chapel Hill, UNC-HCS and employees of the Town of Chapel Hill.

METHODOLOGY

COLUMBIA FOCUS recruited both staff and faculty members of UNC at Chapel Hill and UNC-HCS, as well as, Chapel Hill town employees to participate in a total of six focus groups over a two-day period (February 20th and February 21st). Two focus groups were conducted for each organization. The panel discussions for UNC at Chapel Hill were held on February 20th, 2001 at 10AM and 12 noon in Conference Room A of the Giles Horney Building. The panel discussions for UNC-HCS were held on February 21, 2001 at 9AM and 11AM in the Hedrick Board Room (Hedrick Building). The panel discussions for the Town of Chapel Hill were held on February 20th at 3PM and February 21st at 2PM in the First Floor Conference Room in Town Hall. Potential panelists were recruited from the random lists used to distribute the Housing Demand Survey and from written responses to that survey that indicated a willingness to participate in the planned focus group panel discussions. When extending the invitation to participate, priority was given to the survey respondents who volunteered. Panelists were informed that each focus group would last approximately one hour and that they would be allowed to attend without sacrificing vacation or personal leave time. A gratuity/gift was not offered but in most cases light refreshments were provided by the sponsoring organization. JoAnn Ryan Gaynor, managing member, COLUMBIA FOCUS LLC, moderated the groups.

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STATEMENT OF LIMITATIONS

Since information obtained through qualitative research is based on a small, self-selected sample, it is appropriate to state the limitations inherent in this market research technique. A sample assembled through this method may not be statistically representative of its assumed universe even if it were significantly larger. Qualitative research techniques are employed to determine *why* people react as they do, rather than to determine *how many* people will react in a given way. Ideally, hypotheses developed using qualitative research would be confirmed or refuted via more statistically robust quantitative methods.

GROUP 1/UNC AT CHAPEL HILL

COMPOSITION

Of the twelve individuals recruited to participate in this focus group, eight were able to attend, one cancelled due to illness and the remaining three were no shows. The background of this particular group of respondents was evenly split in a number of areas. Fifty percent (4) currently own their home and fifty percent (4) now rent. Three currently live in Chapel Hill (but not in the downtown area); two currently live in Durham, one in Hillsboro and the remaining two in the surrounding area (Mebane and Alamance County). Four indicated a typical commute time of approximately 40 minutes, whereas, four had a 20-minute or less commute time. Again, they were evenly divided in their interest in living in downtown Chapel Hill. Four said they would consider it, if affordable. The remaining panelists were strongly opposed (2) or were not willing to seriously consider "at this time" but perhaps later at retirement (1) or when downsizing their home after the children had left the nest (1). The two panelists that strongly opposed residing in downtown Chapel Hill are long-term employees with a typical commute of 30-40 minutes who prefer a rural location.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

There were twice as many cons/problems mentioned as opposed to pros/benefits with regard to living in downtown Chapel Hill. Although participants agree upon the convenience of living in the downtown area, this group was very vocal in expressing their view that the campus and town parking is insufficient. ***"Before they address the housing issue they need to address the parking issue. They go hand in hand."*** It was stated again and again that the parking demand far exceeded the available parking slots. As one senior employee (20 years) commented, ***"A parking permit is a 'license to hunt', giving you the prerogative to look for a place to park but it does not guarantee you a parking space."*** Another senior managerial employee (27 years) added, ***"People who work on Franklin Street, I can't imagine where they park or how much it is costing them. It's ridiculous."*** Many respondents indicated that they don't go downtown for lunch because the chances are that they will not be able to find a place to park. Instead, they opt to go to the malls where they can be assured of being able to park.

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Several members of the panel think that living downtown will allow them to become less dependent on a vehicle. However, public transportation is not always considered a wise alternative. The UNC shuttle service was said to be inconsistent and unreliable. Newer employees (those employed 2 years and under) were more comfortable using buses and public transportation in general. A seasoned facility manager summed up the parking issue this way: ***"It is the biggest complaint of potential and current employees."***

Older panelists think downtown Chapel Hill would be a good location in which to retire. But there are concerns regarding safety. One woman stated, ***"There are a lot of homeless people on the street."*** Vandalism, students' conduct, and students' disregard for others were other issues discussed.

