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## Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: Measuring Public Service Provision in Chapel Hill's Comprehensive Planning Process

By CED Program Interns & Students

Article: <https://ced.sog.unc.edu/measuring-public-service-provision-in-chapel-hills-comprehensive-planning-process/>

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With support from the Community-Campus Partnership, the Town of Chapel Hill is currently in the process of updating its comprehensive plan. One of the main goals in this process is to follow a new, participatory approach by engaging with as many community stakeholders as possible. During the planning process, stakeholders will participate in meetings in order to 1) identify issues to be addressed by the plan, 2) serve in a problem-solving capacity to envision long-term strategies around these issues, and 3) help to produce the content of the plan itself. Potential stakeholders include anyone who lives, works, plays or invests in Chapel Hill. The Town would like to engage as many people as possible in the planning process when stakeholder meetings begin this coming fall.

Since Chapel Hill has never before followed this participatory approach to comprehensive planning, the Communications and Public Affairs Department and the Planning Department have undertaken an unprecedented outreach campaign. The goals of this campaign are to publicize the planning process, encourage community participation and identify potential barriers that might prevent particular populations from becoming active stakeholders. Especially, the Town wants to involve populations that have not historically participated in similar civic processes.

One of the main tasks is to reach out to local community organizations, including service providers, churches, non-profits, civic organizations and advocacy groups. This outreach effort serves two purposes. First, these community organizations have many links to the Chapel Hill community and can help the Town to publicize planning meetings and encourage stakeholder participation. Second, these organizations can provide the Town with the information about their memberships and client bases. This information will help the town identify when meetings should be held and what additional services (for example, childcare or transportation) stakeholders may require in order to participate.

It is uncommon and difficult for municipalities to enact such a participatory approach to comprehensive planning. Nevertheless, the overwhelmingly positive response among those organizations that have been contacted indicates that it may prove to be a successful strategy to producing a planning document that represents the many diverse interests within the Chapel Hill community.