

December4, 2020c

Dear Mayor and Town Council.

**There are serious problems with the North Chapel Hill Planning proposal. We strongly oppose the Council investing in this plan, and the town taking on the role of “master horizontal developer” directing and in subsidizing the project further.**

Taxpayers’ experience is that the town staff underestimates infrastructure costs and forgets about the costs of providing services to new development. Blue Hill is a good example where infrastructure costs were consistently underestimated and the cost of services caused net Town expense increases, not budget savings.

Last summer, CHALT met with Brian Peterson and submitted detailed comments. It is evident that none of them were heeded, so it appears these same comments are relevant to the proposal before you now..

The main reasons we oppose this plan proposal are the same ones we put forward in our letter to Brian Peterson last summer.

- First we oppose the Council potentially or actually subsidizing infrastructure for development that is badly planned, lacks community benefits and will turn out to be costly for the Town. Please provide the total extent of the Town resources spent so far along with the cost of hiring consultants for this proposal.
  
- This proposed plan displaces residents from the nearby trailer park.
  - Council needs a plan in place for how to house trailer park residents who are turned out of their homes before submitting plans for redevelopment.
  - Proposed apartment sizes restricted to studios, and one and two bedrooms are not family oriented.
  - Affordable homes should not be placed next to I-40 in low lying areas.
  
- Placing affordable homes along I-40 is a bad plan because noise and particulate matter are unhealthy, especially since DOT has definite plans to widen I-40 producing even more noise and pollution.

- Noise: At every outside location near these homes, we would expect the noise to mirror the sound level at Habitat homes on Sunrise Rd or even to exceed the 70 decibel continuous sound level already measured on Sunrise. These noise levels have proven to be harmful to hearing.
  - Particulate matter: there are real risks to breathing particulate matter when home owners live within 600 feet of I-40. 200 meters (660feet) is the minimum safe distance needed to avoid particulate pollution most commonly cited yet these habitat homes are located closer to I-40 than that minimum distance.
- Transportation.
    - Traffic volume onto Weaver Dairy Rd is already heavy.
    - Planned residential units will add appreciably to traffic. (All of the townhouses/condos have garages/parking for two cars/unit). Can the area accommodate the 940 parking spaces in the design? Will parking deck(s) be required — adding to cost?
    - Most of units will exceed walkable distance to use the nearest stop on the BRT. Chapel Hill Transit plans return service on WD Road in favor of service improvements to MLK, so less transit available.
    - The plan has only two road connections to Weaver Dairy road. Is that enough to accommodate the proposed development's traffic?
    - Surface parking is not a sustainable practice and increases stormwater problems.
- Stormwater problems are not addressed:
    - Three marshy, wet areas--larger than those shown on Brian's map—should not be developed
    - RCD and flood plain located at the bottom of Weatherstone Drive that stretches west to Kensington must be protected.
    - Several intermittent streams cross the properties and feed into Jordan Lake.
    - Negative impacts on adjoining downhill residential neighborhoods (Kensington Trace, Weatherstone, Coventry/Carol Woods)
      - Flooding complaints already from Kensington Trace as a result of clearing at Vilcom project.

- Town stormwater evaluation of the land for building suitability needed before draft plans are presented to the Council.
  - The Town paid for a hydrology study in the area, but we've not seen a published report.
- Other barriers to implementing this plan:
  - Compatibility with existing town plans. ***The 2007 Northern Area Plan*** called for development that would not create congestion, a design that would mitigate I-40 noise impacts, innovative stormwater management, and specifically advised against residential development in the narrow strip of land adjacent to I-40.
  - Common misunderstanding that development will pay for itself and lead to net positive revenue but the opposite is true for residential development. ***A more realistic cost benefit analysis is needed that includes all infrastructure and services expenditures needed as the population increases.***
  - Sewer and power lines would appear to be an almost insurmountable challenge. We oppose asking OWASA ratepayers to pay substantial costs of moving water and sewer to a new road to serve the development. Topography may require a pumping station that OWASA policy does not support.
  - Town subsidies need to be factored in to provide “missing middle income” housing; town investment in housing is wrong if placed in unhealthy places.
  - The topography is not friendly to the intended uses: steep slopes in several spots.
  - High cost of building streets, greenways and sidewalks throughout should be borne by developer, not town.
  - Uncertainty of future retail and office markets due to previous national downward trends on retail and expected pandemic economic impacts.
  - Timberlyne is already having trouble retaining retail, as is University Place, and other shopping districts.
  - The Town-wide Traffic Model needs to establish that Weaver Dairy Rd can handle all the traffic from new development being planned in the general area of the MLKjr Blvd and Weaver Dairy Rd intersection.
  - Challenges of working with multiple property owners is a big one:
    - Developers will have to “make their numbers work”.

- Unclear how infrastructure of roads and sewer will get built or paid for without Town playing a larger, possible inappropriate role as developer coordinator.

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