

THE CARRBORO
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LETTERS

Support Shelton Station

I am writing in support of the proposed Shelton Station project submitted by Carrboro resident Kenneth Reiter. Ken and I have discussed this project on numerous occasions, and I believe it will have a tremendous positive impact on the downtown area.

This is a good project for the development of downtown. The scale and character of the project are appropriate to the surrounding neighborhood and the size of the parcel being developed. The mixture of uses will provide for people nearby restaurants and stores, some of which we own and/or operate. It will also provide needed affordable housing. The flow of traffic for cars, pedestrians and bicycles will be improved. He is pursuing a pretty high level of green and sustainable features. The entire project will increase the property tax base significantly when compared to the current situation of the site. This project meets many of the long-term goals for downtown Carrboro.

MAC FITCH
Fitch Lumber Company

Reject Shelton Station

I grew up in Carrboro and am the fourth generation of a family with deep roots here. I am writing this letter to share my concerns about a rezoning request that could have a significant impact on my hometown.

I strongly urge the board of aldermen to vote NO on Jan. 24 to rezoning 500 N. Greensboro St. The rezoning would allow for high-density development such as Shelton Station. Initially, the BOA will only consider the rezoning request. However, rezoning is required before developers can later bring Shelton Station (which includes 96 apartments and 24,000 square feet of retail/office space on roughly 2.5 acres of land) to the BOA for approval.

A high-density development at this location would be sited directly across from Shelton Street on the edge of one of the oldest neighborhoods in Carrboro and would vent traffic onto North Greensboro where there is already high traffic activity. All participants acknowledge that the serious traffic congestion there would be made worse.

High-density development will play a role in Carrboro's future. There are four projects already approved for downtown Carrboro that combined total more than 400,000 square feet of commercial space and 115 residential units (apartments, condos and other units). These developments will bring increased traffic and draw on existing infrastructure.

At what point do we stop and look at how we are growing, and what the impacts will be of approved and proposed developments? Vision 2020 calls for preserving historic areas, buildings and older neighborhoods, and calls for development that is consistent with the distinctive town character. Developments such as Shelton Station can be good for Carrboro – if they are put in appropriate locations. Let's not place them where they would negatively impact established older neighborhoods and increase already significant traffic problems.

In addition to voting NO to rezoning 500 N. Greensboro St., I also encourage the board to reach out to citizens and revalidate the ideas in Vision 2020 to ensure that our commitment to growth sustains the integrity of Carrboro.

CELIA PIERCE
Carrboro

LETTERS POLICY

Letters should be no more than 425 words in length and must be accompanied by the author's name, address and contact information. One letter per author per month. Lengthy letters written in longhand will mysteriously become lost. Emailed letters are preferred. That said, send your letters to:

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Shelton Station makes sense

PATRICK MCDONOUGH

Over the past few years, the cold economic winds blowing in our nation have postponed or scuttled multiple development projects in Carrboro. We are fortunate to have under consideration a mixed-use project that will positively impact Carrboro in terms of the environment, economic activity and, most importantly, social equity. That project is Shelton Station.

Located just a few blocks north of the heart of downtown, Shelton Station and the residents of its 96 apartments will create a considerably smaller carbon footprint than if those same units were built on the edge of town. Why? Carrboro – and particularly downtown – is built to encourage the most environmentally friendly travel behavior in the state. As of 2009, Carrboro has a higher percentage of bicycle and public-transit commuters than any other North Carolina town. In the part of town with the most transportation choices, Shelton Station residents will be able to take advantage of these options.

Economically, the presence of another 125 to 170 residents so close to downtown will boost local business activity, in addition to generating construction jobs in the short term. Some worry that Shelton Station does not have enough commercial space included, but those individuals should consider the common adage in commercial real estate: “Retail follows rooftops.” In order to achieve the worthy goal of doubling commercial space in our downtown by 2020, we will need also to expand the local market of residential shoppers to support that commercial space. With that in mind, the significant residential component of Shelton Station should enhance the market viability of downtown commercial space in future developments by putting more customers close to downtown shopping opportunities.

The most compelling reason to support Shelton Station, however, is on equity grounds and the need to sustain a place for the middle class in Carrboro. In November 2011, the public-interest journalism nonprofit Pro Publica published the illuminating “Income Inequality Near You” tool on its website that distressingly demonstrates that Orange County has become one of the worst counties in the nation in terms of income inequality. In fact, 98 percent of all U.S. counties had a more equitable distribution of income than Orange

County. By comparison, 67 percent counties were more equitable than Durham County, and 54 percent of counties were more equitable than Wake County.

