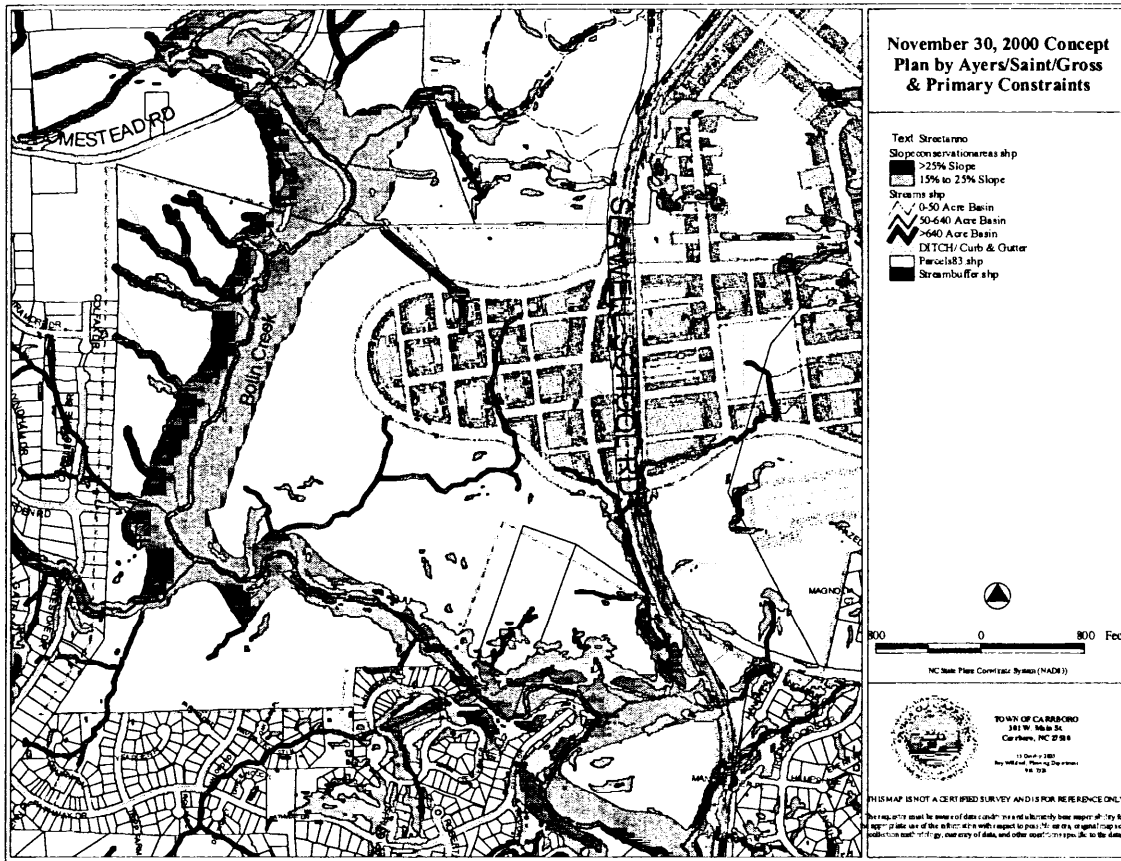


**REPORT
TO
THE CARRBORO BOARD OF ALDERMAN
FROM
THE HORACE WILLIAMS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**



**REPORT ON THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA'S PLANS FOR
CAROLINA NORTH**

**PRESENTED TO THE CARRBORO BOARD OF ALDERMEN ON
OCTOBER 28, 2003**

Committee Members:			
Rich Bell	Catherine Devine	Evie Odom	Dianne Reid
Jay Bryan	Randee Haven-O'Donnell	Dave Otto	Allen Spalt
Kathy Buck	Diana McDuffee	Heidi Perry	
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Introduction

