

## Orange County Comprehensive Plan Update

May 19, 2008 Public Hearing Comments, Allan Rosen

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Members of the Orange County Comprehensive Plan Coalition want the updated plan to declare a preference for compact, walkable, mixed-use, and transit-supportive developments within the county's planning jurisdiction. This development pattern is vital to achieving many key components of sustainability including affordable housing, an increase in the commercial tax base, reduced vehicle miles traveled, and improved prospects for local and regional public transportation.

We are pleased that language throughout the plan emphasizes this preference. Overall, the plan is a big step in the right direction, but there is still much room for improvement. In order for compact, mixed-use developments to become the preferred mode of new development, the planning elements of the updated comprehensive plan must complement each other and sensible implementing ordinances need to be adopted.

Coalition members prepared comments on the goals and objectives from the first draft for the Land Use, Transportation, Economic Development, and Housing elements. Since the language of the Public Hearing draft is virtually the same, the comments are still current. These recommendations (found on pages 38-47 of the agenda packet) provide examples of how the current goals and objectives can be improved and how the linkages between the elements enhanced.

The viability of compact, mixed use developments depends on the availability of public infrastructure, including water and sewer. Thus, the coalition recommends that the planning document make affirmative and unequivocal commitments to providing the necessary public infrastructure in a timely manner. Work remains to be done in this regard also.

I recommend a section of the plan be dedicated exclusively to the goal statements and objectives that address both zoning for compact mixed use developments and planning for the requisite public infrastructure. This section should assure the reader that work on these critical objectives is coordinated and finished such that the infrastructure will begin to come on line within the next 3-5 years, if not sooner. As it stands now, it's not clear when and how this will happen.

Personally, I support the emphasis on compact mixed-use developments not only because it's a good conservation strategy, but because this is the best strategy for significantly increasing the supply of housing affordable to working and middle class households.

To put it another way, if the plan's implementation does not result in an increased supply of less expensive land – on a per lot basis -- for residential development than currently available, then the comprehensive plan update will have little or no impact on reducing the shortage of workforce housing in the county.

This points to the main flaw with the plan's housing element. It almost exclusively focuses on issues related to affordable and special needs housing; albeit an area of concern which I fully support. However, the housing element should also address the systemic problems which cause the county's housing market to skew towards upper-income housing and recommend actions for bringing the market into a more equitable balance.

Finally, I encourage the commissioners to ask themselves if they've heard from as many stakeholders as they feel is appropriate for a policy document of this significance before voting on the plan later this summer. I believe the compressed time schedule put a strain on the planning and advisory boards & diminished the opportunity – especially during Phase II -- for widespread and continuous community input. As such, I encourage the commissioners to immediately solicit the written comments of each lead advisory board so that their comments can be utilized by the planning board as they continue to refine the plan this summer. Indeed, one or more joint advisory board meetings at this stage would be useful in assessing community support for the proposal, as well as gathering constructive recommendations for final improvements.

Good evening Commissioners and Planning Board Members,

My name is Adam Klein, I am the Director of Government Relations and Economic Development at the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce and member of the Orange County Comprehensive Plan Coalition. I am here to offer a few brief remarks on the second draft of the Comprehensive Plan, specifically the economic development section.

In my professional opinion and the opinion of our Coalition members, the economic development section is missing a major strategy—namely working with UNC-Chapel Hill to retain many of the businesses created at the University. UNC in many ways is our business incubator. In the words of Chancellor-elect Holden Thorp, UNC’s challenges in the coming years will be to “Cure diseases...find and invent clean energy...feed seven billion people” to name a few. As UNC strives to tackle these issues, researchers are generating incredible ideas and devices that are spinning off into new businesses. These are businesses that revolve around innovation, pay good wages and have little environmental impact—in a nutshell businesses we want in Orange County. Yet, with over 29 UNC businesses spawned since the year 2000, only 3 are located here. The majority go to RTP because they can find readily available office and lab space and a welcoming business environment.

We can do much better than this and it can start with our Comprehensive Plan. I ask that you consider including a new objective of “working closely with UNC’s Office of Technology Development to identify commercial space needs of businesses created by UNC research, promote development of such space within the County, and actively encourage UNC businesses to stay in Orange County after leaving the University.” This should be one of our *primary* strategies for economic development.

I thank you for your time and consideration.

Comments on Transportation Element  
Holly Reid  
Walkable Hillsborough Coalition  
May 19, 2008

My name is Holly Reid and I am a co-founder of the Walkable Hillsborough Coalition, a group of community volunteers who have worked the past seven years to advocate for pedestrian and bike ways for Hillsborough, surrounding communities and Orange County. I have been involved in the exploring the possibility of reopening a train station in Hillsborough. I am also one of the twenty-nine members of the Special Transit Advisory Commission, whose charge was to recommend a regional transit system for the Triangle region to our joint Metropolitan Planning Organization representatives. Our final report will be presented to the MPO's this Wednesday, May 21, in Raleigh.