Many think the downtown business community does not offer a balanced assortment of retail services. It currently consists of mostly restaurants, bars and gift shops. There is no grocery store and there should be at least one gas station and affordable clothing stores. As one attendee noted, ***"The downtown business district caters primarily to the students and the visitors."***

CREATING "COMMUNITY" THROUGH DESIGN

When participants were asked to describe how they would like the proposed housing to be designed and what amenities should be featured, the responses all indicated a strong desire for a ***"HOME"***. The building should be architecturally designed in a way that is interesting and pleasing to the eye. The townhouse concept is a good place to begin but there is no interest in apartment-like units that do not offer a private entry or direct access from outside. As one young woman who is to be married shortly stated, ***"At NC State, the married student housing was bleak-looking; boxes stacked upon boxes – it was unappealing and depressing."*** Ideally there would be some separation between units. But if that were not possible, superior sound proofing insulation would be desired to minimize noise from surrounding units. A variety of styles and sizes would be attractive. Two and three bedroom units of at least 1200 sq. ft. should predominate for households of two adults with and without children. A larger more open eat-in kitchen would be preferred over a small galley type kitchen with a separate dining room. Creating a feeling of light, space and openness in the design is needed. One woman put it this way; ***"I love resorts – 5 star resorts. I would want a 5-star resort 'feel' if I lived downtown."*** Other factors mentioned include a pet friendly design, two parking spaces per unit plus designated visitor parking, a gated community or parking lot to discourage unauthorized parking trespassers, and storage areas (either individual or a common area that could be shared). All agree that green space is very important. Most would prefer a private balcony or patio or a small fenced in back yard. A shared green space/play space is acceptable as long as it is well maintained and includes a picnic or cook out area.

Six of the eight respondents would prefer to purchase, if affordable, and two would prefer to rent. Those who selected the option to purchase supported this decision by listing the following advantages: more control of the property, equity investment, tax advantages and the belief that owners maintain their property better than renters do.

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The two participants who would choose to rent were both young singles who felt more comfortable, at this time, with the flexibility renting can offer.

Potential purchasers are concerned with the amount of down payment required, possible condo fees and affordability. A mortgage payment over \$800 would be too high to be competitive with housing outside of the downtown area. This group agrees that the maximum selling price of a 1250 sq. ft. townhouse should be \$125,000. There is also concern that owners would need to sell their home if they leave their current employment. (Duke University has this condition on its housing.)

The issue of affordability resurfaced again and again. Who is the target employee of this proposed housing? Will it benefit anyone other than high-level faculty that UNC is trying to recruit? (Clerical employees who have a maximum salary of ~ \$35,000 are the ones who truly need affordable housing.) Will this proposed housing offer the incentive to stay in Chapel Hill?

Overall this group was interested and willing to support the proposed housing concept for downtown Chapel Hill. The three largest stumbling blocks are (a.) defining affordability, (b.) resolving the parking problem, and (c.) determining who is in the greatest need of this program and if this program will offer the incentive to make downtown Chapel Hill *'home'*.

GROUP 2/UNC AT CHAPEL HILL

COMPOSITION

Of the twelve individuals recruited to participate in this focus group, seven were able to attend, three cancelled due to work logistics and two were no shows. The panel was composed of three males and four females. Four currently rent a house or apartment while three own their residence. One panelist lives in Chapel Hill (not downtown), three panelists live in Durham, two live in Carrboro and one in South Orange County. The average commute time was 26 minutes. Four expressed an interest in living in downtown Chapel Hill, two would consider it but not at this time, and one had no interest in the downtown area as a place of residence. The panelist who expressed no interest in residing in downtown Chapel Hill is a long-time employee who loves his current neighborhood. This neighborhood is located just outside the Chapel Hill town limit. His children attend Chapel Hill schools, which boast a high degree of excellence, but he does not pay Chapel Hill's high property taxes. In effect, he has the best of both worlds.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

As in the earlier UNC group, there were twice as many cons/problems cited as opposed to pros/benefits with regard to living in downtown Chapel Hill. On the positive side, panelists saw living downtown as a way to minimize the need for a car. With the addition of a grocery store, most retail services would be within easy walking distance.