The proposed development by UNC-Chapel Hill of a large, mixed-use research park called Carolina North on the “Horace Williams Property” presents a mixture of opportunity and risk to the Town of Carrboro. This fall provides a short window of opportunity for influencing the project as the University prepares its draft conceptual plan, scheduled for adoption in January 2004. While the current draft of the plan (2-27-01 Ayres/Saint/Gross plan presented to the Board of Aldermen) appears to be somewhat consistent with Carrboro’s Vision 2020 goals, the fast pace of the University’s planning process, the purely conceptual nature of the commitments, and the array of potential negative impacts makes it incumbent upon the Board of Alderman to be proactive in its communication and planning and assertive and focused in the pursuit of its interests. If managed well, the development of Carolina North provides a vehicle for achieving important long-term goals for the Town of Carrboro and advancing the quality of life of its citizens.

Background

For more than a decade, UNC-Chapel Hill has been planning to develop the approximately 1,000-acre “Horace Williams Property” now called “Carolina North”. The University has undertaken two important initial planning efforts for this project including the 1998 JJR report and the 2001 Ayers/Saint/Gross plan that have collectively informed the current conceptual master plan for the property. The planning process has recently quickened and generated a great deal of momentum. The “Carolina North” project is currently envisioned as a village of mixed uses including research and commercialization that fosters ongoing work at UNC-Chapel Hill.”

The University has established a decision making body, the Carolina North Executive Committee, which is supported by the Carolina North Advisory Committee and its four subcommittees. The subcommittees have completed their work and issued reports, which in June were approved by the Executive Committee as guiding principles for Carolina North. The planning process is now described as “on a fast track” as the University prepares to make community presentations and receive comments about its plans during October and November. Based on those sessions, the draft conceptual plan will be updated and the Carolina North Executive Committee will take it to the UNC Board of Trustees at its January 2004 meeting.

Given the compressed time period offered for community response to the University’s plans and a perceived lower level of openness and transparency relative to earlier planning processes, the Carrboro Board of Alderman formed the Horace Williams Advisory Committee and asked it to:

- Define and advocate for Carrboro's interests and objectives, including the following topic areas: water and sewer, hazardous waste, stormwater, transportation, housing, schools, natural area protection, fiscal equity, and neighborhood interface;
- Keep the Mayor and Board of Alderman informed about the work progress,
- Identify and create opportunities for informed citizen comment, and
- Prepare recommendations about Carrboro's response to the University's plans for Carolina North.

The overall goals of the Committee are to: 1) help the Town of Carrboro be proactive, focused and effective in its communication with the University and the Town of Chapel Hill about the Carolina North project; and 2) ensure that Carolina North will be a net benefit to the Town of Carrboro and all of its citizens.

Positive Features of Carolina North

The current draft conceptual plan for Carolina North (as it is described in the Ayers/Saint/Gross plan) contains many principles and planned components that can be applauded. The plan includes a range of attributes that are consistent with the principles outlined in Carrboro Vision 2020 and encouraging with respect to Carrboro's interests, including:

- 1) The program components and physical plan of Carolina North are compatible with the surrounding area of Carrboro,
- 2) The planning process involves Carrboro;
- 3) The plan utilizes the University/Norfolk Southern Railroad right-of-way for transit.
- 4) Intensive development of the property and design as a transit-oriented development should support a high level of transit service, and transit should provide regional access;
- 5) The property is intended to be developed as a group of dense, mixed-use neighborhoods each disciplined by a walking distance of five minutes from a defined center to the edge and each with a strong sense of place;
- 6) The plan provides pedestrian and bicycle facilities throughout the site and effective connections to public facilities surrounding the site, establishes a range of effective and attractive, multimodal connections, and employs a strong combination of trip reduction strategies;
- 7) The plan makes significant use of well designed, structured parking and on-street parking;
- 8) Floodplains, stream buffers and steep slopes will remain as open space and 58% of the property will be left as either undeveloped or passive recreation in the first phase;
- 9) The project proposes to employ stormwater management best practices, green design and construction, and other strategies to achieve: minimum disturbance, the maintenance of the natural hydrologic cycle and the benefits of infiltration, sustainable wastewater treatment, energy and water conservation, and the overall maintenance of air and water quality;
- 10) The project should protect Bolin Creek and its corridor by retaining a permanent protected buffer and be fully integrated with existing Bolin Creek greenway plans;
- 11) The project could permanently protect designated environmental assets, preserving these assets by inviolable means such as conservation easements or land trusts, and preserving other environmental assets by durable means;
- 12) The project may provide community access to recreational resources, establish new recreational trails and integrate greenways and bikeways with those in local master plans; and
- 13) The project could resolve environmental liabilities

