

# **A Plan for Responsible Development at Central West**

## **Supported by Concerned Citizens**

### **September 10, 2013**

This document has been developed by a group of citizens and some steering committee members who believe that none of the four alternative plans (A1, A2, B1, B2) developed by the Central West Steering Committee, which you will see tonight, are acceptable. There are places in Chapel Hill that are suitable for this kind of intensive urban development, but the Central West planning area is not one of them. Four members of the Steering Committee agree with us. Their rationale for not accepting any of these four plans, but instead for supporting a more appropriate level of development, is attached in their letter. We support their viewpoint and commend it to your attention.

Thank you for caring about your community and for coming tonight to take part in this opportunity to shape its future.

---

#### **Contents of This Packet**

<b>A Letter to Steering Committee from Four Steering Committee Members.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>An Alternate Vision Map Which We Support .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Demand for Better Traffic and Budget Analysis .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Comparison of Concept Plans .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Traffic Mitigation Strategies Proposed by the Town .....</b>	<b>5</b>

# An Alternative Vision for the Central West Planning Area

Submitted to Steering Committee September 3, 2013

Updated September 10, 2013

Members of the Central West Steering Committee:

We find that we cannot support any of the four plans now being considered by the Committee without significant changes. This letter is not meant to discredit anyone's hard work; rather, it is intended to document our understanding to date about the incompatibilities of the current four proposed plans with our announced objectives and principles and to clarify the big-picture concerns that led us to find these plans unworkable.

1. The Central West planning area is a relatively small area, in a sea of residential neighborhoods located at least 1–2 miles from the highly developed areas such as downtown and the 15-501-Franklin Street corridor. The available land area in Central West is not large enough to become a self-contained urban community as some believe it can be. We want to see changes that will enhance our area and complement the two nearby schools, the first phase of Carolina North (approved 800,000 square feet), and the many nearby residential neighborhoods.
2. When given an opportunity, the public has strongly supported development that will not clog the mobility of Estes Drive but would improve the quality of a safe biking and walking experience along that road. At the major community events held so far, the public opposed the high-intensity development now being proposed by the majority of the Steering Committee. This articulate public opposition has not been incorporated in the discussions and decisions of the Steering Committee.
3. The Estes-MLK intersection is already overwhelmed by traffic, rating F for many traffic movements at peak hours. The four plans now under discussion call for 1500 to 2300 new residents to be shoehorned into Central West, along with retail and commercial space. Much of this traffic would be channeled into Estes. The traffic analysis assembled by town staff for the four current plans shows that traffic conditions will become even worse than F, even when considering the rosier assumptions. Since most of Estes will remain a two-lane street and we have made safety near the schools a priority, Central West development must be planned to minimize new traffic loads on Estes and at the MLK-Estes intersection. The suggested "traffic mitigation strategies" could easily turn Estes Drive into a more dangerous road. (See attached slide). New turning lanes should be limited and added with care to maintain pedestrian and bike safety. We endorse the proposed road circulation in our proposed map and question the unsubstantiated traffic assertions found in "Demand for better traffic and budget analysis."
4. The planning approach adopted by the Town Council to deal with each "focus area" separately is obstructing a Town-wide comprehensive approach to planning. The individualized focus area approach is blocking a comprehensive, common sense consideration of the best overall development strategy for the Town. There is a place in Chapel Hill for intense urban development, but Central West is not the right place for it. Our principles say we are seeking development that will serve the needs of our area and we need to choose unique forms that suit it.

5. The Town has studied how much residential, retail, office, and commercial space exists in Chapel Hill, the vacancy rates, and how much of each type of space has already been approved by the Town Council but not yet built. This Town-wide information should have guided the discussion of what development is most needed for Central West, but the Steering Committee has not pursued and used this information. Recent information provided by developers in response to questions from the Steering Committee co-chairs indicated that there is not a large market for office and retail. (A hotel being proposed for Tract A by the landowner has not been discussed by the Steering Committee.)

The four Committee members who support this report want others to consider and discuss the serious problems we see with the current proposed plans. You will recall the plans produced by an out-of-state consultant were approved by Committee majority vote before we received stormwater and transportation information. We have not studied the impacts of either of these factors on the development plans.

### **Alternate Vision for Central West**

Our alternate vision is based on the best ideas we've heard so far and includes a concept map showing road circulation, uses, and proposed building heights. It includes: 1) retail and office space and professional housing for families in Tract A; 2) professional and single-family housing with no commercial development on Tracts B, C and E; and 3) preservation of the sensitive parts of Tract H. A comparison of the impact of design elements in each plan shows what happens when key parameters are modeled, illustrating how our alternative vision would add the least number of auto trips and only 323 additional residents. In addition, we endorse a pedestrian and biking plan that will include all intersections in the impact area. We want to share this alternate view with the public on September 10, 2013. (Note: On Sept 3 Steering Committee declined to make it a part of the presentation.)