Over the years and especially through my involvement on the STAC, I have learned that the Triangle area is one of the most sprawled regions in the country and that we expect a million more people to Wake, Durham and Orange Counties in the next 20 years. I have learned that we are off-the-scale auto centric in our country, and that we are realizing the great costs of this choice every day: poor health, poor community connections, dangerous and unattractive alternative modes of getting around, disenfranchised young and old, loss of commerce in our downtowns, and an irresponsible carbon footprint, to name a few.

I believe our Unified Transportation Board recognizes these huge community costs. They have listed many of these them as key issues in a future Comprehensive Transportation Plan that is recommended in Objective T-3.2, and they see this plan as addressing strategies for all transportation modes, including bike, pedestrian, rail and all other critical transit facilities.

What is absolutely critical to righting our heavily over-weighted single modal car culture is a new multi-modal transportation system that is well emphasized in Goal 3. What needs just as much emphasis in Goal 3 is future development which is compact, walkable and in mixed-use neighborhoods that are along transit corridors supported by transit. Transit and pedestrian-oriented development is the critical nexus of transportation and land use and it needs to be highly emphasized and cross-referenced frequently in our Comprehensive Plan. In my view and the Coalition's view this needs to be written right into the Overarching Goal as the most important change in transportation and land use, a game-changer for our future.

I am also going to emphasize a couple of other objectives that our Coalition recommends to be added to the Comprehensive Plan. We recommend a new Objective T-4.4 to implement the Special Transit Advisory Commission's recommendations for regional transit (including light rail, passenger/commuter rail, expanded bus and transit-oriented development at a future Orange County train station in Hillsborough). Being very involved in Safe Routes to School initiatives I am also very interested in our Coalition's recommendation to add Objective T-1.8 to coordinate with Orange County schools to provide safe walking and biking routes within 1.5 miles of all schools for children during school hours and residents after hours. Connectivity for our communities between key public institutions, commercial areas and neighborhoods will bring the vitality and foot traffic back to our community lives that we have lost over years of exclusively accommodating King Car.

Our County's Comprehensive Plan is our way to receive gratitude instead of disdain from the next generations for our foresight. Let's make a difference now. Thank you.

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May 19, 2008 Public Hearing Comments

prepared by Dolly Hunter, Community Action Network

## **The Orange County Comprehensive Plan Coalition has the following comments about the Land Use Element:**

The wording of Land Use Objective 3.4, which discourages the location of non-farm and intensive residential development within farming areas, could exclusively prevent Rural Node and cluster development in all rural areas. We recommend that Rural Node development be allowed in farming areas where appropriate transportation and services can be accessed. A land use pattern for Rural Nodes should be identified on the Future Land Use Map. To protect farms from complaints and nuisance suits the new neighbors should be given notification of the right to farm.

The coalition recommends (see comments dated May 5) several additional Land Use Objectives, including:

- I. Amend the regulatory process in order to expedite the review and approval of residential cluster development forms throughout the County, including the Rural Buffer and other areas zoned for low density residence.
2. Expedite the development approval process for projects that commit to providing workforce and special needs housing; for housing in rural nodes; and for cluster developments throughout rural areas.

## **Additional Comments from Dolly Hunter**

The tables of development activity for major, minor and exempt subdivision data from 1999 to 2007 be should be included in the County Data Profile. This is absolutely necessary to accurately evaluate development trends. If placed in the Data Profile it can be updated with future years activity data.

The tables and analysis of population data should very clearly delineate the population of unincorporated areas from that in incorporated areas of the county. The populations of Chapel Hill and Hillsborough should be removed or delineated to honestly reflect the unincorporated population. This is especially important in population comparisons and projections.

Two examples that need accurate accounting are:

- The Land Use Map 5.5 which shows the percent of population growth of each Township. The map should show (a) the number of additional people and (b) the change in populating between 1990 and 2000 population per Township;
- The overall density of Orange County is 305 persons per square mile if one includes Chapel Hill and Hillsborough. Using data only from the rural part of the county, density is closer to 100 persons per square mile.

When comparing Orange County to other counties, the other counties should be identified, rather than not as is currently the case.

Most importantly all analysis should be objective and not subjective and speculative. All subjective analysis should be removed from the text because it is in many cases misleading.

In conclusion, Orange County has done an excellent job controlling growth and protecting the environment. I hope that now the county will being accommodating and directing growth in a visionary pattern to achieve social, economic and environmental equity in the future.