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Many panelists agreed that the absence of a grocery store was a major roadblock. ***"When Fowler's Food Store closed, it made getting a car necessary. When Fowler's Food Store closed, Chapel Hill became less of a village. On Rosemary Street you had Huggins Hardware, dry cleaners and a Laundromat. Now it is not convenient to be downtown and walk as you would in a village."*** Chapel Hill Transit is currently providing some service and is viewed as fairly dependable. But respondents would like to see this service upgraded and expanded. ***"Major consideration should be given to minimize the use of a car. Housing should be within walking distance of retail and on transit lines."*** The urban lifestyle is an attractive option. ***"I want an urban life available to me."*** Security and safety are not seen as significant issues. Participants perceive Chapel Hill to be safer than Durham because crime prevention techniques had been implemented.

The negative factors discussed regarding living in downtown Chapel Hill included the high expense of renting or owning a home in the area, the difficulties in finding adequate parking, traffic congestion, the high volume of students, and the lack of a community meeting area. One respondent mentioned informal community gatherings at the Weaver Street market in Carrboro. ***"A lot of community has shifted to Carrboro. Carrboro is now the progressive community that Chapel Hill thinks it is."*** This quote expresses the sentiment that Chapel Hill's identity is in limbo. Chapel Hill is not what it used to be and has not become what it envisions itself to be.

Many panelists are not happy with the current mix of retail services available in downtown Chapel Hill. The opinions heard from this panel indicate that businesses in Chapel Hill are more interested in meeting the needs of visitors and students as opposed to residents. ***"Downtown Chapel Hill has evolved into an area that caters to tourists, students and people who work in the area. The things you want available to you where you live are not there."***

CREATING "COMMUNITY" THROUGH DESIGN

When asked to describe how this housing should be designed, panelists indicated that housing above parking and/or retail is appealing. The prospect of a high-rise would be acceptable but no more than 5 stories would be appropriate for the downtown community. Convenient parking would be a plus. Many feel an intergenerational mix would enhance the sense of community. Perhaps a couple of small developments or buildings could be geared towards different 'life stages'--one for singles and young married couples (without children); -- one for families; and one building for seniors/retirees. The square footage should range from 1,000 (for singles) to 2,000 for families. A minimum of two bedrooms would be needed. A washer/dryer in each unit is essential. A community area (playground, tennis courts, pool) would be a welcome asset. An inner courtyard would also be a great addition.

The panel all agrees that they would be interested in purchasing in order to gain the tax benefits and to build equity. Coming up with the down payment is seen as a bigger concern than meeting the monthly mortgage payment. The group viewed employer incentives in the form of down payment assistance (with repayment at time of resale) as

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attractive. A rent-to-own program would enable more people to take advantage of this program.

A panelist mentioned the Horace Williams Tract as a tremendous opportunity to build both housing and retail venues that would be distanced from the various student communities.

In summary, this group views the housing program positively but feels it would be most attractive to younger people and retirees, and less appealing to families. In addition, prime candidates would be those individuals most open to being less dependent on a private vehicle and more willing to walk or use public transportation.

GROUP 3/TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL

COMPOSITION

Of the twelve individuals recruited to participate in this focus group, only three were able to attend. Two could not attend due to job obligations and were invited to participate on February 21, 2001 at 2PM. The high level of no shows for this panel (7 no shows) may be indicative of a communications problem with supervisors who did not have adequate notice to arrange coverage for those Town employees who wanted to participate. Of the three female respondents, one lives in Cary, one in Chapel Hill near the Durham line and one in Hillsboro. Commute times ranged from 15 minutes to 45 minutes. One married respondent currently owns her home and the two single respondents are both renting at this time. None of the panelists who participated in this discussion expressed an interest or desire to live in downtown Chapel Hill.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Although these three women listed many important retail facilities located downtown (dry cleaner, drugstore, hardware store, office supplies, banks and post office) they all agree that a grocery store within walking distance is needed to make living downtown attractive. ***"Downtown Chapel Hill has what you want. Sutton's Drug Store has been here forever. A grocery store is the only thing missing downtown."*** Many of the drawbacks cited to living in downtown Chapel Hill centered on the concerns associated with co-existing with a large student population. A panelist who grew up in the Town of Chapel Hill, and who is a long-time employee of the Town, commented on this student/non-student tension. ***"I want a clear separation from student life. I truly believe that while we can all be here together, there should be some definite separation because I don't think the students and campus employees have the same respect for the town that people who live here and work here have. They have a different view on how the town is perceived. I think I have a different kind of respect for the town, even if I didn't work here, than people who come and stay for 4-5 years."*** A married woman with three children added, ***"There is too large of a student population in downtown to have a really good family atmosphere."***

