



## Where are the Trees?

### Chatham Park Submits Inadequate “Tree Protection Additional Element”

Chatham Park, a proposed planned development on over 7000 acres, has submitted the latest revision of their [Tree Protection Additional Element](#) to the Pittsboro Town Board for their approval. We believe their proposed ordinance for minimum tree coverage and retention of existing trees is completely inadequate, and is full of loopholes.

Chatham Park could end up with fewer trees than any other city in NC, a particularly tragic fate for this beautiful forestland along the Haw River and Jordan Lake. **The revised Chatham Park Tree Protection rules would only require saving as little as 10% of the existing tree coverage for much of Chatham Park development**, with 0% in some of the densest areas, and with only 20% – 25% coverage in some residential areas after replanting (25% if all sparsely planted saplings). **In contrast, the current tree canopy coverage within the Town of Pittsboro is about 50%.**

We believe there should be zero exceptions, even in the most densely urban areas. The more urban an area, the greater the need for trees to provide shade and heat reduction, oxygen and better air quality and buffers against stormwater impacts. All new development *must* be seen in the context of how it impacts climate change and as currently proposed, Chatham Park will have a negative impact. At the very least, dense development should trigger much more preservation of the existing mature forest in Chatham Park, especially in the 2000 ft. buffer along the Haw River, as was designated in [Pittsboro's Land Use Map](#).

Chatham Park claims to have based these rules on the city of Durham’s tree protection ordinance for their urban tier, meaning Chatham Park is using a model for density that would mimic the most urban kind of development. We do not believe the density and sparse tree coverage proposed by Chatham Park can be done without great harm to the Haw River, wildlife (including endangered species) and to Jordan Lake’s drinking water. [Durham does not think their tree ordinance is protective enough](#), and is currently working to update it to be more protective. Other cities are also trying to find ways to maintain or increase tree coverage. In an article in 2016 from UNC Urban Institute on Charlotte, [A City of trees, but for how long? Canopy is loved but threatened](#) they said: “In response to studies showing that the tree canopy was disappearing faster than it was being replanted, the Charlotte City Council in 2011 adopted a “50 percent by 2050”. The Town of Cary (home to Chatham Park developers) has 46% tree canopy coverage. Even New York City has [tree canopy coverage of 24%](#) .

Chapel Hill is a city of about the same population (almost 60,000) that Chatham Park is proposing. Chapel Hill’s tree coverage ordinance requires 30 – 40% tree coverage for almost all new development. The known benefits of trees for air quality, water protection, and prevention of flooding are well documented. That’s why Chapel Hill’s tree protection ordinance was used as a model for Pittsboro by the town’s Conservation Ordinance Review Committee after their review of all NC municipal tree ordinances. **Importantly, this [Pittsboro model ordinance](#) states that the highest priority is to maintain the existing trees.** Chatham Park has argued that eventually the trees that are replanted will grow to provide a larger tree canopy cover, and that existing trees in open space, streets and mandated buffers will add to that. But how many trees? And how many will survive? **Chatham Park should preserve more of the existing forest before the bulldozers arrive.**

## Other Concerns:

- **Land under “forestry management”** programs in Chatham Park will be exempt from even this inadequate tree coverage. We fear that a large portion of the existing forests in Chatham Park will be logged or clear cut in advance of development as "forest management"
- **The root protection zone** proposed for grading and construction is much smaller than most experts recommend and would result in root damage and poor tree survival.
- **60% of the existing trees for a Tree Coverage Area need only be 2” in diameter.** Replanted canopy trees also only 2” diameter, and understory trees only 1”. This could result in very large areas of small sapling trees, with little of the shade and stormwater benefits that forests provide.
- **This revision of CP’s Tree Element (requirements) includes a very complicated and loosely designed "Tree Coverage Planning Area” (TCPA).** At worst it could allow *temporarily* undeveloped forest to substitute for required tree coverage in a development. Chatham Park has indicated large combined areas of hundreds of acres could be averaged -- meaning the low percentages they are requiring could be even lower. As currently written, the ordinance could allow counting an existing forested area towards tree coverage (TCA), and then later clearing it for a greenway or stormwater pond.
- **Existing mature trees can get double credit by being called "specimen trees" but without being exceptional.** There is no provision for providing extra credit for preserving large areas of intact mature forest. Extra credit should only be allowed if the overall requirements are significantly increased, so that it doesn't further undermine the current low requirements.

**The bottom line is that in order for Chatham Park to fulfill the stated purposes (below) of their Tree Protection Plan Additional Element, they will need to preserve much more of the forest that exists there today. The newly added point #11 seems to be the only real purpose of this plan.**

1. Emphasize the importance of trees and vegetation as both visual and physical buffers.
2. Moderate temperature and promote energy conservation.
3. Promote carbon dioxide absorption and oxygen production
4. Reduce the harmful effects of wind, heat, noise and glare.
5. Improve surface drainage and aquifer recharge.
6. Prevent Reduce soil erosion while promoting soil stabilization and enrichment.
7. Provide shade.
8. Reduce water pollution.
9. Provide wildlife habitat.
10. Encourage the protection and planting of native trees.
- 11. Enhance the aesthetic qualities of Chatham Park and its built environment as a means of improving quality of life and attracting new businesses and residents.**

## *Let's Speak For the Trees*

You don't have to be a resident of Pittsboro to urge the elected officials of Pittsboro to do more to protect trees. Much of Chatham County, and people throughout the region, will be impacted by Chatham Park's air and water pollution, and the impacts on recreation and drinking water from Jordan Lake.

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To see the links cited in this article, go to [www.hawriver.org](http://www.hawriver.org). If you would like to be added to a list serve for updates from Haw River Assembly on Chatham Park please send your name, email address, and location (your county or city) to [info@hawriver.org](mailto:info@hawriver.org).