



NEXT Chapel Hill-Carrboro
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Dear Mayor and Council of Chapel Hill,

We are writing as members of NEXT, a local advocacy group that works to advance economic development, affordable housing, and transportation alternatives. We want to see Chapel Hill live up to its reputation as a diverse community committed to equity, integrity, and inclusiveness. We are writing this letter in support of the Aura project, which is coming before the Chapel Hill Town Council and town advisory boards in the coming weeks. We would like to emphasize the following points.

Aura is already a compromise. We need visionary development.

If Chapel Hill were fully committed to making our community more prosperous, equitable, and sustainable, we would be discussing a much more ambitious project. A 16-acre property located less than two miles from downtown Chapel Hill—and on the planned North-South Bus Rapid Transit line—could support a project with *five times* as many homes. By asking the developer to limit building heights, the town has already ensured that Aura won't provide as much housing, office space, and retail as it could. In the future, we hope that the town can encourage developers to set their sights higher.

We need alternatives to driving, not another traffic study.

The town's new traffic study shows that the Aura project will not significantly impact traffic on Estes. But it will attract people who bus, bike, and walk to school and work, making our roads safer for all. In addition, approving Aura will help the town make the case for the North-South Bus Rapid Transit project, which will allow our community to realize its environmental, economic, and housing goals. Finally, Aura will help fund the completion of the Estes Drive Connectivity Project, creating a safe route from Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard to Phillips Middle School and Estes Hills Elementary School. If the town declines to approve Aura, this critical connection might go unbuilt for a decade or more.

We need housing, including apartments and townhouses.

Aura will add 418 homes, both apartments and townhouses, to Chapel Hill, including 54 apartments reserved for people making between 65 and 85 percent of the average median income. While we would like to see even more housing on this site, including affordable housing for low-income families, this project will make it easier for people to live and work in our community. Although we often hear complaints about “luxury apartments,” the only real luxury housing in our community are single-family homes built on large lots. Single-family homes in Chapel Hill sell for \$500,000 and up, more than *seven times* the average median income for a household of four. If we want our community to live up to its values of being inclusive and equitable, the high cost of land requires that we increase housing density. By building apartments and townhouses, we can ensure that more people can afford to live in our community.

Let's make Estes Drive a 15-minute city.

We believe that Chapel Hill residents should live no more than 15 minutes, via bus, bike, or foot, from schools, parks, shopping, and work. The town council has already made major investments in this area, including planning for the N-S BRT and the Estes Drive Connectivity Project, which will add greenways connecting Aura with Phillips Middle School and Estes Hills Elementary School. We think that the town should prioritize the construction of bike lanes on Elliott Road, which would create a safe, protected route from Aura to the Blue Hill District, giving residents in Aura and the surrounding neighborhoods easy access to grocery stores, restaurants, shopping, and more. In addition, the town should make Aura a station for its planned e-bike share network, which will help bike riders of all ages and abilities navigate the hilly terrain.

We can make Chapel Hill a better place.

We have the great fortune of living in a community that values diversity, inclusivity, and progress. While growth has its challenges, we believe better planning and an optimistic vision for the future of our community can ensure that the Chapel Hill of 2050 is even more vibrant, sustainable, and equitable than it is today.

Sincerely,

Donna Bell
Allison De Marco
Martin Johnson
Danny Nowell

Ryan Byars
Molly de Marco
Kathy Kaufman
Alyson West