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Traffic congestion and the parking challenges in the downtown area were also discussed. ***"The more people you cram into the Chapel Hill area, the more traffic you create and the more undesirable living conditions you create."*** Another participant added, ***"I appreciate getting into my car and going to people rather than getting into my car and getting away from people."*** All three panelists expressed a desire for a home that could be a quiet haven at the end of the workday. ***"At the end of the day, you want to go home, you want quiet. You want to be able to kick off your shoes and sit down outside without having to worry about horns, about people and someone else's party. Three years ago, I did not feel this way 'cause I wasn't a parent. I would have wanted to be where it's happening - in the middle of it all."***

A strong desire was expressed for ample green space. One panelist is used to living on 5 acres in Hillsboro and the other two both place a high priority on providing an environment in which their children could thrive.

"CREATING COMMUNITY THROUGH DESIGN"

Since this small group had already clearly indicated little or no interest in living in the downtown Chapel Hill area, for the purposes of discussing possible housing design and amenities, they were asked to change their mindset. They were requested to change their frame of reference and imagine that they could envision themselves living downtown.

These panelists want separate, direct entry into units designed like townhouses with 1 or 2 stories. A garage or basement would be attractive for both storage and to help with future family growth. Ideally there would be 1 reserved parking space per adult in the household. Access to the reserved parking should be restricted in some way to discourage unauthorized use. Having the housing built over parking or retail (rather than other housing) is preferred due to noise and privacy concerns with living over another tenant. ***"I would rather live over retail with 9-5 hours of parking (preferably my own) than living over people. Privacy is an issue."***

Community daycare is not seen as an important amenity but having a washer/dryer in each unit is highly desired.

Again, outdoor green space is a big plus. A private or shared courtyard or a play area or garden plot is a feature that panelists say would be very appealing to them.

This focus group indicated that they would definitely elect purchase over renting in order to gain tax advantages and to have control over the property. Unfortunately all three indicated purchasing a house in Chapel Hill was probably beyond their financial means. ***"I am resolved that I may have to leave Chapel Hill because I can't afford to be in Chapel Hill. I don't expect Chapel Hill to build me a house, or build me a community of people who make less than \$30,000. There has to be a way for people with regular jobs to have a home."***

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The general consensus at this panel discussion was that meeting the monthly mortgage payment would be a greater hurdle than coming up with the appropriate down payment. There was some discussion regarding the types of restrictions that ownership may require. One participant expressed concern regarding the possible resale to individuals who do not need the assistance. Although owning a home is an investment, participants do not want to see 'flipping' and the making of large profits on the reselling of these homes. These potential buyers stated that they intend to make a long-term commitment when making such a purchase. ***"I want to invest time in my home; time to just be there; time to make my home fit me and me fit my home."***

Even though all three panelists initially expressed little interest in living in downtown Chapel Hill, by the end of the focus group they concurred that it is a good idea to help employees find affordable housing. The concept is a good one and worth pursuing. But panelists feel the program would appeal to younger people as opposed to older people who would prefer a more quiet location with less traffic.