Let's not be misconstrued that this is a county-only problem, American Community Survey data I analyzed on The Village Project blog in April 2011 tells a related story within Carrboro. In the year 2000, 69 percent of Carrboro households had incomes of \$50,000 or below. By 2009, the percentage of Carrboro households with incomes of \$50,000 or less had fallen to 59 percent. During the same time period, Carrboro added approximately 900 households earning more than \$100,000 a year and experienced a net loss of roughly 90 households earning less than \$100,000 a year.

When you look at numerous data sources, a simple story emerges: The central reason behind this loss of middle-class residents in the county and our town is the lack of affordable housing. If Carrboro does not want to become a town where only the wealthy can afford to live, then the town must approve more housing. That housing should be developed on Carrboro's terms, in accordance with Carrboro's values and priorities. As Shelton Station developer Ken Reiter has proposed pursuing green features in the building design, providing covered bicycle parking and renting 10 percent of the units to be affordable to workers at 60 percent of the median income, there is evidence that Reiter has thought carefully about ways to reflect Carrboro values in Shelton Station's design.

Recently, *The Carrboro Citizen* published some outgoing wisdom from longtime Carrboro Board of Aldermen member Joal Hall Broun, who said, “I think that Carrboro should work hard so that we don't price ourselves out of diversity.” I could not agree more. Fortunately, a lot of hard work has gone into developing the plans for Shelton Station, and the resulting proposal is one that is likely to bring economic and environmental benefits to Carrboro while expanding the housing stock, thus reducing the price-out pressure facing Carrboro's middle-class residents. I encourage the Carrboro Board of Aldermen to move Carrboro forward on all three dimensions of sustainability by approving this project.

Patrick McDonough is a Carrboro resident and a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners.

Established boundaries

JACK HAGGERTY

This is the first in a three-part series about Carrboro development.

I think of Carrboro as my hometown. I was not born here, nor did I grow up here, but I have lived in Carrboro long enough for my heart to have attached to this place. A long residency gives a perspective that is focused by involvement and one that is made keen by the attachment. I've gone to a great number of town committee meetings and attended numerous hearings before the board of aldermen. I've sat on steering groups and served on commissions. I have done more than a few projects in Carrboro as an architect. This essay is about the horizontal growth of Carrboro's downtown, while the next will focus on the vertical element of growth. I believe the expansion of the “downtown” beyond its historic boundaries, which are still apparent, and for the most part respected, has two counterproductive results, and that such growth, when proposed, should be strongly discouraged.

Compactness is required for a small downtown to be a lively, civic venue. The boundaries need to be clear, and the desired activity of the downtown is enhanced by the containment. When the boundaries are expanded for no pressing reason, the energy collected begins to dissipate, and the downtown is diminished. The current zoning districts in Carrboro are structured to keep the downtown compact.

The downtown boundaries of Carrboro are well established. The western edge is the area around town hall, the exception being the potential for commercial development along the wide stretch of Jones Ferry Road with its ready access to N.C. 54. The train tracks at North Greensboro Street are the historic northern boundary. It wasn't so long ago that houses, fields and pastures were the only things north of the train tracks. Now that area is a residential neighborhood. Carr Street is the southern boundary of the downtown, and the commercial lots down South Greensboro Street are the exception in that direction. That area went commercial quite some time ago, and a large part of it is now ripe for commercial redevelopment. Like the Jones Ferry Road area, the lots at the foot of South Greensboro Street have quick access to 54. The area is well bound by its geography; a redevelopment of it won't impinge on the nearby neighborhoods. In addition, Carrboro can develop to the east along East Main St. It is a happy circumstance that Chapel Hill encourages businesses on their west end, and the synergy where the two towns meet should be exploited.

Looking through older photos of Carrboro, it is easy to see the historic boundaries. It is easy to see them still. The town's Vision 2020 document, the product of a broad, consensual,

community-visioning effort, contains the goal of doubling commercial square footage. It also contains the goal of preserving the older neighborhoods around the downtown. These goals are compatible. The doubling of commercial square footage in no way requires we expand the boundaries of the downtown, the boundaries captured in the current zoning. I've seen nothing in the 25 years that I've lived here that makes me think we need to go beyond these boundaries to have the Carrboro we “visioned” a little over a decade ago.

The bright lights of the compact downtown give way to streetlight-lit avenues of small mill houses, crepe myrtles and insect song. Even our generic street names have acquired the patina of charm – Oak, Poplar, Maple – because their integrity has been maintained, because they're ours, because they're Carrboro. There are still some shabby spots, some anomalous duplexes, some small, two-story apartment complexes, but none of us wants to lose these either. The expansion of commercial uses, of the downtown, into these neighborhoods will erode and degrade them. We should not chip away at our assets.

