

MINUTES OF A WORK SESSION OF THE MAYOR AND COUNCIL OF  
THE TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL, MUNICIPAL BUILDING,  
TUESDAY, JULY 12, 7:30 P.M.

Mayor Jonathan B. Howes called the meeting to order. Council Members present were:

- Julie Andresen
- David Godschalk
- Joe Herzenberg
- Nancy Preston
- Art Werner
- David Pasquini

Council Members Wallace and Wilkerson were absent, excused. Also present were Assistant Town Manager Ron Secrist and Town Attorney Ralph Karpinos.

Planning Board members present were Alan Rimer Tom McCurdy, Berry Credle, Don Francisco, Bruce Guild, Marcella Groon, Kay Maltbie, Mae McLendon, Julian Raney, and Judy White.

Mayor Howes commented that the purpose of this work session was to meet with the Planning Board and discuss progress on the Comprehensive Plan. He stressed the importance of the Comprehensive Plan as a key legislative document setting forth development policies for the Town.

Planning Board Chairman Alan Rimer stated that development of the Comprehensive Plan had been a rocky road to this point, but that pieces of the Comprehensive Plan were beginning to come together. He commented that the purposes of tonight's work session were to highlight issues raised in the Comprehensive Plan and discuss these with the Town Council in a meaningful way. He also suggested that the process for taking these issues out into the community be discussed.

Planning Director Roger Waldon then presented a slide show that highlighted the strategic issues that had been raised in the process of developing the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Waldon reviewed twelve components of Chapel Hill's strategic position: natural setting, attractive community, presence of the University, cultural diversity, proximity of the Research Triangle Park, a recession-proof economy, adequate community facilities, increasing traffic congestion, proximity of I-40, strong market forces, a tight regulatory environment, and an increasingly connected and regional institutional framework. He went on to highlight the six major issues that have been identified so far in the Comprehensive Plan: land development patterns, and the relationship between transportation and housing; the influence that the University plays on Town development issues; the extent to which problems must be addressed on an intergovernmental level; the fact that there are few if any affordable housing opportunities in Chapel Hill; the fact that our transportation future looks rather bleak because of increasing congestion; and the fact that our natural environment is beginning to show the effects of development.

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Planning Board Member Don Francisco complimented the staff work that had been done to-date on the Comprehensive Plan. He expressed the need to take these issues into the community for discussion and dialogue as soon as possible. He described the citizen involvement efforts that have been undertaken to-date, consisting of a series of four public information meetings.

Chairman Rimer referred to the fact that the Planning Board considers the 1986 Land Use Plan to be an interim plan. He referred to a major hole in the 1986 Land Use Plan, which is the University. He expressed the concern that the University must be involved in planning for Town-wide land use. He pointed out the goals and objectives that the Council had adopted drive the Land Use Plan, and suggested that the conflicts within those goals and objectives needed to be examined. He suggested the possibility of the Council appointing a subcommittee to help look at the Town's goals and objectives along with the Planning Board. He mentioned that in addition to looking at goals and objectives, attention needs to be paid to three particularly large issues:

1. The relationship between roads, our transportation problem, and housing patterns;
2. The impact of our increasing retiree population in Chapel Hill, desiring larger lots in a decentralized environment;
3. The importance of working with the Town of Carrboro.

He closed his introductory remarks by suggesting two of the kind of questions that should be addressed during consideration of the Comprehensive plan: The first question is, "What happens to the Land Use Plan if a decision is made to widen Estes Drive to four lanes? What would the impacts be?" Another typical question might be, "What happens if you build higher density housing close to the Town Center? What are the impacts of a land development pattern of that nature compared to the land development pattern that our Land Use Plan projects?"

Mayor Howes made the point that we need to be thinking strategically about transportation issues. We need to be multifaceted in our approach to solving these problems - we need to be thinking about our Land Use Plan, road improvements, and our growth management system in general.

Council Member Godschalk observed that decisions that we make on investments and facilities need to be made in the context of the overall growth of the Town. He noted that he had talked to the Town's Transportation Planner David Bonk, and was told that the transportation model that the staff was working on (that would allow computer analysis of the the Town's road network) might be available by November or December of 1988. He stated that our Comprehensive Plan needs to be more measurable, with specific, temporal objectives. As an example, he offered the suggestion that we need to establish specific levels of service for different kinds of facilities (eg. all intersections need to be at a specified level of service by a specified date).

