

To: Orange County Board of County Commissioners
Re: WASMPBA
From: Orange Chatham Group of the NC Sierra Club

Dear Commissioners,

We applaud your adoption of the Orange County Climate Action Plan (CAP), and we are writing to ask your support of the WASMPBA extension in southern Orange County, in support of that Plan and the County's climate goals.

The section of the CAP on transportation notes:

Transportation is the largest source of emissions within Orange County, with 43% of all community emissions coming from vehicle miles traveled (VMT)... The strategies and actions in this section are designed to make alternatives to single-occupant, fossil fuel trips easy, convenient, and attractive to residents and visitors. It is also critical to understand the impact of careful land use planning and its effect on sprawl and subsequent VMTs.

The extension of the WASMPBA will enable Chapel Hill to plan for future denser growth along a Bus Rapid Transit-accessible corridor, preventing more leapfrog, sprawl development. Right now, 43,000 people travel into Chapel Hill from surrounding counties to work, largely because Chapel Hill housing is too costly. If more people can live closer and near transit, they will be able to ride into work at UNC without adding individual car VMT emissions or creating traffic through the county coming into Chapel Hill.

The section of the CAP on Green Community notes:

A critical focus should remain on proper zoning to prevent sprawl and encourage high density within the County. Planning efforts will have long term impacts towards directly reducing GHG emissions, preserving the rural nature of the County and protecting regional wildlife corridors.

Allowing denser development closer to Chapel Hill jobs will allow more efficient use of limited available land, lessening the development pressure on remaining rural land within our County.

We all recognize that the area covered by the WASMPBA extension request will eventually be developed. Without the extension, such development will likely be spread out McMansions, as we see elsewhere in the county. Efficiency is a consistent thread through the CAP. It's important to recognize that more compact land use and denser housing make serving water, sewer and electricity more efficient, as well as cheaper per household served. So, in addition to the transportation efficiencies, enabling denser housing closer to town is a more cost-effective way to serve more people with needed utilities.

In short, extending the WASMPBA will serve Orange County's climate goals, Chapel Hill's housing, transit and climate goals, and enable our local governments to mindfully plan a more resilient, green future for the people of our county.