Primary Concerns about Carolina North

The committee identified and discussed the following major issues that are poorly addressed in the current Carolina North draft conceptual plan:

1. Lack of a written firm commitment to permanently protect as natural open space the land surrounding Bolin Creek.
2. Lack of clarity regarding the following transportation components:
 - Traffic counts and which primary access points are planned for employees commuting to Carolina North;
 - The future of the Estes Road corridor and the design of that road;
 - A specific plan and firm commitment for the use of the rail right-of-way for transit connecting Eubanks Road park-and-ride, Carolina North, downtown Carrboro and the main UNC campus, and the protection of long-term options for a regional rail link.
3. Inattention to dedicating land for public facilities such as a fire station or a public school site to accommodate increased enrollment, lack of specifics and commitments on recreational uses (including but not limited to a soccer field) and the lack of a policy for public accessibility to recreational facilities; vagueness about the range of commercial services and their availability to the public.
4. Lack of attention paid to the financing and provision of public services, systems for reimbursement of fire protection and how the payment of local taxes or payment-in-lieu could be worked out for private uses on University property;
5. Limited options for community participation and citizen influence in the planning process, and a rigid, "presentation-comment" structure to community consultations.

Priority Issues and Recommendations

The committee recognized that a small portion of the Carolina North project will be developed under Carrboro's jurisdiction and that Carrboro's interests may differ significantly in some respects from those of the Town of Chapel Hill. The committee agreed that a proactive and focused approach to a few selected priorities would make good use of our planning and political resources, increase the likelihood that our proposals will be adopted, and yield the most positive possible results from Carolina North for the town. In concert with this approach, the following priorities and recommendations were agreed upon:

A. Permanent Bolin Creek/Open Space Protection

All property west and south of Bolin Creek is physically separated by the creek from the rest of the Horace Williams Tract and should be dedicated as permanent open space to prevent it from being developed publicly or privately. A greenway along Bolin creek should be permanently protected either through dedication or preservation.

Recommendation 1: Present a formal request to the Carolina North Executive Committee to permanently protect this land.

Recommendation 2: Permanent protection of the land adjoining Bolin Creek is of primary importance to the quality of life of Carrboro's citizens and has been a consistent priority of the Board of Alderman. Pedestrian and bike connections across the creek will have a minimal impact on this natural and recreational resource while providing a greater measure of planning control for the Town of Carrboro, an important amenity for citizens and a critical alternative transportation link to Carolina North. The committee recommends that the Carolina North Plan include a pedestrian and bike trail connecting Tripp Farm Road across Bolin Creek to the Carolina North Project.

B. Sustainable Transportation Connections/Neighborhood Protection from Traffic Impacts

The committee determined that, given the limitations of Estes Drive Extension and surrounding roads, the existing road system will not be able to handle anticipated increases in traffic without adversely affecting neighborhood safety and quality of life. A combination of improvements that promote diverse, alternative modes of transportation and increased connectivity while discouraging the growth of automobile traffic along Estes Drive Extension and through Carrboro was determined to be of primary importance to Carrboro's quality of life.

Recommendation 3: Urge UNC to support Carrboro's concept for improvement of Estes Drive Extension . Reject any four-lane options that would support its use as a primary gateway or major conveyor of traffic generated by Carolina North.

