



**ORANGE COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH
RESOLUTION PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADEQUATE AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

WHEREAS, housing is a human right, not a commodity¹, because humane and adequate housing¹ is necessary for all humans to live their best lives and to rise to their full potential²; and

WHEREAS, Orange County is experiencing a housing crisis:

- County residents identified a lack of affordable, humane housing as a top concern, both in the 2023 Community Health Assessment³ and the countywide assessment for the Orange County Strategic Plan⁴;
- The county has 13,689 fewer units⁵ than we need, and this deficit disproportionately affects individuals earning less than 50% of the area median income, with a deficit of 9,555 units⁶;
- National data show that 16% of Orange County residents spend at least half of their income on housing, a proportion that is considered severely housing cost-burdened. This greatly exceeds the proportion in neighboring and peer counties^a which ranges from 9% to 13%⁷. The annual income to afford a two-bedroom in Orange County is \$74,880, exceeding earnings for teachers (\$51,740), childcare providers (\$33,000), and firefighters (\$36,230), so our civil servants cannot live where they work⁸; and

WHEREAS, unstable housing significantly harms individual health:

- Living unhoused disrupts access to sanitation and supplies⁹, increases social isolation and stigma⁹, impedes access to healthcare^{9,10,11}, and increases exposure to hazards such as heat, cold, and physical and sexual violence^{9,10,11}. These effects accelerate aging, with premature onset of chronic medical conditions, functional and cognitive impairments, and increase mortality^{12,13}. Individuals who are unhoused have 7 times the mortality rate from all causes and 14 times the overdose mortality rate compared with their housed counterparts¹⁴;
- Children who move frequently are more likely than stably housed children to experience chronic health conditions, poor physical health, and to have less consistent health insurance coverage¹⁵, and efforts to improve housing are one of the most promising interventions to prevent adverse childhood experiences¹⁶; and

WHEREAS, lack of housing causes significant adverse impacts to public health for communities:

- Communities lacking adequate housing experience disproportionate levels of incarceration^{17,18,19,20,21}, increased levels of drug use^{14,22,23,24}, and overuse of hospitals and emergency medical services, straining medical providers and increasing wait times^{10,25,26,27,28,29,30,31,32};
- Investments in permanent supportive housing decrease emergency room visits by 70%³³ and annual healthcare utilization costs by an average of \$48,510 per person³⁴;
- Failure to house community members costs more than providing adequate housing due to the expense of supplementing emergency healthcare and incarceration costs^{20,35,36,37}. “housing first” strategies save \$900 to \$29,400 per person housed per year³⁸, returning \$1.80 for every \$1.00 invested³⁴; and

WHEREAS, zoning and land use policies profoundly shape our built environment:

- Deficits in affordable housing reflect longstanding zoning policies^{39,40} that have had an exclusionary effect, including limits on small-scale multifamily housing⁴¹, commonly known as “Missing Middle” housing⁴²;
- Best practices such as APA’s Equity in Zoning Policy Guide⁴³ can help correct these harms;
- Orange County and the Towns of Carrboro, Chapel Hill, and Hillsborough are engaged in the process of developing new land use plans and/or zoning ordinances.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED on this 29th of October, 2025, that we the Orange County Board of Health recognize the lack of affordable housing in Orange County as a threat to public health. To address this, the Board of Health recommends that the Orange County Board of County Commissioners and the governing bodies of Carrboro, Chapel Hill, and Hillsborough incorporate the following in their land use plans and zoning ordinances:

^a Peer counties are other NC counties with similar population size, age distribution, racial composition, income, and education levels as compared to Orange County.



1. Ensure that policies, ordinances, and administrative practices do not unduly restrict the development of adequate, affordable and attainable housing, recognizing that land use plans and zoning ordinances can redress generational harms created by historic discriminatory policies.
2. Reduce minimum lot sizes, minimum setbacks, and other dimensional requirements to reasonably allow more compact development footprints and higher density.
3. Implement incentives for developments that incorporate desirable residential characteristics such as:
 - a. clustering of units to preserve natural lands
 - b. mixed housing types or sizes
 - c. dedicated affordable housing units
 - d. reservation of adequate lot area and wastewater system allocation for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)
 - e. commitments that Home Owners Association (HOA) documents will permit and accommodate ADUs with no unreasonable restrictions
 - f. support for multi-generational living
 - g. cooperative housing initiatives
 - h. preservation of high-quality open space such as wetlands and floodplains
 - i. connection to public sewer systems
4. Identify and evaluate ways to incentivize development of affordable and “Missing Middle” housing types such as by streamlining the permitting processes and reducing permit fees where practical.
5. Re-evaluate development standards to ensure that they do not create excessive constraints on housing production. Examples include regulations that require development to include transitional buffers, a minimum number of off-street parking spaces, and high amounts of open space.
6. Where onsite wastewater systems are utilized, consider basing residential density on number of allowed bedrooms instead of number of units, as this is a more precise measure of development intensity and impact.
7. To reduce vehicle miles of travel, eliminate home-based business restrictions that are not related to the impact those businesses may have on the residential neighborhood.
8. Allow in residential areas supportive uses such as childcare and appropriate commercial uses that support families and provide important neighborhood services.
9. Develop a significant portion of the jointly owned Greene Tract with affordable and “Missing Middle” housing options, both for rent and for purchase.
10. Permit and encourage appropriate types of non-traditional or innovative housing that are less expensive to build and may provide greater affordability, such as manufactured (mobile) homes, modular homes, cottages, tiny homes, pop-up homes, container homes.
11. Re-visit interlocal agreements with other jurisdictions as needed to implement the above.



12. Work collaboratively with the City of Mebane to optimize residential development with municipal utility services in and near Mebane's extraterritorial jurisdiction, where located within Orange County.
13. Consider implementing Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing Overlay Districts⁴¹ to preserve areas of Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing, especially those with high density or in historically disadvantaged communities.
14. Explore the potential for new developments to utilize community onsite wastewater systems in lieu of individual wastewater systems for areas unserved by public wastewater. For these community systems, incentivize enhanced design standards and treatment criteria.

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