Planning Board Member McCurdy noted the need to have specific measurable objectives in the Comprehensive Plan. An example of where we need specific measurable objectives was on page 3 of the Demographics Report where we put forth population projections for the Town. Mr. McCurdy suggested that we should be giving thought to whether or not these projections reflect the Town's desires for rate of growth and ultimate population.

Planning Board Member Credle said that it was his opinion that the population projections were derived by assuming a total build-out of the Chapel Hill area; he suggested that we are being myopic by not consulting the University further.

Council Member Andresen noted the need for substantive, coordinated planning with the University. She also highlighted the need for better traffic signalization, and a better downtown circulation plan.

Planning Board Chairman Rimer suggested that the Town-Gown relationship needs to be driven by the Town Council and the University, rather than by the Planning Board. Mr. Credle suggested that he could not vote on Planning issues for the Town of Chapel Hill without knowing more about the University and the University's plans for growth and development.

Planning Board Member Bruce Guild suggested that it is valuable to study traffic patterns and impacts, and have a model to predict impacts; but problems occur in trying to implement a system to improve traffic circulation without just loading requirements onto new development.

Mayor Howes suggested summing up this topic by requesting that the Planning Board specify issues it thinks the Council should be discussing with the University. Chairman Rimer suggested that the Planning Board will return to the Council with a memorandum on key issues for discussion with the University. Council Member Godschalk suggested that it might be useful to consider specific institutional arrangements, such as having the University representative sit on the Planning Board and have a reciprocal arrangement on the University side. Council Member Werner suggested that in this memorandum the Planning Board should break out priority critical issues and also explain those issues the Council needs to deal with itself; specifically, what can we be doing now irrespective of any process. Council Member Godschalk concurred that we should go ahead now, we should not stop and be paralyzed without additional information.

Mr. Waldon pointed out that last year, the Town and University did work together in appointing a committee to work jointly on a response to the University's proposed Land Use Plan. In response to a question regarding whether any University-Town joint planning is going on now, Mr. Waldon responded that a considerable amount of coordination and discussion was going on at the staff level.

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Back on the subject of computer traffic modeling, Mr. Credle noted the need to be undertaking origin-destination studies to determine where traffic was coming from and where it was going. Mr. Rimer commented that a computer model will help us do sensitivity analysis, to determine the impacts of different changes in the system. Council Member Godschalk suggested that information of that kind would help the Town Council make decisions.

Questions turned to transit feasibility. In response to a question about levels of density it takes to support an efficient transit system, Transportation Planner David Bonk offered that a 5-7 units/-acre net overall density can be conducive to efficient transit service: (net overall density of 5-7 units/acre, with clusters of higher densities toward 10 units/acre near main transportation arteries).

Mayor Howes moved the discussion on to the subject of housing, and asked what ideas the Planning Board has come up with to try and promote affordable housing in Chapel Hill.

Planning Board Member Francisco suggested that affordable housing is in part a transportation problem, and that the transportation and housing systems are closely linked. Planning Board Member Raney questioned whether the community is serious about wanting to promote affordable housing and wanting a diverse population. Council Member Pasquini noted that the Town's Homeownership program, Tandler, is about as affordable as the Town can provide, yet there are still units unsold. He questioned the assertion that there is strong demand for housing in that price range.

Council Member Werner commented that he was not convinced of the correlation between land use and affordable housing, or of the correlation between land use and transportation issues. Council Member Andresen agreed; she commented that there is a tenuous relationship between density and affordable housing. She mentioned her interest in approaching affordable housing through regulation, rather than by raising densities.

Mr. McCurdy pointed out that the Town has had density bonus provisions for affordable in its ordinance since 1981 and they had not ever been used.

Mr. Rimer noted that another issue is the natural environment. He noted that our air quality problems are going to need attention. Mayor Howes pointed out that low density development patterns and transit usage do not mix well, and that if air quality problems continue to worsen we may need to reconsider some of the patterns we have in place at the moment.

Mr. Rimer described one innovative idea that had come out of the discussions, that of creating a transitway along the railroad right-of-way that runs from the High School property into the center of town. One idea is to develop a transitway along that corridor and promote high density residential development along that corridor.