Zoning protects neighborhoods. Zoning focuses development. Zoning creates predictability, a reliable expectation of the uses and sizes of projects, and where they can occur. A developer would study the zoning map to see what uses the town allows in specific zones. Homebuyers would study the map to see if a four-story building could be built 10 yards from the house where they want to raise their children. The necessity and value of zoning are obvious. It is at once a recognition of the town's past and a map to its future.

The members of the board of aldermen have created some zoning “tools” with which they can redraw zoning districts, or they can even create a new zone, whole cloth, to accommodate a developer. To do so is something of a radical act, especially if the proposed use is inconsistent with the surrounding uses. When the aldermen use these “tools,” the expectation engendered by the zoning map are upset, and residents should recognize that vagaries have been introduced into an area, into their neighborhood. When does it end? What precedents are set?

Carrboro is not suffering from expansionary pressures. The downtown of Carrboro is not built out. There is no cause to rethink the existing zoning, no reason to allow commercial uses into the older neighborhoods. Such an action weakens the identity of the downtown and erodes the older neighborhoods. We should not give up our identity so easily, so willingly, simply to accommodate developers who want to reshape the town.

Jack Haggerty is an architect who lives in downtown Carrboro.

To Peace and
Justice Plaza
and beyond

DAN COLEMAN

In the past two weeks, I've twice visited Chapel Hill's Peace and Justice Plaza: once for an Occupy Chapel Hill-Carrboro event and once for the NAACP's annual Martin Luther King Jr. rally. Each time, I found myself reflecting on the struggles and commitments of those whose names are enshrined there.

Creating a monument like Peace and Justice Plaza can carry with it a sense of finality, of a work completed. We must consciously remind ourselves that their work was only a step along the way and that taking the next step is the work of our time. That next step can be rooted in the lives of those commemorated at the plaza or of a revered figure like King, but only if we understand the nature of their work for social and economic justice and for the expansion of civil and human rights.

A key factor that informed King's work as well as that of those honored at the plaza was the understanding that the law is on the side of the powerful and therefore often in the service of injustice. To achieve his aims, King broke the law and was arrested many times. But perhaps we forget that my late friend and NAACP leader James Brittain, memorialized at the plaza, was also arrested many times in the struggle for civil rights. So too were a number of others whose names are engraved in that stone marker.

To honor their memory, we must be cautious not to disempower today's social-justice activists by offering them Peace and Justice Plaza as an accommodating place for their freedom of speech but crying foul when they take their cause to the site of injustice.

We must take care when we express pride at the level of cooperation between town government and Occupy Chapel Hill-Carrboro while characterizing the occupiers of the Yates Building disparagingly as trespassers. We must not forget that the crime for which Brittain was arrested was also that of trespass. Such trespass was a cornerstone of the civil rights movement.

In that context, it is important to recall that King was not particularly bullish on the sanctity of private property. “Life is sacred,” he wrote. “Property is intended to serve life, and no matter how much we surround it with rights and respect, it has no personal being. It is part of the earth man walks on; it is not man.”

We must also bear in mind that King's last campaign was the Poor People's Campaign for economic justice, one in which he called for massive civil disobedience to shut down Washington, D.C., and for the illegal occupation of the Mall through the creation of a shanty town. The campaign was a precursor to today's Occupy Wall Street, and King feared similar violent reprisals.

One of the obstacles to progress discussed repeatedly by King is liberal complacency – people who are concerned, who are of good will, but who retreat when a campaign for justice moves beyond their comfort zone. King wrote of “a liberalism so bent on seeing both sides that it fails to become committed to either side. It is a liberalism which is neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm.” In this community, many of us pride ourselves on our liberalism, but we must strive to make sure it is the strong, committed liberalism that King admired, the liberalism that is honored at Peace and Justice Plaza.

Elected officials face a particular challenge. When citizens demand justice, I am sworn to uphold the laws of the state that are often designed, in the interest of wealth and power, to sustain those very injustices. But as a moral being, I have an obligation to find a way to support the cause of justice despite such limitations.

While listening to the King holiday speeches, I felt that it is more important than ever that Peace and Justice Plaza call us not only to remember heroes of the past but to honor those among us who take similar risks today, to take that memory and that inspiration to the setting of injustice, and to bring forth that struggle to which power must eventually yield.

Dan Coleman is a member of the Carrboro Board of Aldermen.