

New Hope Creek Corridor Advisory Committee

839 Sedgefield Street

Durham, NC 27705

The New Hope Creek Corridor Advisory Committee (NHCCAC) was created to advise the City and County of Durham, Orange County and the Town of Chapel Hill on implementation of the 1992 New Hope Creek Corridor Plan. Since the adoption of the plan, thanks to remarkable collaboration of local governments, state agencies and private donors, there have been major accomplishments in protecting the corridor and opening it up to public use. This includes the creation of four major parks—Leigh Farm, Old Chapel Hill Park, Sandy Creek Park and Hollow Rock Environmental Park. Other accomplishments have been several heavily used trails, raising the new 15-501 bridge to allow wildlife movement and a large number of development plans in which projects respected the integrity of wildlife corridors and the slopes that were an integral part of them.

The NHCCAC has an obvious interest in planning for the Patterson Place Compact Neighborhood. We have participated in all of the public planning events and workshops and submitted a number of written comments. Our specific concerns stem directly from the New Hope Plan—protection of steep slopes, setbacks sufficient to allow wildlife movement, and provision for public education and recreation, especially through walking and biking trails.

We join the Durham Open Space and Trails Committee in endorsing the recommendations proposed on May 29, 2018 by Durham Planning Staff that would protect steep slopes and provide a setback from the floodplain. We are less wedded to a specific set of numbers than to whatever it takes to maintain the natural values of the New Hope and Dry Creek corridors, particularly as habitat for plants, birds and animals, both those that may live there, and those passing through. Determining how much of the slopes need to be protected should be done through a careful ecological analysis of both the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to the species both residing in this area and to those who use it as a movement corridor. [We are seeking additional advice from ecologists knowledgeable in island biogeography/corridor studies both in general and with specific reference to this site. Compact neighborhood planners can expect to receive additional comments both from the NHCCAC as well as from some of these experts individually.]

Millions of dollars in federal, state, local and private funds have been expended to protect the New Hope corridor, including significant land acquisitions both north and south of 15-501, raising the 15-501 bridge and developing a trail and boardwalk system in the New Hope Bottomlands. The LRT has been re-routed so as to parallel 15-501 rather than intruding into the floodplain as initially proposed. As DOST has pointed out, the portion of New Hope Creek north and south of 15-501 is the most important and sensitive part of the entire New Hope corridor. As development has taken place along 15-501 and Southwest Durham Drive, the remaining natural lands are a “pinch point” in a corridor that is many miles long and quite wide to both the north and the south. Further development in this area, if not properly planned, could reduce the functionality of the entire corridor.

The NHCCAC was distressed when an apartment development, now under construction, did irretrievable damage to slopes on the south side of 15-501. We were told that there was no current legal basis for protecting these slopes under the existing Durham ordinances. The same appears to be true for a grading plan submitted for a large property on the north side of 15-501.

We believe that the Patterson Place Compact Neighborhood Plan has significant promise for protecting the resources that remain, particularly the slopes and corridor adjacent to and north of 15-501. We have consulted with several wildlife experts and believe that what we have learned from them about the environmental values of the corridor warrant a very high degree of protection. We strongly recommend that both design standards and proposals for zoning districts reflect these values.

The NHCCAC has also long been an advocate for both recreational and transportation (bike/ped) trails, which are also an emphasis of the New Hope Plan. In the Patterson Place area, we hope that provision will be made for a bike/ped trail (paved, separated from automobile traffic) that would extend from Eastowne through or around New Hope Commons, then along the north side of 15-501 to a bike/ped friendly crossing of New Hope Creek at the level of the existing bridge and continuing on to Sandy Creek Park and a possible connection toward Duke and downtown Durham.

We have come a long way in the last 26 years in implementing the vision of New Hope Creek set out in the New Hope Plan. We hope that the Patterson Place Compact Neighborhood Plan, and associated standards, will continue and expand on the progress that has been made.

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