

MEMORANDUM

TO: Town of Chapel Hill

FROM: Jennifer L. Hurley, Hurley Franks & Associates with The Keesmaat Group

DATE: 9/12/22

RE: Results from Round 1 Stakeholder Interviews for the Complete Communities Strategy

The Town of Chapel Hill is working to building consensus around a new approach to housing that clarifies where and how to build inclusive, sustainable, complete communities and an economically competitive town. The goals for the Complete Communities Strategy are to:

- Begin the process of building consensus about where and how to build,
- Determine where complete communities can be advanced, exploring trade-offs and opportunities, and
- Identify a viable pilot project.

The goals for the stakeholder consultation are to identify community leaders affected by housing, provide them with information about the trade-offs of different smart-growth options, and to foster genuine dialogue about how and where to grow. Stakeholder interviews were the first step in this consultation. The purpose of the interviews was to:

- Understand diverse perspectives in the community about where and how to build housing,
- Pinpoint any perspectives that may be missing from the process and identify someone who can add that perspective, and
- Begin discussions about what criteria we should use to evaluate potential pilot projects.

This memo outlines the synthesis of key themes heard during the first round of stakeholder interviews for the Complete Communities Strategy, focusing on areas where there was broad agreement and also where there were repeated areas of difference. Details about the interview process appear in the Appendix at the end of this memo. Details about additional rounds of interviews and other forms of community engagement can be found on the project website:

<https://www.townofchapelhill.org/businesses/complete-community>

KEY THEMES

Areas of Agreement

The interviews revealed several areas where there is broad agreement among the interviewees about existing conditions in Chapel Hill and values that should guide future development:

- Chapel Hill is lacking variety of housing prices and housing types.
- The housing problem is most severe for people with lower incomes, but the lack of housing is also affecting recruitment of higher-paid workers, such as doctors .
- The price of land is high.
- Trees and greenspace are very important in Chapel Hill.
- People like and appreciate the trail system.
- The trail system is currently used more for recreation than for transportation, except for some school children getting to school.
- Many roads in Chapel Hill are dangerous for bike riders, even with bike lanes.
- There is very little by right development
- The current process is very long, with very many steps to the review process, multiple staff reviews and multiple advisory boards (6), and then applicant may hear different requirements when they reach Council. There is very little “by right” development.
- Town Council and staff have made efforts to improve the development review and approval process.

Areas of Difference

Although there was fairly broad agreement about existing conditions in Chapel Hill and values that should guide future development, there was substantial disagreement about the causes of the affordability problem and the steps that Chapel Hill should take going forward.

- **Causes of Affordability Gap:** People have different explanations for what causes the affordability gap, which means they have different ideas for what could improve the situation.
- **Success or Lack of Success of Current Development Review Process:** Some people think that the current development review process results in better quality development than would occur without so much discretionary review and negotiation, but others think that the cumbersome and unpredictable review process pushes better developers away from working in Chapel Hill. In addition, sometimes developers give up on the negotiation and build what they can by right, which leaves some affordable housing or other desired improvements “on the table.”
- **Role of Land Use and Management Ordinance (LUMO):** Some people think that specific LUMO requirements (buffers, FAR, etc.) are substantial barriers that prevent more walkable development, while other people think there is enough flexibility in the code to allow these things to get worked out in a beneficial way, but that effort takes a long time, which raises the cost of development.

APPENDIX: ROUND 1 INTERVIEW DETAILS

Developing the Interview List

To start the interview rounds, Council, staff, and community leaders identified a list of about 30 people to interview to include people with differing perspectives from the following categories:

- Pedestrians, Transit, Cycling and Greenways
- Housing and Quality of Life Advocates
- Equity Advocates
- Environmental Interests
- Development
- Business and Institutional Interests

During each interview, we also asked for suggestions for additional people to interview to fill in missing perspectives, and additional interviews will be conducted in Round 2.

Interviews Conducted in Round 1

Full Name	Interest Groups
Betsy Harris	Business and Institutional Interests
Lori Doherty	Business and Institutional Interests
Emily Ziegler	Business and Institutional Interests (UNC Health)
Anna Wu	Business and Institutional Interests (UNC)
Gordon Merklein	Business and Institutional Interests (UNC)
Kristen Smith	Business and Institutional Interests (UNC)
Nathan Knuffman	Business and Institutional Interests (UNC)
D.R. Bryan	Development
Jeff Furman	Development
LeAnn Brown	Development
Mariana Molina	Development
Susana Dancy	Development
Julie McClintock	Environmental Interests
Melissa McCullough	Environmental Interests
Riza Jenkins	Environmental Interests
Xilong Zhao	Environmental Interests
Betsy Booth	Equity Advocates
Delores Bailey	Equity Advocates
Mariela Hernandez	Equity Advocates
Chuck Berlin	Housing and Quality of Life Advocates
Huina Chen	Housing and Quality of Life Advocates
Jamezetta Bedford	Housing and Quality of Life Advocates

Jennifer Player	Housing and Quality of Life Advocates
John Quintero	Housing and Quality of Life Advocates
Jon Mitchell	Housing and Quality of Life Advocates
Lisa Kaylie	Housing and Quality of Life Advocates
Susan Lyons	Housing and Quality of Life Advocates
Yichen Sun	Housing and Quality of Life Advocates (Chapel Hill high school student)
Geoff Green	Pedestrians, Transit, Cycling and Greenways
Jeanette Bench	Pedestrians, Transit, Cycling and Greenways

Interview Questions for Round 1

The interviews were conducted as open-ended interviews to encourage participants to speak about what mattered most to them, but the following questions were used as discussion prompts:

- Chapel Hill's motto is "A Place for Everyone," but housing costs make that difficult. Who is getting left out now, and what do you see as the primary barriers to getting a wider variety of housing types and costs and more affordable housing?
- Tell me about what you love about neighborhoods in Chapel Hill and what changes/improvements you would like to see? (more variety of housing, ability to walk to work, bike/ walk trails, more racial diversity, better transit access, different kinds of parks, etc.)?
- One of the goals of this effort is to identify a pilot project that can demonstrate how Chapel Hill can become a more complete community. Neighborhoods that are complete communities have a variety of housing for people with different incomes, different family types, and in different life stages and where people can travel around affordably, using walking, biking, or transit for some of their trips. A good pilot project is something to be voted on in the next several months, that will show the council's commitment to getting something done now. Do you have any ideas about what would make a good pilot project to support the development of complete communities?
- When we start evaluating different possible pilot projects, what do you think are important criteria to figure out both where and how to build? For instance, one criterion that has been suggested is "visible" and another is "quick." What's important to you in a demonstration project?
- It's very important to us that we hear from very diverse perspectives on this issue – is there anyone else you think we should talk to?
- Is there anything I should have asked you that I didn't?