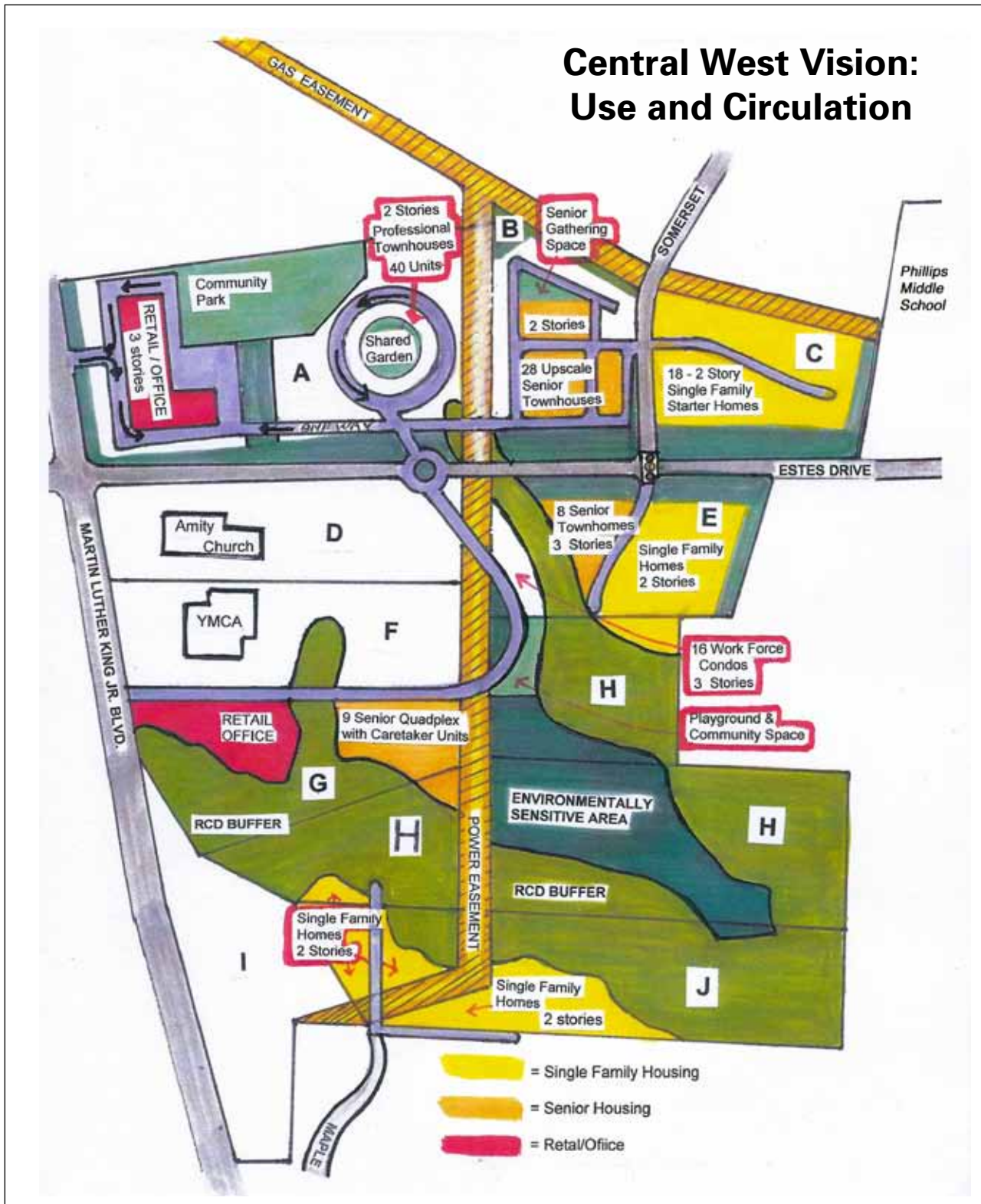
We will continue to advocate our views within the Steering Committee and search for consensus. We will be prepared to present a minority report when the recommended plan is adopted if we believe that the majority recommendation is not right for Chapel Hill.

