



From: The Haw River Assembly

To:

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Will Disney Make Protection of the Haw River and Natural Environment a Priority?

The [Haw River Assembly](#) is the non-profit organization that has worked since 1982 to protect and restore the Haw River in North Carolina. We have been at the forefront for nearly 15 years in the effort to persuade Chatham Park Investors (CPI) to do more to protect the Haw River and the environment it flows through as they transform 8000 acres of forest land into a new city-sized development of 60,000 people and 22 million sq. ft of commercial space.

For the most part CPI has ignored the public's concerns to save more trees in the existing forest, to protect more of the land near the river and streams that run through it and to do more than the bare minimum to protect water quality. The "North Village " section of Chatham Park, where Disney's Storyliving Asteria project will be built, abuts the NC Lower Haw River State Natural Area. We fear this valuable public land and the Haw River it adjoins will be degraded by the removal of the forest nearby, and the introduction of lights, noise and roads.

We challenge Disney to apply the concepts your company has committed to in [The Walt Disney Company 2030 Environmental Goals](#) to the Asteria Storyliving community. *"Disney is committed to taking meaningful and measurable action to support a healthier planet for future generations as we operate and grow our business."*

These goals include actions to reduce pollution from Emissions, Water, Waste, and Materials and to promote Sustainable Design. We urge you to make Asteria a place that embraces and protects the natural environment, and is a model for sustainable development. We welcome the opportunity to discuss specific recommendations with you to address the concerns in this letter.

Protecting the forest protects biodiversity and the climate

The forested land that will become 4000 Asteria dwelling units is currently habitat for a rich diversity of plants and wildlife that depend on the Haw River corridor. Where will they live when their land is bulldozed for new development? This area of the Haw River is also designated as critical habitat for the federally listed endangered Cape Fear Shiner.

The tree protection rules adopted by CPI, after much controversy, allow large areas to be built with little tree coverage, and do not do enough to save existing mature forests. As Asteria is developed, habitat fragmentation could dramatically reduce the populations of amphibians, birds, mammals, and aquatic life in this fragile ecosystem. There have been numerous discussions, demonstrations, petitions and even litigation by members of the surrounding community to protect more of what makes this land so special to live in - but to no avail. As the impacts of climate change continue to worsen, we are already seeing hotter summers, increased flooding, and extended periods of drought. The most cost effective solution to these problems is protecting existing tree canopy.

How will Asteria do a better job of protecting water quality?

CPI contractors have incurred numerous violations in Chatham Park of the local sedimentation and erosion control regulations, resulting in muddy streams and impacted wetlands as development proceeds. The Town of Pittsboro, which has planning jurisdiction over Chatham Park, allowed CPI to have its own set of regulations for development, which they call "Elements." Some of these regulations are much weaker than what is required by Chatham County, where Pittsboro is located. Lack of buffers on ephemeral streams and wetlands are among these, giving us great concern for water quality in the Haw River and downstream in the Jordan Lake reservoir, which provides drinking water for hundreds of thousands of NC residents.

In order to show a commitment to protecting the Haw River and its tributaries within the Asteria project, we advise that ephemeral streams, steep slopes and wetlands be better protected than what is currently required by CPI Elements. All stormwater basins should be designed for the 100 year storm event. Climate change is greatly accelerating the intensity of storms and will far surpass CPI's current 10 year storm event requirement. Design standards are in the process of being revised at the state and national level to reflect trends driven by climate change, and taking this proactive approach voluntarily will help to restore the public trust that CPI has broken.

Can Disney bring solutions to the drinking water crisis in Pittsboro?

You may also be aware of the continuing issue of industrial chemical contamination in the drinking water provided by Pittsboro to Chatham Park. The source for this drinking water is the Haw River, a very scenic river, but polluted by industrial chemicals from cities upstream and considered one of the most impacted by PFAS "forever chemicals" and 1,4-dioxane in the state. The Haw River Assembly, represented by the Southern Environmental Law Center, brought successful legal actions to force the cities of Greensboro and Burlington to reduce the release of these chemicals through their wastewater treatment plants, but the problems are not over.

Pittsboro has finally installed GAC filters to greatly reduce the level of PFAS in the finished drinking water, but does not have advanced treatment in place to eliminate the 1-4 dioxin in the raw water. As recently as the fall of 2023 a high level of these chemicals were discharged into the river from the City of Burlington.

The Town of Pittsboro now has plans underway to buy drinking water from the City of Sanford. Sanford's drinking water treatment plant is located just below the confluence of the Haw and

Deep rivers. Both the Haw and the Deep rivers have contamination from industrial chemicals, and we fear the problem of clean drinking water is not being solved. This will continue to be a problem for new residents of Chatham Park, including those in Asteria, unless Disney can be part of the solution for cleaning drinking water.

As you move from concept to development plans for Disney's Asteria, we urge you to go above and beyond what Chatham Park has codified in their Elements, in order to protect the Haw River and the environment you will be building in. We urge you to create in Asteria a truly special place that embodies what was set out in Disney's 2030 Environmental Goals.

We look forward to meeting with you to discuss the concerns and recommendations we've raised in this letter.

For the river,

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