

An Open Letter to the People of Chapel Hill Regarding the Proposed Land Use Management Ordinance

*from Mayor Kevin Foy, on behalf of the Town Council - -
October 10, 2002*

Dear Citizens,

The Town Council asked me to write this Open Letter to our community, to present information about the proposed Land Use Management Ordinance currently being considered by the Council. This new ordinance will help guide our growth over the next ten to twenty years. We know there will be significant population growth over that time, and it will take place within approximately the same Town borders that we now have. That means more people in the same space – possibly 20,000 more people.

A complete overhaul of our development regulations is long overdue because the current ordinance was originally written in 1981. In addition, in May 2000 we adopted a new Comprehensive Plan for the town. That plan offers a blueprint for the future, and a guide to keeping our community livable as it grows. Two guiding principles in the plan are neighborhood conservation and environmental protection. The new ordinance is designed to implement some of the Comprehensive Plan's key objectives, and these are some of the proposals:

- Enhance Stormwater Management Regulations as a way to control flooding and water pollution.
- Establish a new Neighborhood Conservation District as a tool to help preserve older neighborhoods.
- Expand coverage of the Resource Conservation District to 150' from stream banks, so that building is strictly limited near streams, preventing runoff of pollutants into water and preserving wildlife corridors.
- Increase restrictions for building on steep slopes, to try to minimize erosion and water pollution.
- Establish Maximum Parking Requirements in an effort to encourage development without excess pavement.

- Eliminate (for now) the building or conversion of houses into duplexes in most residential zones (R-1, R-2, and R-3), so that neighborhoods that are experiencing rapid conversion of single-family dwellings into duplexes have time to consider the effect on the community.
- Establish maximum sizes for single-family and two-family dwellings, based on lot size, in order to help maintain the character of existing neighborhoods.
- Limit new Impervious Surface (e.g., asphalt, concrete) in new development townwide, in an effort to minimize runoff of pollutants into the water supply.
- Extend Tree Ordinance regulations to apply to large clearing areas on single-family lots.

A concern for all of us is how these changes might affect existing structures, such as people's homes. The Council intends that these rules should help guide new growth and development, and affect existing development as little as possible. Here are some of the features we intend to build into the new ordinance so that most existing structures are protected:

- Structures that exist (or for which a building permit has been issued) at the time new regulations are adopted would be able to continue to exist and be used, and reconstructed if destroyed.
- Such existing structures would, in many cases, be able to be expanded.

A question the Council is grappling with right now is exactly how the new regulations would apply to undeveloped property and redeveloped property. There may be some modifications, but as the proposed ordinance currently stands, it would apply to all new development, including in-fill and vacant property. As the Town's population grows in coming years, we will see more of what has come to be called "in-fill" development. In-fill includes subdividing existing lots and placing two or more homes where there was formerly only one, building on difficult topography (such as steep slopes that were thought to be unbuildable when other land was available), and knocking down existing structures, like older homes, to replace them with newer – often larger – houses.

Finally, the Council is most interested in assuring that all interested citizens are aware of the efforts we are undertaking, and that everyone has a chance to offer comments and suggestions. The new ordinance will be discussed at the following dates and times:

- October 21, 7pm at a regular Town Council Meeting
- October 24, 4-6pm, we will hold an informal public information meeting
- October 26, 9am-noon, we will hold a "Citizen Workshop on the Impact of Proposed Regulations"
- October 28, 7pm at a Town Council Public Hearing

Every citizen is welcome and encouraged to attend any or all of these events. The October 21 and October 28 meetings will be televised. All the meetings are at Town Hall, 306 North Columbia Street.

36

To see a full copy of the proposed new ordinance, please visit the Town's website at www.townofchapelhill.org, or call the Town Clerk's office at 968-2743. You can write to the Town Council at 306 N. Columbia Street, Chapel Hill, NC, 27516, or send us an email at mayorandcouncil@townofchapelhill.org.

Thank you. We look forward to seeing you at Town Hall, and to your help in working to keep Chapel Hill a great place to live, learn, work, and play.

Sincerely,

Kevin Foy, Mayor
Town of Chapel Hill