GROUP 4/UNC-HCS

COMPOSITION

Of the thirteen individuals recruited to participate in this focus group, ten were able to attend and three were no shows. The background of this particular group of panelists was evenly split in a number of areas. Fifty percent (5) currently own their home and fifty percent (5) now rent. The average commute time is 30 minutes. Cary, Carrboro, Hillsboro, Durham, Windell and Alamance County were where most of the participants currently reside. The panelists were also divided evenly in their interest in living in downtown Chapel Hill; 5 favored the proposition and 5 indicated little or no interest at this time. The panelists who are not interested in living in downtown Chapel Hill all currently reside in more rural areas and have no desire to give up the space and openness they now enjoy. Their decision to live someplace other than downtown Chapel Hill is not impacted by the length of time at their present position and/or the length of their commute.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Once again, convenience (especially to work) was mentioned as the number one reason to consider moving to downtown Chapel Hill. Several respondents mentioned they enjoy the students and would like to live in the area because of the high percentage of students. ***"I enjoy students. It makes you feel good and ALIVE to be among them."*** Nonexistent parking again headed the list of major problems with living in the downtown area. Vandalism, pan handling and drug activity were also indicated as points of concern. Just as many participants stated they were annoyed with student misconduct and behavior as were energized by their presence. A corporal on the hospital police force commented, ***"The perception of Chapel Hill is students. If the city wants people to live in Chapel Hill, they have to offer more and***

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change their way of thinking. "A woman in the payroll department just one month added, ***"Franklin Street shuts down after a big win."***

General agreement was reached regarding the retail services that are missing in the downtown arena. Panelists want retail services such as a bigger movie theater, an affordable drugstore and a grocery store to be added.

It is difficult for those participants who currently live in the countryside, to imagine giving up space and privacy for the convenience of being close to their place of employment.

CREATING "COMMUNITY" THROUGH DESIGN

Panelists think that a single level unit with a private entry and designed to create a feeling of openness and light would offer the greatest appeal to potential residents. Once again, there is great enthusiasm for reserved parking (at least 1 parking space per unit, but 2 spaces are preferred). An on-site daycare center could be helpful but could also be noisy. And will it be affordable? One parent mentioned that they pay \$125/week for childcare services and know of other daycare scenarios that cost up to \$1,000/month. A fitness facility would be a nice perk but panelists are willing to give it up to make the project more affordable and/or to make the units larger.

Participants want well-designed, well-thought out floor plans that would offer some flexibility or options that would suit a variety of household/family types. Access to the outdoors and green space is a priority, a private patio or deck and a washer/dryer in each unit consistently placed high in the amenities panelists mentioned as very important.

Ownership is overwhelmingly preferred over renting. There are many concerns about income eligibility, down payment costs and meeting a mortgage payment. Participants are leery of all the "strings attached" to such a proposed housing program. What type of limitations would be imposed on the sale of these homes? Would the owner need to sell upon termination of their employment? How would it affect their paycheck? Would they have automatic deductions taken out of their gross salary? There is reluctance and some fear in having an employer involved in personal and financial affairs of employees. Such a relationship would be a little too close for comfort for many. However, if the employer creates a separate, non-profit organization, employees feel more relaxed and open to considering participation in the housing program. The establishment of a self-help credit union is seen as providing a good model and low interest loans would be attractive, as well.

Although this group voiced various concerns about the degree of control by the institutions involved in this program, they all think it would be good for Chapel Hill. Hopefully more permanent residents would be convinced to live in downtown Chapel Hill. If the program were able to provide flexible floor plans for different types and sizes of households, it would create a more intergenerational and diverse community. This possible program is also seen as a way to retain employees and reduce the expense to the institution caused by turnover.

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This group suggested developing a 'profile' or 'focus' on the ideal recipients of this program in order to expedite the design and sale of this proposed housing.

GROUP 5/UNC-HCS

COMPOSITION

Of the twelve individuals recruited to participate in this focus group, five were able to attend, three cancelled because of work conflicts and the remaining four were no shows. Those who currently rent (3) slightly outnumbered those who currently own their home (2). Respondents are more spread out in terms of the area of their residence. These areas include Hillsboro, Raleigh, Pittsboro, Mebane and Cary. Likewise the average commute time of 45 minutes is higher than in previous groups. All five panelists indicated that they were willing and interested in living in downtown Chapel Hill. Only one panelist is a long-time employee (15 years). The remaining four panelists have been employed for a much shorter time (6 months, 18 months and 5 years). The positions held by this group of panelists would be considered 'support staff'.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Convenience to their jobs (and reducing their commute time) was the number one reason stated for favoring residing in downtown Chapel Hill. ***"Downtown is close to everything; you can walk to everything you would need or want. Plus, you would save money on parking."*** Some of the concerns addressed included the absence of a grocery store, noise and traffic congestion, and the negative influence college students may have on younger, impressionable teens.

