

Race and Equity Pocket Questions

Title and purpose of this initiative:

Legislative Public Hearing Relating to Cafes and Residential Density in Certain Zoning Districts. The purpose of this agenda item for the Town Council to consider revised text amendments to the Land Use Ordinance relating to residential density and restaurant uses.

Department: Planning

What are the racial and equity impacts?

The text amendment would, if approved, allow for additional residential density in the Office and Office/Assembly zoning districts and add a new neighborhood café use, a restaurant use that would not involve a commercial kitchen. Community members will benefit from start-up opportunities to begin business ventures with lower overhead and/or opportunities to seek more diverse housing options such as smaller units. Community members in neighborhoods in proximity to the Office and Office/Assembly districts, including Alabama Avenue, a historically African American neighborhoods may experience crowding from an increase in density or additional traffic related to the café use.

Who is or will experience community burden?

The text amendments provide increase potential residential density in Office and Office/Assembly districts. There are currently two areas zoned Office, the Willow Creek office complex along Jones Ferry Road and the undeveloped property across the street at 603 Jones Ferry Road, and three areas zoned Office/Assembly, the Public Storage site on Jones Ferry Road, the Public Works site and antique shop along Smith Level Road, and the health services complex along Smith Level Road near Culbreth which includes the Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Carolina Institute for Developmental Disabilities, and similar office facilities. Some neighboring residents may experience burden from an increase in residents and associated travel/trips, particularly long-time residents.

The text amendments will also add the café use in up to ten districts, the two above, and if the alternate is selected, all the Town's commercial districts, and the Historic Rogers Road Residential district. Community members in and/or near these locations may find the activities associated with a café a burden. The cafe may attract small groups for meetups or study groups, as well as some additional traffic relating to patrons and/or deliveries, parking, and emergency service accessibility.

Who is or will experience community benefit?

Increasing residential density is one strategy for creating additional affordable housing, when paired with office use categories, it can also provide live-work opportunities. The neighborhood café land use would create new opportunities for food service businesses that do not require a commercial kitchen—a scenario that would allow entrepreneurs to open a business with less overhead. Both changes to the existing regulations increase benefits for community members related to housing and/or business.

What are the root causes of inequity?

Structural racism in government decisions, particularly those relating to land use, can make it difficult for some residents to gain generational wealth through homeownership and/or business opportunities. Lack of information about development proposals and understanding about the review process limits opportunities to provide meaningful input into projects that may have long-lasting impacts on the Town or specific neighborhoods. Personal experiences with government, can further alienate those that may find it difficult to attend meetings—like working individuals and families—and contribute to a reticence by historically marginalized people to speak in a public setting.

What might be the unintended consequences of this action or strategy?

Changes to land use regulations can affect land values and quality of life experiences for surrounding property owners and occupants in ways that can be beneficial for some and detrimental to others. While the increase in residential density includes a requirement for 15-percent affordable housing (for rent or for purchase) the increase in development potential may also increase land values and tax burden. Neighborhood cafes may generate traffic—vehicular and/or bike-ped.

How is your department planning to mitigate any burdens, inequities, and unintended consequences?

The public hearing process is intended to provide a way for the community to learn about a proposal and provide input in a public setting. State law dictates minimum notice provisions. The Planning Department is completing REAL lens for policies and procedures, including the amendment process to determine additional steps for mitigation of burdens and impacts.