Julie McClintock  
Firoz Mistry

David Tuttle  
Mickey Jo Sorrell

# An Alternate Vision Map

This Alternate Vision Map was presented to the Steering Committee on September 3, 2013 by four committee members. The concepts are consistent with the majority of public comments offered at Central West meetings, as well as with an earlier Citizens' map presented to the committee on June 24th. It offers a manageable increase in traffic (based on an analysis of existing and future conditions), protection for existing neighborhoods, and no buildings in the most sensitive areas. By focusing on different types of senior housing, it meets a real growing need in Chapel Hill without adding the need to build another public school. Creators of this map find that the map meets the published goals and principles of Central West development and the Town's 2020 Plan.



## Demand for Better Traffic and Budget Analysis

### What Effect will Central West Development Proposals have on Traffic and on the Town Budget?

Chapel Hill is considering proposals for intensive development at Central West, the area north and south of Estes Drive near the Estes-MLK intersection. Two of the most critical issues to evaluate are how such intensive development would affect these two streets that are already painfully overloaded with traffic and how the balance between Town tax revenues and expenditures would be affected. The analysis done by the Town so far on these issues is too defective to be a reliable guide to these major decisions.

#### Traffic

- All four of the development plans now being considered by the Steering Committee have a traffic service rating of F and thus fail to handle projected traffic without massive “improvements”.
- The traffic projections done by the Town have several questionable assumptions, all of which understate likely future traffic.
- Traffic growth is projected at 2% per year for 3 years and then at only 1% per year for the next 7 years. This reduced growth rate after 3 years is not consistent with Chapel Hill 2020 or with Long Range Transit Plan projections.
- The Town projects that new residents of the Central West area will make only 25% of their vehicle trips on Estes as opposed to MLK and that only 10 percent of the Estes trips will go east versus 15% west. Because most of the vehicle access to the Central West area will be from Estes, trips on Estes will probably be much greater than 25% of the total. Also, it is not credible that only 10 percent of the trips will be eastward, when that is the direction of University Mall, the Post Office, the Library, Eastgate, Whole Foods, and Ram’s Plaza.
- The traffic studies now being relied on by the Town are not comprehensive studies with current data. They are pieced together from the Carolina Flats study done in 2012, which is heavily based on the Carolina North study done in 2009, which uses some actual data collected as early as 2002.
- Decisions of the magnitude of those being considered for Central West must be evaluated by new studies that use current data and with assumptions that have been reviewed for plausibility by the community.

#### Budget

- The Town has expressed the need to increase the tax base to provide more revenues to cover Town expenditures. This increase in the tax base from new development must be balanced against the Town’s increased costs to manage the new development. The Town has used a model to estimate the effects of the four plans for Central West now being considered on Town revenues and expenditures.
- The Town’s analysis has major flaws. It does not include in the expenditure side of the calculation The Central West share of general around Town transit or the cost of new buses, drivers, and related support to handle the 4000 to 10,000 additional daily bus trips needed to handle the new development transit needs. Also missing are other significant costs, including bond expense. As a result, the costs of serving this new development may be underestimated by 30 percent.
- Because the costs are underestimated, the four development plans being considered may only bring a net benefit to the Town budget of \$100,000 to \$150,000 per year, instead of the \$250,000 to \$500,000 per year as now estimated by the Town. Given this result, the net benefit to the Town from the dense development being considered is very likely not any greater than for lower density development with fewer Town service needs. The Town should redo the economic analysis, including all costs, and allow public scrutiny of the results before decisions are made.
- The Town should also evaluate a lower density development plan to compare its economic and traffic impacts with the denser plans.

## Comparison of Concept Plans (Alternate Plan, A1, A2, B1, B2)

### Comparison of Development Concepts

<b>Totals For All Tracts</b>	<b>Alternate Vision</b>	A1	A2	B1	B2
<b>Total Auto Trips</b>	3459	7122	15,774	12,763	18,127
<b>Residents Auto Trips</b>	581	2480	3207	2166	3066
<b>Commercial Square Feet</b>	200,000	355,050	644,450	545,050	897,450
<b># Resident Units</b>	168	687	923	601	881
<b># of Residents</b>	401	1712	2267	1510	2168
<b>Max Height</b>	3 stories	6 stories	8 stories	6 stories	8 stories

## Traffic Mitigation Strategies Proposed by the Town

Town’s transportation consultant  
courtesy David Bonk, Town of Chapel Hill

- **A northbound right-turn lane was assumed in the background conditions.**
- **With the projected heavy traffic, the following improvements should be considered:**
- **Adding a second through lane on Estes along both the eastbound and westbound directions**
- **Adding a second westbound left-turn lane on Estes**
- **Adding a southbound right-turn lane on MLK**
- **Adding a second southbound left-turn lane on MLK**
- **Adding a third through lane on MLK along both the northbound and southbound directions**