http://heraldsun.southernheadlines.com/resources/printfriendly.cfm?StoryID=1138643&pageid=10

Action on 'social equity' urged

BY DANIEL GOLDBERG : The Herald-Sun

dgoldberg@heraldsun.com

**Apr 14, 2009**

Bookmark and Share

CHAPEL HILL -- Greenbridge developers and leaders from the town of Chapel Hill should "take immediate action to address issues of social equity" related to the residential community now rising on the corner of Rosemary and Graham streets, says a group comprising university, nonprofit and church representatives.

The steering committee of United with the Northside Community Now released an open letter calling on Greenbridge and the town to address six points identified during two community discussions hosted by the group in recent weeks.

"These communities are strongly invested in issues of sustainability and environmental and economic justice," the letter states. "Northside and Pine Knoll emerged as 'service communities,' providing manual labor to the primary local industry, the University. Economic disparities threaten the sustainability of communities likely to be displaced and erased, rather than honored and supported by current directions in development."

Signatories of the letter, released last week, include emPOWERment Executive Director Delores Bailey, Chapel Hill-Carrboro NAACP President Eugene Farrar, the Rev. Mark Royster of Cedar Rock Baptist Church and several church leaders and students.

UNC-NOW wants the town to "spearhead property tax relief in traditionally low wealth neighborhoods" and implement a moratorium on development in those areas "until a more inclusive and dynamic process of community involvement can be realized."

Recalling a commitment made by the developer to job training and employment for community residents, the letter says that Greenbridge "must immediately" identify opportunities and offer training through community colleges "to ensure that local residents will be employed within this development."

But UNC-NOW's most adamant demand relates to an informational video produced by the Greenbridge team.

"Community members featured in the video -- including Rebecca Clark, Velma Perry and Kenneth Mann -- were pained and enraged to learn that their historic interviews were represented as supporting Greenbridge, which they take to be antithetical to their own interests," the letter says. "Greenbridge must completely withdraw the video and issue a public apology."

On Monday, Tim Tobin, a Greenbridge partner, offered a point-by-point response in which he referred to UNC-NOW's "demands" as "uninformed and inflammatory." Contrary to the call for a more inclusive process, Tobin pointed out that the town and developers held more than a dozen public hearings on the project. Those meetings resulted in changes to the design: a lowering of the west building by two floors, creation of a public plaza and inclusion of on-site affordable housing.

As for the call to apologize for the video, Tobin said that developers had a very good relationship with the three longtime residents mentioned in the video.

"I spoke to [Rebecca Clark] two weeks before her death," he wrote in an e-mail. "Never once did she mention being pained or enraged about the video, and anyone who really knew Ms. Clark knows that if she had something on her mind, she let you know it in no uncertain terms."

Perry liked the video so much that during a public viewing at Hargraves she insisted that it be played again, Tobin said.

"In any case, the video was not 'misleading' and we never used the documentary in any way, except to place Greenbridge in the historical context of this area. It was always intended to honor and be highly respectful of these remarkable elders. I'm not sure what UNC-NOW means by 'withdrawing' the video, and we certainly have nothing to apologize for."

UNC-NOW will hold its next community meeting on April 30 at St. Joseph CME Church on Rosemary Street.

Bookmark and Share

© 2009 by The Durham Herald Company. All rights reserved.