CREATING "COMMUNITY" THROUGH DESIGN

Participants want to see a mixed, intergenerational community in downtown Chapel Hill that will give the feeling of a city within itself. Smaller families with children would be fine but these respondents would prefer NO STUDENTS.

There should be reserved parking (1 parking space per bedroom) that is well lit and close by. Perhaps there could be an option to purchase additional parking spaces if needed. Also, there should be some allowance for guest spaces that could be located off-site but within an easy walking distance.

Potential owners would like to be provided with design options. Townhouses or clusters of units would be more appealing than a high-rise condo/apartment concept. If the housing will be multi-leveled, an elevator would be welcomed. Building over retail services would be okay but many would not be thrilled with living over a restaurant due to the noise and smells.

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A surveillance system that includes a guard and cameras at entry doors and the playground area would help to ease security concerns. ***"Chapel Hill is a student town. Crime rates go through the roof during a student exodus like a semester break. It would be interesting to see if those rates go down if more employees and people who work in downtown year round were scattered in and around."***

This focus group listed amenities not previously mentioned in the other panel discussions. They include a sprinkler system, direct vent gas fireplace, double pane windows, cable and internet access, high ceilings, a dishwasher and garbage disposal in the kitchen, and a master bath with a separate shower stall. Other amenities that were included were ones consistently mentioned in the previous focus groups. They include a washer/dryer in each unit, separate entry into the unit, and green space options such as a patio or deck and a playground. One respondent summed it up by stating, ***"I'd like to see something dynamic built."*** Another participant who owns several properties (and rents the properties he doesn't reside in) commented, ***"Demand to live in Chapel Hill is exceedingly high and people will pay a premium to do it."***

These employees would rather see the proposed housing program as an employee benefit as opposed to another assistance program. They don't want to be viewed as "needing assistance". ***"You need to give people a sense of ownership and not a feeling of assistance."*** Financial concerns include both the down payment and the monthly mortgage payment. In determining an affordable cost, panelists use the standard of \$100/sq. ft. for a purchase price and indicate a monthly cost of between \$800-\$900 is reasonable.

Respondents again expressed the privacy concern with respect to an employer being involved in their personal finances. Everyone wanted more details regarding how this part of the program would be implemented. Who would qualify? How would qualified individuals be selected? Would a lottery system be used? Must you sell upon termination of employment?

Since most wanted to make a long-term commitment to living in the area, restricting the appreciation would be acceptable if it made it more affordable to purchase.

"Chapel Hill is a great town and will continue to be a great town." Everyone is proud of Chapel Hill – it is a great town. But Chapel Hill is a college town that is trying to become a retirement community. The dynamics of the Town are changing and this would be an ideal time to lay the groundwork for creating a different community mix where the emphasis would be not just on the students but on the year round community of residents.

GROUP 6/TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL

COMPOSITION

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Of the twelve respondents recruited to participate in this focus group, eleven were able to attend, one cancelled, one attended who was originally scheduled for the panel discussion held the day before, and there was one no show. Six participants are currently renting and five currently own their home. Most live within a 10-minute commute (8), in the suburbs of Chapel Hill, Carrboro, Durham and Orange County. Only one respondent out of the eleven said yes to living in downtown Chapel Hill. Of the remaining 10 participants; four were a 'maybe' and six were a definite no. Those who said no to living downtown cite as disadvantages the tight parking situation, the students and the lack of land or space to give the feeling of openness. ***"I desire to live in Chapel Hill but not downtown. In downtown, there is no space to call your own."***

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Positive factors related to living in downtown Chapel Hill once again feature convenience to employment, goods and services. ***"Convenience may be a reason to live in downtown Chapel Hill."*** Again it is seen as relatively safe and mention was made again that it is perceived as 'safer' than Durham.

