COMMUNITY CHARACTER, LET'S PROTECT IT

The individual character of North Carolina's cities and towns matters. Natural beauty, livability, historic structures – these are just some aspects of each town or city's character. Character drives the ability of a community to attract new residents, new jobs and visitors, as well as cater to current residents' lifestyles and protect their investments in homes and businesses. Whether a picturesque mountain community that depends on tourism dollars, or a large city like Raleigh and Charlotte dependent on vibrant downtowns and diverse workforces that bring high-tech and financial industry jobs, community character plays a crucial role in economic success.

Who protects that community character? Cities and towns.

Locally-elected officials and municipal staffs – with the input of residents and taxpayers – create careful land-use planning policies, including zoning rules, to ensure that development occurs in ways that do not damage community character. Doing so, they protect the home values of adjacent property owners from incompatible uses, preserve and protect natural areas and historic properties, and create scenic roads and walkways. As the protector of community character, towns and cities preserve quality of life, ease of access to neighborhoods and business districts, and the larger appeal that causes any place to become a hub of economic and social activity.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Zoning in U.S. cities in the early 20th century came at the behest of large-tract home developers concerned about nearby industrial uses harming the value of the property which they were developing.

- One of the first major court cases upholding the use of municipal zoning ordinances, *Hadacheck v. Sebastian*, involved whether the City of Los Angeles could prohibit brick-making operations in an area where residential developers were building homes.

- Multiple studies have shown that the location of city parks, open spaces and greenways are highly correlated to home values.

- A study asking retirees to rank the most important factors in their selection of a new location to live chose a top three of scenic beauty, recreational opportunity and mild climate.

- Another study found that a community's quality of life increased the attractiveness of a job, and the likelihood that an applicant would accept a job offer, by 33 percent.

CITIES AND TOWNS ENHANCING AND PROTECTING COMMUNITY CHARACTER

It Doesn't Just Happen

WAKE FOREST

Today, the Town of Wake Forest's historic downtown area is a bustling, thriving area. It didn't just happen. Stretching back to 2004, town officials implemented a plan to bring new retail businesses, restaurants, office space and housing to the area while prioritizing pedestrian, bike and transit access. In addition to investments in infrastructure and streetscape projects, the effort included the town establishing an historic district to preserve historic buildings and the creation of a unified development ordinance to ensure that development – whether commercial or infill housing -- occurred in ways that made sense. In short, the plan and the new UDO encouraged development while protecting the town's character and the vision of local residents.

EDENTON

Edenton has long been known for its picturesque waterfront along the Albemarle Sound, but like many towns in rural areas of the state, it has also faced development challenges. Its North Oakum Street Redevelopment Project, begun in 2014, used innovative concepts to acquire vacant and dilapidated properties and make public investments to create better housing opportunities and revitalize a neighborhood covering roughly 15 acres and including about 65 homes. The changes also involved a review of its Unified Development Ordinance and changes to its Land Development Code to accommodate non-conforming parcels. Today, private developers have seen the project's value, making more private investment to build on the momentum.

RALEIGH

There is little question that mixed-use developments in North Carolina's largest cities present some of the most complex planning issues, and without proper planning, they can create significant backlash from existing residents. Large buildings with a mix of residential, office and retail space create a range of livability and transportation needs by new residents, workers, shoppers and business owners, as well as existing owners and users of adjacent properties. The approval of a 40-story building by the City of Raleigh in 2020 in the north end of its downtown is another example of city officials and a developer working together to fit the development within the envisioned character of the area and needs of residents. The developer agreed to allow a city bike-share station on the property and a bus-rapid transit stop; city officials note that city-led pedestrian improvements and a new nearby park will create a more walkable community.

Every day, city officials work in concert with private developers, business owners and local residents to accommodate and encourage growth while protecting community character, preserving the very things that make their communities attractive and economically vibrant.