



May 15, 2023

Dear Mayor and Council members,

I am writing on behalf of the Orange-Chatham Group of the North Carolina Sierra Club. We are writing in support of the Town of Chapel Hill's LUMO changes regarding Housing Choices for a Complete Community. This proposal aligns with the national Sierra Club infill and smart growth policy adopted in 2019 -- the latest tool in our longstanding fight against sprawl, greenspace destruction and climate change. (<https://www.sierraclub.org/smart-growth-urban-infill>) The national Sierra Club has even launched a guidance document for the policy, meant to assist Sierra Club activists who are interested in making a difference in their community. For these purposes, as well as for a more vibrant, resilient and equitable Chapel Hill, we support the proposed changes to the LUMO, changing the single-family ONLY zoning to be able to include gentle density – a return to historic housing patterns.

The Sierra Club's infill policy states:

Affirmative support for [smart growth and equitable] communities is a natural corollary to the **Sierra Club's opposition to sprawl, which promotes automobile dependence, destroys natural ecosystems, separates people from each other, increases social inequity, reduces economic security and increases carbon emissions** (emphasis added).

The Sierra Club acknowledges that many national and local land use policies were designed to separate people by class and race, and that many planning, housing and development practices still reinforce those inequitable and racist outcomes. The Sierra Club believes affordable housing is a human right. Further, all neighborhoods should be open to people of all income levels and backgrounds. In working to expand housing and economic opportunities we recognize our obligation to address past and ongoing inequity in the communities and neighborhoods most damaged by it and to fully engage the stakeholders of such communities in our work.

The Policy also addresses specific priorities for vibrant communities:

Land use zoning regulations and public infrastructure investments that favor lower density, automobile dependent development are problematic for numerous reasons, including: increasing vehicle miles traveled, degraded air and water quality, and destruction of open space, farmland and critical habitat. Concentrating economic opportunities, new homes, services, and amenities in existing communities protects and mitigates against sprawl, reduces pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, while creating livable communities.

Some of the priorities for vibrant communities are especially relevant to Chapel Hill's Housing Choice proposal:

- Development should allow a mix of uses (housing, commercial, retail, schools and amenities) sufficiently close to each other, and at sufficient densities, to support walkability... [and] at the highest densities within walking and bicycling distance of transit stations.
- Regulations and public incentives should expand housing choices in neighborhoods that offer access to educational and economic opportunity, particularly for residents who, because of race, ethnicity, and/or income, have historically been marginalized and displaced in land use decisions.
- Every neighborhood should host its fair share of affordable and low-income housing through equitable zoning, regulation, and investment.

Finally, the guidance includes an entire section this very issue: “Increase Missing Middle Housing Types” (page 66). Most pointedly to the Town proposal, it provides a recommendation:

Club activists should encourage their city or county to adopt zoning regulations that encourage the construction of missing middle housing types. This may mean that a jurisdiction that currently relies exclusively on traditional zoning rules for single family neighborhoods should replace the zoning with form-based codes, or a hybrid code that allows a wider variety of housing types (e.g., fourplexes, townhouses, courtyard buildings) in single family zones.

As Sierra Club members, we want to, and work to, protect the environment, the climate, trees, green space and natural habitats. We also recognize that the best way to accomplish these things now is to prevent more sprawl by more effectively utilizing the land and infrastructure inside the limits of our Rural Buffer. We hope that you will pass the proposed changes to the LUMO, allow gentle densification of Chapel Hill, and help to preserve the natural lands and farm land that we have remaining.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

With thanks,

Melissa McCullough, Chair

Orange-Chatham Group of the North Carolina Sierra Club