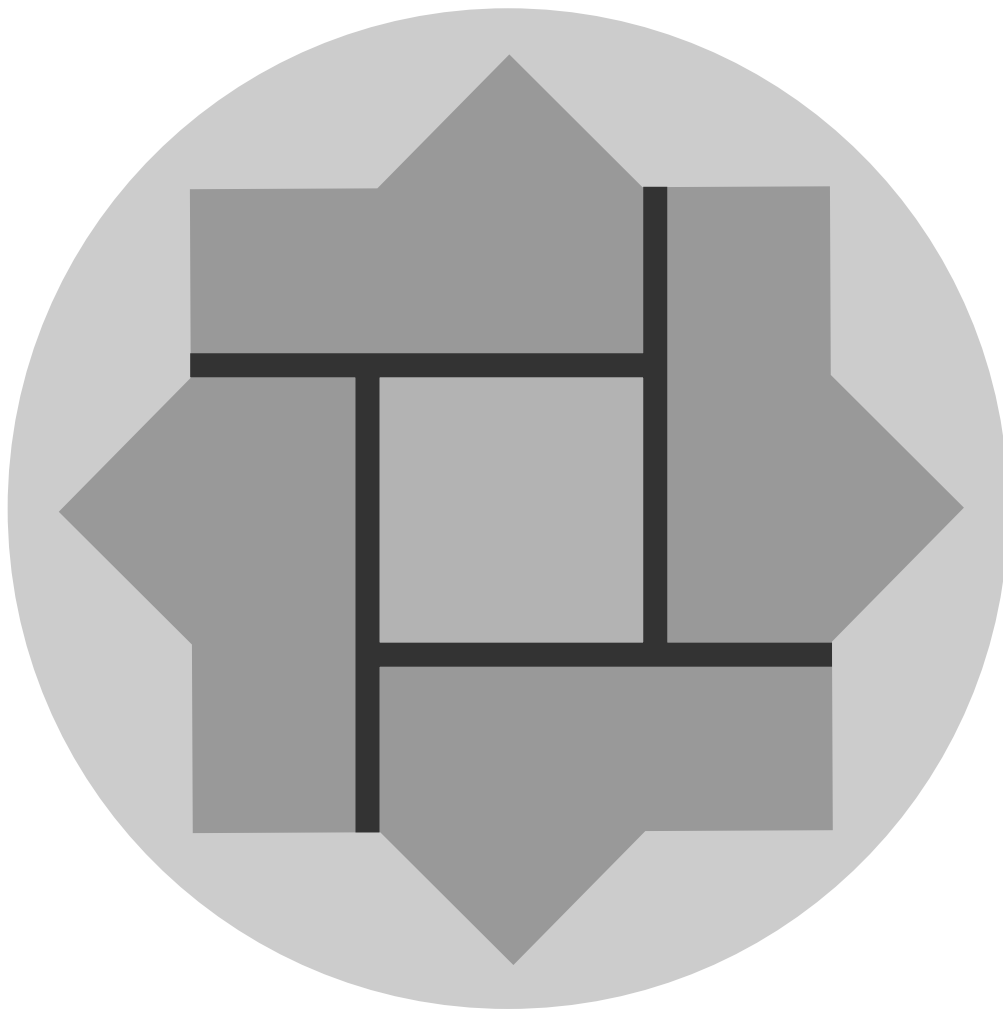


# Villages & Countryside

Land-Use Alternatives for Orange County



*a report from*

**The Village Project**

*published by*

Weaver Street Market

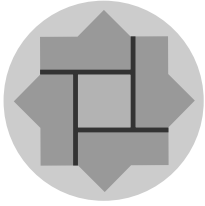
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# Villages & Countryside

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# Foreword

Beginning in 1995, a task force called Shaping Orange County's Future led a five-year process of developing a community-wide vision for the County in 2030. They propose a shift in the development patterns of the past decade, during which half of the County's new homes were built outside municipal planning jurisdictions. The task force recommends instead that, in the future, two-thirds of the projected 30,000 future homes be built inside the towns of Chapel Hill, Carrboro, and Hillsborough and that only one-third be built in the rural parts of the County. This would mean more rural area we can conserve as farms, open space, and ecological protection areas.

In this report, the Village Project illustrates how the County can move in that direction. The Village Project contrasts two alternatives (one conventional, one innovative) for developing that one-third of housing units in Orange County outside of Carrboro, Chapel Hill, and Hillsborough:

- If 10,000 rural homes are spread over average 3-acre lots, more than 46 square miles of Orange County will be converted to conventional large-lot subdivisions.
- If three-quarters — 7,500 — of these homes were clustered into five transit-oriented, mixed-use “villages,” they would require less than 3 square miles of developed land total. Even if the remaining 2,500 homes are built in conventional subdivisions, which would occupy 12 square miles, total rural development would still consume less than 15 square miles total.

To help us envision what it might be like to walk around in Carrboro or Efland many years from now, the Village Project designers illustrate how these communities can accommodate the increased population while improving Orange County residents' quality of life.

