

Where We Stand on Housing Choices

June 15, 2023

The 2022 joint housing study by UNC and the Town of Chapel Hill made it clear that for us to remain a vibrant, equitable place, the town needs to substantially increase not only the amount of housing, but the diversity of the housing types available in our community.

As part of implementing our Complete Communities strategy, staff has brought forward the Housing Choices proposal for allowing varied housing types in our single-family neighborhoods. This “gentle density” is one tool we can use to increase equitable access to housing in Chapel Hill.

While we support the goal of adding residential gentle density, and thank staff for their thoughtful work and responsiveness to community concerns, we find that the current proposal still falls short. To avoid the negative consequences we see with the proposed ordinance as it stands (such as incentivizing teardowns, harmful environmental effects, and negative impacts to our historic districts), we strongly recommend the following changes:

1. Putting guardrails in place to incentivize units for populations we don’t currently serve well (singles, downsizers, new families, etc.), disincentivize student staffers, and promote livability through efforts including:

- a. Developing a design book – preapproved floorplan designs with expedited process, minimal fees
- b. Imposing parking limits – less than 1 space/bedroom, a maximum of four parking spaces per duplex lot, no parking in front yards, restricting on-street parking in neighborhoods without bike-ped infrastructure
- c. Formulating a plan for providing residential parking permits in neighborhoods with limited on-street parking
- d. Developing an effective education and enforcement plan to make sure the protections in the ordinance are working as intended

2. Explicitly prohibiting new building in the RCD.

3. Improving tree canopy standards to 40% for duplex, triplex, and quad lots (as proposed in the town’s 6.14.23 news release), 40% for lots with ADUs, and the maximum practical for cottages on compact lots, as well as **ensuring that current impervious surface protections remain** in place.

4. Protecting the Historic District from the teardowns of historic homes by prohibiting construction of new duplexes, triplexes, and quadplexes in those areas, while encouraging increased density by adopting the proposal’s regulations for ADUs and cottages on compact lots in the district.

Our interest is in building effective new housing policy tools, not delaying progress on housing issues. Recognizing that it will take time to put some of these recommendations in place, and not wishing to postpone action on this proposal, we request that the vote take place as planned, with the ordinance to take effect on a date certain that will allow staff time to establish effective guardrails.

We feel that these changes meet the intent of the Housing Choices proposal, supporting diversity and thriving neighborhoods while protecting against negative impacts, and we urge their adoption. Next week, Council will receive further economic analysis that will help us understand whether we are incentivizing teardowns and student-only housing with this proposal. That information is another crucial missing piece in evaluating Housing Choices before a final vote.

Pam Hemminger (Mayor)
Jess Anderson (Council Member)
Amy Ryan (Council Member)