Council Member Preston suggested that the Comprehensive Plan may want to look at the example of the draft Design Guidelines, with its look at four subareas of town. She asked if there were any applicability of that subarea concept to the Comprehensive Plan and the Development Ordinance. For example, does the R-2 zoning district near the downtown area have to be the same, with the same setbacks, height limits, etc., as an R-2 zoning district out on Weaver Dairy Road? What about the idea of promoting subcommunities, each with self supporting neighborhood commercial land uses? Mr. Rimer noted that the Planning Board had discussed the idea of designating more commercial areas on the Land Use Plan.

Moving into the subject of process and schedule, Mr. Rimer asked Mr. Waldon to discuss the proposed schedule for review of the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Waldon described the schedule that had been worked out with the Planning Board. The schedule calls for discussion of these issues at this work session tonight, the Planning Board and staff refining these issues and bringing to the Council at an October work session a "Strategic Implementation Report." This report would tie together all the major themes of the Comprehensive Plan and make specific recommendations about where policies might need adjustment. The idea would be to discuss this with the Council at an October work session, and then take these materials out into the community for a series of meetings in the fall and early winter. The objective would be to have the new Comprehensive Plan with a new revised set of goals and objectives on the table for the Council to act on by March, 1989.

Tom McCurdy stated that the format the staff was using for presenting information about the Comprehensive Plan was conducive to public dialogue, in that it focused on issues with specific reference to conflicting Town objectives and missing objectives. Council Member Godschalk suggested that it is unlikely that we will ever get all of the conflicts out of the Comprehensive Plan; but that we should recognize the conflicts that are in the Plan and deal with them as best we can. Mayor Howes suggested that the plan we will be creating will be our best vision of the future as of 1988-89. In 1981 the Council did the best it could do of reflecting in its plan at that time what it thought the community wanted for the future. What we are doing now is going through that process again and setting forth our best vision now for the future of the community.

Mayor Howes then asked what is the relationship of the Comprehensive Plan to the Thoroughfare Plan that is in the process of being revised. Mr. Waldon commented that the Thoroughfare Plan is being revised, and the revision is being coordinated with this work on the Comprehensive Plan. Both the Comprehensive Plan and the revised Thoroughfare Plan are likely to be part of the public dialogue this fall. This concluded the discussion of the Planning Board and the Town Council on the Comprehensive Planning issues and process.

The second subject for discussion between the Planning Board and the Council was neighborhood planning. Chairman Rimer noted that Bill Rohe of the Department of City and Regional Planning will be conducting a class this fall that will be working to better define a

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proposed neighborhood planning structure for Chapel Hill. Mr. Rimer presented a memorandum that had been prepared by the Planning Board with Planning Board's preliminary recommendations about how a neighborhood program should be structured for Chapel Hill. Mr. Rimer posed the question to the Council: Are we on the right track?

In response to a question from Council Member Werner, Mr. Waldon described how neighborhood planning might be used to help develop small area plans that might include a focus on pedestrian and vehicular circulation systems, parks and recreation areas, etc. Council Member Pasquini asked to whom these groups would report if they set up neighborhood planning groups. Waldon responded that that could be structured in any of a number of ways, but one of the ways it might appropriately be structured would be to have those groups report directly to the Council.

Council Member Preston indicated a preference for a 1-tiered approach to a neighborhood planning system. She pointed out that the boundaries are critical to the success of this effort. We should try to include neighborhoods that are similar, that have some commonality.

Mr. Credle indicated that he was cool to this idea of a neighborhood planning structure. He doesn't see the need and would rather see an idea of this kind come from the bottom up rather than be imposed by the Council.

Mayor Howes stated that if we have a neighborhood planning network, it should foster strong regard for the whole community, and not be a stimulus to neighborhood chauvinism. Planning Board Member Maltbie suggested that neighborhoods undergo change as the community changes, and that a system of this type might help facilitate communication that would be useful to all parties.

Mayor Howes closed the discussion by indicating that more work sessions on this subject may be needed as we progress and develop further information and further definition of a proposed neighborhood planning program for Chapel Hill.

The meeting adjourned at 10:00 p.m.