Negative factors included parking, the high cost of living in the area (tax rates in Chapel Hill are very high), a grocery store and more clothing stores need to be included in the retail mix, and concerns regarding Franklin Street and student rowdiness were all mentioned.

CREATING "COMMUNITY" THROUGH DESIGN

Since this large group had already indicated little or no interest in living in the downtown Chapel Hill area, for the purposes of discussing possible housing design and amenities, they were asked to use their imagination and envision living in downtown Chapel Hill.

Interestingly enough, there was a desire for a mix of ages, incomes and types of households to provide a sense of "community". But again – NO STUDENTS. Separating singles from married couples and households with children is acceptable since it would be easier to provide the amenities that would appeal to individual groups as opposed to trying to be all things to all people.

A neighborhood pool is high on the list of amenities. Two reserved parking spaces per unit are ideal. Some panelists are accepting of off-site parking as long as it is well lit; others are not in favor of this option because of safety concerns.

Other desired amenities include a storage area, a private entry, townhouse design, washer/dryer in each unit and recessed lights in the ceilings. A fireplace is not deemed important and could be eliminated entirely.

Most would not want to live above a retail business of any kind since it is not typical for the area. But living above parking is acceptable.

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The majority would prefer to purchase if the cost would be about the same as renting. Two would probably rent since they do not want the responsibility of up-keep. Coming up with the needed down payment and not having to work two jobs to make the monthly payment are concerns. ***"If I buy a house, I want to be comfortable not living paycheck to paycheck and working a second job to make ends meet for the rest of my life."***

Defining affordability and developing the program so that it could work on a sliding scale are also important considerations. ***"What would be affordable? What does affordable mean to this project?"*** Participants think the extent of assistance should vary depending upon need. A rent-to-own scenario would be appealing to this group. Many see this as a job benefit and are anxious about the idea that they would lose it if they terminated their employment with the Town of Chapel Hill.

Everyone agreed it is a good idea to provide affordable housing. ***"It is hurtful to know that you have to move 5-10 miles outside the town you want to live in because you can't afford to live in the town."*** Ironically, one participant commented, ***"If the Town has money for this, they are taking too much of my tax dollars."***

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The proposed housing development program under consideration by the Institutions is overwhelmingly perceived as a good and noble cause and a rallying point in beginning the transformation of downtown Chapel Hill.

However, it is clearly demonstrated through these six focus groups that employees want this as a benefit of their employment. They do not want to include students since the general feeling is that there are already ample housing opportunities for the student population. Overall, there seems to be a love/hate relationship with the UNC at Chapel Hill student body. Many concede the University and the students are the reason for their employment, but at what cost? Students are viewed as voracious consumers of parking, goods and services and at many times a pain in the neck with their rowdiness and disregard for others in the Town. Although some stated that they like being around the students, since it makes them 'feel alive' and 'energized', most want to be separated from the student body.

Employees want clear, concise answers to the following questions:

1. Who will be eligible for this program?
2. How will it impact my relationship with my employer?
3. How are you defining 'affordable'?
4. Who will the 'community' of downtown Chapel Hill cater to?
5. Can a Town identity be established apart and separate from the University?
6. I don't want to be seen as needing assistance – will the program be sensitive to this concern?

Focus Group Topline Summary

UNC at Chapel Hill, UNC-HCS, Town of Chapel Hill

Several groups suggested the development of a profile of whom the institutions are targeting. The information gathered from these groups will enable the institutions to define who would benefit the most from such a program.

In addition, the institutions need to lay aside their differences and stress the importance of uniting behind this program. As one Town employee stated, ***"The way it looks and the way the University makes it sound is that we just want to have more and more people come to the University of North Carolina. More and more people to work at the University of North Carolina. We want to have the biggest research grants done at UNC. We want to build a bigger hospital with better facilities. While I don't knock that; what do you want the Town to do - shrivel up and die?"***

In order to continue to grow and thrive, these institutions need to co-exist and to have mutual respect and understanding of what each brings to the others.

Joining forces to make an assisted housing development project a reality could become a focal point to show a commonality that is not readily apparent.