



CITY OF DURHAM | DURHAM COUNTY
NORTH CAROLINA



Date: June 6, 2016

To: Thomas J. Bonfield, City Manager

Through: Keith Chadwell, Deputy City Manager

From: Steven L. Medlin, AICP, Planning Director

Subject: Compact Neighborhood Planning Overview and Compact Neighborhood Tier Policy Updates (A1500020)

Summary. Over the past year, the Durham City-County Planning Department has re-evaluated the Future Land Use Map of the *Durham Comprehensive Plan* to better align Compact Neighborhood Tier boundaries with the planned Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit (D-O LRT) system, recently endorsed by Durham elected officials and the Metropolitan Planning Organization Board. With input from the community, five areas along the D-O LRT corridor were studied. The intention of this memo is to provide project background (Attachment 1) and to recommend two additional policies be added to the *Durham Comprehensive Plan* (Attachment 2).

Recommendation. Staff recommends approval of Plan Amendment Case A1500020, Compact Neighborhood Tier Policy Updates. The Planning Commission recommended approval, 13-1, on March 9, 2016.

Background. Planning for the D-O LRT system has been ongoing for many years. In addition to serving transportation needs, the D-O LRT has the potential to redirect growth and focus development in a more compact, walkable and mixed-use pattern. To do so effectively will require a multi-faceted approach to station area planning that includes land use planning, infrastructure improvements, and strategies to meet affordable housing objectives. This memo will describe a step in the Land Use Planning initiative to re-examine the Compact Neighborhood Tiers as described on the Future Land Use Map.

The 2005 *Durham Comprehensive Plan* divided the County into “development tiers” to describe the character of development and provide the basis for context-sensitive policy and regulation. The development tiers allow for a diversity of development patterns throughout Durham, ranging from low-intensity rural landscapes to a pedestrian-oriented mixed-use downtown.

The Compact Neighborhood Tier was created to promote “high density and intensity infill, redevelopment, and new development that integrates a mix of uses through an urban fabric,” and was applied on the Future Land Use Map to areas surrounding a proposed regional rail transit system (Policy 2.1.2e, Compact Neighborhood Tier Defined). An additional designation, called the Suburban Transit Area, was established for later phases of the regional rail system, and provided the option of developing under Compact Neighborhood standards.

With increased certainty of station locations, the Durham-City County Planning Department is re-evaluating the Compact Neighborhood Tier and Suburban Transit Area boundaries established in the 2005 *Durham Comprehensive Plan* to better reflect the current light rail proposal. Since 2005, the light rail alignment has shifted and stations have been relocated, added and removed. Through this re-evaluation staff is recommending three-part changes to the Future Land Use Map including:

1. Revising Compact Neighborhood Tier boundaries;
2. Converting Suburban Transit Areas along the D-O LRT corridor to Compact Neighborhoods and revising their boundaries; and
3. Amending the underlying future land use designations in the Compact Neighborhoods to Design District.

Areas under consideration in this study surround the Leigh Village, Patterson Place, South Square/MLK Jr. Parkway, Duke/VA Medical Center (aka "Erwin Road"), and Alston Avenue light rail stations.

The Planning Department hosted 10 community meetings held between April 2015 and August 2015, two in each proposed Compact Neighborhood. Meetings were designed for members of the public to learn about Compact Neighborhoods, weigh in on areas they believed should (or should not) be included in the Compact Neighborhood Tier, and understand the planning process. Over 460 people attended these meetings and helped to shape the recommendations described in this memo. To view materials from these meetings, visit: www.durhamnc.gov/compactneighborhoods. Two additional public information sessions were held in late October to review and receive feedback on the draft reports contained the attachments of this memo.

Approving the proposed changes to the Comprehensive Plan will adapt Durham's long term land use policy to match current conditions. By designating the boundaries of the Compact Tiers at this time, planning staff, property owners, and the surrounding community will have clear policy direction before any zoning changes occur in this area. Addition, there are several other advantages to changing the Development Tier designations before the more intensive, station area-specific zoning changes occur:

1. Instead of auto-oriented minimum street yard setbacks, non-residential developments in a Compact Neighborhood will be required to maintain a maximum street yard to help the transition to a more urban, pedestrian-oriented land use pattern.
2. Departments and other agencies that use the Future Land Use Map for infrastructure planning purposes, such as Water Management and the Metropolitan Planning Organization, can plan utility and transportation improvements accordingly.
3. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) New Starts Application that GoTriangle will be preparing in the near future requires a qualitative score for "Transit-Supportive Corridor Policies." If necessary changes to the Comprehensive Plan are in place, this would receive a "High" ranking from the FTA.
4. The enhanced affordable housing density bonus approved by the City Council and the County Commissioners in September 2015 only applies in designated Compact

Neighborhoods. The bonus provision in UDO Sec 6.6.2.A.2 allows three additional market rate unit for each affordable housing unit provided.

There is a minimal increase in the base density permitted in the Compact Tier for non-residential zoning districts (See Attachment 8, Table 1). For example the Office Institutional (OI) and Commercial General (CG) districts, the maximum density in the Suburban Tier is 11 dwelling units per acre, while in the Compact Tier it is 18 units per acre. This is still significantly less the density permitted in the Compact Design District, which permits up to 60 units per acre in the CD-C district (See Attachment 8, Table 2).

Summary of Comprehensive Plan Policy Amendments. Two new policies found in Attachment 2 are proposed to be added to the text of the *Durham Comprehensive Plan*. These are intended to help guide the Planning Commission and elected officials in making land use policy and zoning decisions. Both are in response to feedback heard throughout the public engagement process. The first formalizes in the *Comprehensive Plan* the City and County's resolution on affordable housing in transit areas, while the second aims to describe how future development intensity will transition from the transit station to blend with the surrounding context.

Issues. As described in Attachment 1, updating the Future Land Use Map is only a first, but important, step in station area planning for the D-O LRT. It renews the policy that as areas around light rail stations develop overtime, that they do so in a way that is consistent with the goals of the Compact Neighborhood Tier. There is still a lot of work ahead: refining Compact Design zoning regulations, developing strategies for creating and maintaining affordable housing, and developing and funding infrastructure plans. For these Compact Neighborhoods to be successful, continued diligence and dedication from the community, appointed boards and commissions, staff and elected officials will be needed in the years to come.

Staff Contact.

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Attachments.

Attachment 1, Compact Neighborhoods: An Introduction

Attachment 2, Planning Commission Written Comments

Attachment 3, Resolution

Appendices can be found online at www.durhamnc.gov/compactneighborhoods