This whole growing six-county region is also facing similar growth pressures. While the Shaping Orange County's Future Task Force developed their vision, three groups of Triangle leaders — local elected officials of the Triangle J Council of Governments; business, university and civic leaders in the Greater Triangle Regional Council; and advocacy organizations in the Triangle Smart Growth Coalition — also developed and adopted eight completely complementary principles for future development regionwide.

The first fundamental regional principle is “to clearly define land areas that are appropriate for development as well as environmentally sensitive, historic, natural or recreational land areas that need protection. Pursue policies and strategies that are both equitable and consistent with these identifications.” Building on that basic pattern, the principles call for “walkable” communities, mixed-use activity centers, affordable homes and transportation, green space networks, multimodal transportation, enhanced civic

and public facilities, and investing first in established communities.

In Orange County, and certainly regionwide, to build this broadly shared vision will require nothing short of an about-face transformation of our policies and investments. Today, 46% of the six-county Triangle's residents live outside areas defined as urban. According to the News and Observer (4-30-01), in 1990, the Triangle had 2,133 square miles of rural land with fewer than 100 residents per square mile (roughly one home per 14–15 acres). By 2000, only 1,586 square miles were that sparsely populated. The net result is less tillable agricultural land, less open space, and more automobile-dependent development.

“Business-as-usual” public strategies, policies, and investments will not transform these patterns of development. Our communities will have to make some dramatic changes in spending priorities, and we will have to implement planning, design, and engineering strategies that are far more directive, more collaborative, and more innovative than past approaches. The Village Project does not provide all the technical fixes or legislative strategies that will be required.

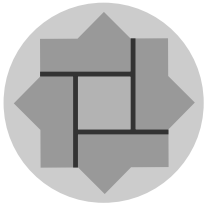
Instead, this report does something even more important. It takes Shaping Orange County's Future and the Regional Development Principles one step further toward the realm of the possible. It helps our community more concretely envision models for development. It builds political will. This vision is powerful enough to inspire the kind of sustained efforts that will be required to reshape our common future.

This report is a catalyst to encourage new developments that preserve water and air quality, rural land uses, and open space. The villages proposed here can accommodate projected growth while mitigating its negative impacts. They can give residents of all ages affordable, convenient transportation. The report calls for development patterns that can, unlike large-lot subdivisions, accommodate homes for a mix of incomes on high-cost land.

The Village Project authors offer Orange County and the Triangle not only a vision for the future, but also hope. They offer hope that there is a way each reader of this report can contribute to shaping our community, so that growth happens according to a shared vision.

So, when you see these folks, thank them. Applaud their community-spirited contribution and praise their impressive talents. Then, catch the contagious inspiration they offer. That way, the ideas we develop, the strategies we support, and the investments we make in our communities will all aim for these goals we hold dear.

*Lanier Blum  
Summer, 2001  
Triangle J Council of Governments*



## Acknowledgements

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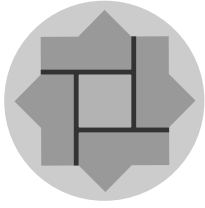
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Photographs by James Carnahan



*Arcadia, a co-housing development in Carrboro, North Carolina*



## The Village Project

**The Village Project** is a citizens' group advocating land use and transportation reform in North Carolina. Our primary mission is the creation of more walkable communities and preservation of the rural landscape. We believe this is necessary for environmental, fiscal and public health reasons and is desirable for restoring and increasing the vitality and intimacy of our communities. Open space is best preserved by using land in traditional patterns that organize structures, people and activities in compact forms of development that encourage walking, biking, and use of public transit. In order to tread more lightly on the Earth, and thus to act more responsibly for the sake of future generations, we must diminish our ecological footprint.

**Elizabeth Barry** is pursuing her bachelors degree in landscape architecture at the NCSU College of Design. During her studies she has explored urban ecological design and planning for sustainable communities. She is currently the coordinator for the Durham Inner-city Gardeners at SEEDS, a non-profit community gardening group in Durham, NC. The DIG project brings together urban youth, food security, and civic involvement in a context of personal growth. By focusing on community self-sufficiency and closing loops, she continues using design as a tool to work towards environmental and social justice.

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**Cara Crisler** received her M.A. in community planning at the Rijksuniversiteit in Groningen, the Netherlands. While there, she became inspired by the creative means used to meet the challenges that arise when high population levels are accommodated in a limited land area. She has lived in Orange County, NC since 1998 and is the Associate Director for the North Carolina Smart Growth Alliance. She also serves as a member of the Orange County Commission for the Environment and is a volunteer facilitator for the Orange County Dispute Settlement Center. She is a founding steering committee member of the Triangle Smart Growth Coalition and board member of Triangle Growth Strategies, Inc. She was a member of the 1999 Triangle Leadership class and is currently working toward certification in the Duke nonprofit management program.

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Anonymous photographer

*Village in Germany, 1945*