Recommendation 4: Work with UNC, the Town of Chapel Hill, NCDOT and other relevant stakeholders to establish curb and gutter, bike lanes and sidewalks on both sides, and turn lanes where needed as the future improvements on Estes Drive Extension;

Recommendation 5: Work with all relevant stakeholders and decision-makers to connect the Bolin Creek greenway to provide safe and convenient bike and pedestrian access across Estes Drive Extension (with possible grade separation) to serve Carolina North and Carrboro's Northern Transition Area;

Recommendation 6: Strongly support the current alignment of the proposed Seawell Road connector as shown on the 2000 Concept Plan contained in the February 27, 2001 Presentation Report to the Town of Carrboro Board of Aldermen prepared by Ayers/Saint/Gross et al.

Recommendation 7: Encourage UNC to make use of park-and-ride lots to serve Carolina North employee parking needs. Request that UNC focus particularly on using the Eubanks Road park-and-ride lot and/or additional lots convenient to I-40 and that it provide express bus service from all park-and-ride lots. Reinforce the use of structured parking where feasible to reduce land and impervious surface requirements.

Recommendation 8: Strongly encourage the use of the existing rail corridor for transit within Carrboro/Chapel Hill serving the Eubanks Road park-and-ride lot, Carolina North, downtown Carrboro and the UNC main campus with connections to regional transit. Encourage short-term use of the rail corridor as a dedicated bus-way to support Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and continued study of the corridor for longer-term connections to regional rail service and national interstate high speed/high capacity rail.

Recommendation 9: Meet with the Chapel Hill Town Council and its Horace Williams Citizens' Committee to share Carrboro's priorities, discuss issues and perspectives related to a dedicated transit right-of-way, and coordinate plans for the future design of Estes Drive Extension and the Bolin Creek Greenway.

C. Public-Private Options for Taxation and Provision of Public Services

The Town of Carrboro has a primary fiduciary responsibility to its taxpayers to ensure that new development within its jurisdiction pays for the cost of services that it requires from the town. Given the generally tax-exempt nature of University-owned property and functions, portions of Carolina North in Carrboro could potentially represent a financial drain for the town unless contracts and payment-in-lieu agreements are made and taxing options are fully explored for private development on University property.

Recommendation 10: Communicate to UNC, the Town of Carrboro's interest in fully recapturing the cost of any public services provided by the town through contracts, payment-in-lieu agreements or alternative taxing arrangements for private development that occurs on University land.

Recommendation 11: Request of the Carolina North Executive Committee that a joint committee be formed to explore further the range of taxing options that are available for different uses and types of property that may be developed on University-owned land in Carrboro as part of Carolina North. This committee would make recommendations to the Town of Carrboro and the Carolina North Executive Committee for consideration by both bodies.

Rationale for Selecting Three Priority Areas

The committee identified the above three priority areas as the most important and promising areas of focus that were both directly related to the development of Carolina North and also within Carrboro's control. Given the small portion of Carolina North that will be developed in Carrboro, the range and complexity of the three priority areas, and the less direct relationship between other concerns and the Carolina North development itself, the committee determined that the Town should not attempt at this time to extract concessions related to sites for public facilities and recreational programs, the type and amount of student housing provided or the nature and availability of commercial services that will be difficult to secure commitments for at this early stage.

Conclusion

The Horace Williams Advisory Committee believes that Carolina North has the potential to be an important asset to the Town of Carrboro if it remains consistent with our Vision 2020 goals, provides a vehicle for achieving important long-term goals, and minimizes negative impacts on traffic, the environment, the town budget and neighborhood quality of life. We suggest that the Board of Alderman adopt the recommendations in this report and directly engage the University's Carolina North Advisory Committee and Carolina North Executive Committee about all of its priorities and recommendations as soon as possible to ensure incorporation of these proposals into the conceptual plan that will be put before the UNC Board of Trustees in January 2004.